

Staying safe: Developing a personal safety plan



Everyone has the right to feel safe. Victims in an abusive relationship often feel they have lost that right, but this isn't true. Even within the most dangerous of situations, those in fear for their well-being can take steps to ensure their personal protection. The first step is to create a safety plan.

If you are facing mental, emotional, or physical abuse or are part of an unhealthy relationship, a safety plan can provide guidelines for how to act — and react — in different circumstances. This practical, personalized plan can keep you and any dependents (such as children or pets) safe while in an environment of abuse, when preparing to leave, while leaving, and when free from an abusive situation.

It's important to prepare ahead to protect your safety and well-being, especially during episodes of violence when you may not have time to think things through. Safety plans can be as varied as the situations in which you might find yourself. You should customize yours toward specific legal issues, geographic location, and available resources, but make sure it contains some common elements as follows.

When creating a safety plan:

- **Think about all possible escape routes.** This might include doors, first-floor windows, basement exits, elevators, and stairwells. If possible, rehearse your escape.
- **Decide on a place to go.** Choose somewhere you will be safe, such as the home of a supportive friend or relative, a motel or hotel, or a shelter.

- **Pack a survival kit.** Think about both your daily and longer-term needs and pack accordingly. Consider including money for cab fare, a change of clothes, extra house and car keys, birth certificates, passports, medications and copies of prescriptions, insurance information, checkbook, credit cards, legal documents such as separation agreements and protection orders, address books, valuable jewelry, and papers showing jointly owned assets. Conceal your kit in the home or leave it with a trusted neighbor, friend, or relative. You can also store important papers in a bank deposit box.
- **Try to start your own savings account.** Have statements sent to a trusted relative or friend.
- **Avoid arguments with the abuser in dangerous locations.** This may include areas with potential weapons, such as the kitchen or garage. Also avoid areas without access to an outside door.
- **Know the telephone number of a domestic violence hotline.** Contact it for information on resources and legal rights. Memorize other important phone numbers.
- **Review your safety plan monthly.** Be familiar with the steps so you can react quickly during a fast-moving dangerous situation.
- **Let trusted neighbors or friends know about the abusive situation.** Develop visual or verbal signals you can use to alert them of active abuse so they can contact the police.

Make plans to leave

While there is danger in leaving, it's also dangerous to continue to live with an abuser. Over time the violence usually becomes more frequent and severe. You can't stop an abuser's actions, but you can take steps to get out of the violent situation and begin to put your life back on track.

Changing or leaving an abusