



Safety Plan

Adapted from the Peel Committee Against Woman Abuse 'Creating a Safety Plan'

INTRODUCTION

It is important to know that although you do not have control over your abuser's violence, it is possible to increase your own safety, as well as your children and pet's safety when being subjected to this abuse. Creating a safety plan involves identifying action steps to increase your safety. Your plan prepares you in advance for the possibility of further violence. This comprehensive plan offers many suggestions and ideas that you may find useful. However, don't try to do everything right away. Take it a step at a time, and start with the ideas that seem most doable for you.

In creating a safety plan it is important to remember that:

- A safety plan can help to increase your own and your children and pet's safety
- A safety plan is needed whenever the possibility of abuse is identified
- This safety plan information is specifically designed for actions that you can take
- This safety plan information also includes actions you can take to increase your children's safety
- This safety plan information also includes steps to take to keep your animal safe
- It is important to become familiar with and to review and/or revise your safety plan regularly – abusive situations and risk factors can change quickly

It is important to develop a Safety Plan for yourself, your children **and your pets.**
If you need help creating a Safety Plan, talk to your counsellor.

EMERGENCY ESCAPE PLAN

An Emergency Escape Plan focuses on the things you can do in advance to be better prepared in case you have to leave an abusive situation very quickly. The following is a list of items you should try to set aside and hide in a safe place (e.g. at a friend's or family member's home, with your lawyer, in a safety deposit box):

(A) Take a photocopy of the following items and store in a safe place, away from the originals - Hide the originals someplace else (if you can):

- Passports, birth certificates, immigration papers, for all family members
- School and vaccination records
- Driver's license and registration
- Medications, prescriptions, medical records for all family members
- Welfare identification
- Work permits
- Divorce papers, custody documentation, court orders, restraining orders, marriage certificate
- Lease/rental agreement, house deed, mortgage payment book
- Bank books
- Insurance papers
- Address/telephone book
- Picture of abuser
- Health cards for yourself and family members
- All cards you normally use e.g. credit cards, bank cards, phone, Social Insurance, Driver's license
- All of your pets documentation e.g. licence information, medication instructions, vaccination records**

(B) Try to keep all the cards you normally use in your wallet:

- Driver's license
- Social insurance cards
- Charge cards/ Banking cards
- Phone card
- Healthcare cards

(C) Try to keep your wallet and purse handy, and containing the following:

- Car/house/office keys
- Chequebook, bank books/statements
- Driver's license, registration, insurance
- Address/telephone book
- Picture of abuser
- Emergency money (in cash) hidden away

(D) Keep the following items handy, so you can grab them quickly:

- Emergency suitcase with immediate needs

Adapted by the Violence Prevention Program at the Calgary Humane Society with permission from the Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter

- Special toys, comforts for children
- Medications/prescriptions
- Items of special sentimental value
- Pets leash or cat carrier, comfort/stress relieving toy, medications, pet food (if possible), a list of likes and dislikes and any behavioural concerns if you need to leave your pet with someone else**
- A list of other items you would like to take if you get a chance to come back to your home later (note: The police can escort you back to your home later to remove additional personal belongings)

(E) Other things you can do...

- Open a bank account in your own name and arrange that bank statements or other calls be made to you only; or, arrange that mail be sent to a friend or family member or P.O. box
- Save and set aside as much money as you can - out of groceries if necessary
- Set aside, in a place you can get to quickly, \$10 to \$15 for cab fare, and spare change for the telephone
- Plan your emergency exits
- Plan and rehearse the steps you will take if you have to leave quickly, and learn them well
- Hide extra clothing, house keys, car keys, money, etc. at a friend's house; make sure they know why so they don't accidentally let it slip if my abuser talks with them
- Keep emergency suitcase packed or handy/ready to pack quickly
- Memorize the phone numbers of some Women's Shelters
- Consider getting a safety deposit box at a bank that your abuser does not go to

Exercise

I will review, revise, and practice my Emergency Escape Plan every _____

I trust _____ and _____ to tell them about my situation.

I will use the code word _____ to let them know I am in danger and to contact police immediately.

I will keep a suitcase, box, or bag _____ where I can get to it quickly and easily.

I can open a separate bank account in my name at _____

If my abuser knows my account or PIN number, I will _____

DURING A VIOLENT INCIDENT

Women cannot always avoid violent incidents. However, in order to increase your safety, here are some things you can do:

- Remind yourself that you have an Emergency Escape Plan, and go over it in your mind
- Start to position yourself to get out quickly or near a phone so you can call 911, if necessary
- Try to move to a space where the risk is the lowest. (Try to avoid arguments in the bathroom, garage, kitchen, near weapons, or in rooms without access to an outside door)
- Use your code word with your children so they can protect themselves during a violent incident
- Use your judgement and intuition - if the situation is very serious, you can agree with your abuser or give him/her what he/she wants to calm him/her down. You have to protect yourself until you are out of danger
- When, or after, you have been assaulted, call the police at 911 if you can. Tell them you have been assaulted by a man/woman, and leave the phone off the hook after your call
- Make as much noise as possible (set off the fire alarm, break things, turn up the stereo or TV) so that neighbours may call the police for you

Exercise

I will photocopy all important documents by _____

I will have an extra set of keys cut by _____

I can keep my purse and car keys ready and put them _____ in order to leave quickly.

If my abuser asks me what I am doing, I will tell him/her _____

I can tell _____ about the situation and request they call the police if they hear suspicious noises coming from my home

I can use the code word _____ with my children so they can protect themselves during a violent incident.

On the main floor, the best way to get out is _____

On the second floor, the best way to get out is _____

In the basement, the best way to get out is _____

CREATING A SAFER ENVIRONMENT

There are many things a woman can do to increase her safety. It may not be possible to do everything at once, but safety measures can be added step by step. Your counsellor can help you make a plan. Here are some suggestions:

AT HOME - If you are living with your abuser:

- Get your Emergency Escape Plan in order and review it often
- Create a telephone list with numbers of local police, nearest women's shelter, crisis lines, family members, counsellors, children's friends and local animal shelters or local veterinarian
- Make arrangements with friends or family so that you can stay with them if necessary – make arrangements to have your pet stay somewhere, if pet is unable to stay with you
- If you call a women's shelter, make sure you dial another number after so your abuser cannot press the redial button and find out who you were talking to
- Try to predict the next likely violent episode and make plans for the children to be sent to friends, family etc. (Try to anticipate your abuser's "cycle")
- Teach your children how to use the telephone (and cell phone, if you have one) to contact the police
- Create a code word with your children and/or friends so they know to call for help
- Teach your children how to make a collect call to you and to a special friend if your abuser takes the children
- Plan your emergency exits and teach them to your children
- Teach your children their own Safety Plan
- Teach your children how to get the pet out safely with themselves**

AT HOME - If you are NOT living with your abuser:

- Change the locks on the doors and windows, install a peephole in the door, change the locks on your garage and mailbox
- Teach the children to let you know when someone is at the door, before answering the door
- Keep your restraining order near you at all times and make sure that it is registered with the police and courts after serving your abuser
- Make sure that the school, day care, and police have a copy of all court orders, including restraining orders, custody and access orders, as well as a picture of your abuser
- If possible, try to predict the next likely violent incident and be prepared
- If you have call display on your phone, be careful about who can get access to the stored numbers (e.g. last number dialled, etc.)
- Have your telephone number unpublished, as it is harder to track than when it is unlisted. Block your number when calling out
- Consider getting a cell phone and pre-program 911 and other numbers of people to call
- Contact your local Victim Services to inquire about your eligibility for the Domestic Conflict Unit emergency response system program
- Consider moving your furniture around differently as this is something your abuser may not anticipate, and cause him/her to bump into it and give you warning that he/she is in the house. Also put your kitchen utensils and knife block in the cupboards so they are not as accessible

- If you live in an apartment, check the floor clearly when getting off the elevator. Look in mirrors and be aware of doorways in hallways. Speak to security requesting safety in your building
- Purchase rope ladders to be used for escape from upper floors
- Replace wooden doors with steel/metal doors if possible
- Install smoke detectors and fire extinguishers for each floor
- Install an outside lighting system that lights up when a person is coming close to your house
- Do whatever you can to install security systems, including additional locks, window bars, poles to wedge against doors, an electronic system, etc. – anything to provide added security

IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD:

- Tell your neighbours that you would like them to call the police if they hear a fight or screaming in your home
- Tell people who take care of your children which people have permission to pick up your children
- Tell people in your neighbourhood that your abuser no longer lives with you, and they should call the police if he/she is seen near your home. You may wish to give them a photo and description of him/her and of their car
- Ask your neighbours to look after your children **and pets in an emergency**
- Hide clothing and your Emergency Escape Plan items at a neighbour's house
- Use different grocery stores and shopping malls, and shop at hours that are different from when you were living with your abuser
- Use a different bank or branch, and take care of your banking at hours different from those you used with your abuser
- Change your doctor, dentist and other professional services you would normally use
- Do not put your name in your apartment building directory

AT WORK:

Note: Each woman must decide for herself if and/or when she will tell others that she is being/has been abused and that she may be at risk. Friends, family and co-workers may be able to help protect women. However, each woman should consider carefully which people to ask for help. If you are comfortable, you may choose to do any or all of the following:

- Tell your boss, the security supervisor, and other key people or friends at work about your situation
- If it is possible, ask to have your calls screened at work; it would also help to have these calls documented
- Discuss the possibility of having your employer call the police if you are in danger from your abuser

WHEN ARRIVING OR LEAVING WORK:

- Let someone know when you'll be home
- Carry your keys in your hands or get a remote or keyless entry car door opener
- Walk with someone to your car
- Scan the parking lot
- Carry a purse-sized flashlight
- If you leave work after dark or are working late, move your car closer to the entrance during your break
- Walk around your car, look under the hood and check if anything has been tampered with and check brakes. Remember to keep your car seats forward, so you know if someone is hiding in the car

- If your abuser is following you, drive to a place where there are people to support you, e.g. a friend's house, police station, or a public place
 - If you have underground parking, consider parking across the street
 - Keep a sign in your car saying "call police"
 - Change the patterns of when you arrive and leave work and the routes you take home; If you are walking, take a route that is populated
 - If you see your abuser on the street, try to get to a public place, e.g. a store
- When using public transit, get off at a stop different than your abuser may expect or wait to exit until you see that other people are also exiting

AN EMOTIONAL SAFETY PLAN

The experience of being abused and verbally degraded is often exhausting and emotionally draining. The process of surviving and building a new life requires much courage, and incredible energy. To conserve your emotional energy, and to support yourself in hard emotional times, there are a number of things you can do:

- Attend individual and/or group counselling (for yourself or your children)
- Become involved in community activities to reduce feeling isolated
- Take a part-time job to reduce isolation and to improve your finances
- Enrol in school to increase your skills
- Join support groups to gain support and strengthen your relationships with other people
- Take time for yourself to read, meditate, play music, etc.
- Spend time with people who make you feel good and provide support
- Take part in social activities, e.g. movie, dinner, exercise
- Take care of your sleep and nutritional needs
- Keep a personal journal to write about your feelings, especially when you are feeling low or vulnerable - keep it in a safe place
- Take time to prepare yourself emotionally before entering stressful situations like talking with your abuser, meeting with lawyers, or attending court
- Try not to overbook yourself to avoid stress
- Be creative and do what makes you feel good
- Write something positive about yourself everyday - your own personal affirmations
- Do not find your comfort in excessive use of alcohol or food
- Avoid excessive shopping and impulse buying
- Try exercising; it will increase your energy level and increase your sense of well being
- It's OK to feel angry, but find positive and constructive ways to express your anger

Exercise

If I have to communicate with my abuser in person or by telephone, I can _____

Whenever I feel that others are trying to control me, I can _____

When I need support or a shoulder to cry on, I can call _____

Things that I could do or learn to help me to feel stronger and become more independent are _____

If I feel down and ready to return to a potentially abusive situation, I can _____

A CHILD'S SAFETY PLAN

The most important thing that children can do for their mothers and their families is to get away from the area of violence. Tell your child/children that the best and most important thing for them to do is keep themselves safe. Children should learn ways to protect themselves. There are several ways to help you develop a safety plan with your children.

- Have your child pick a safe room/place in the house, preferably with a lock on the door and a phone. The first step of any plan is for the children to get out of the room where the abuse is occurring
- If it is safe for the child to do so teach them to take the pet with them into the room**
- Stress the importance of being safe, and that it is not the child's responsibility to make sure that his/her mother is safe
- Stress the fact that the violence is not the child's or the animals fault**
- Teach your children how to call for help. It is important that children know they should not use a phone that is in view of the abuser. This puts them at risk. Talk to your children about using a neighbour's phone or a pay phone if they are unable to use a phone at home. If you have a cell phone, teach your children how to use it
- Teach them how to contact police at the emergency number
- Ensure that the children know their full name and address
- Rehearse what your child/children will say when they call for help

Exercise

Dial 911. Ask for the Police.

Then your child says:

My name is _____.

I am _____ years old. I need help. Send the police.

Someone is hurting my mom.

The address here is _____.

The phone number here is _____.

- ♦ It is important for children to leave the phone off the hook after they are done talking. The police may call the number back if they hang up, which could create a dangerous situation for yourself and your child/children
- ♦ Pick a safe place to meet your children, out of the home, after the situation is safe for you and for them (so you can easily find each other)
- ♦ Teach your children the safest route to the planned place of safety for them
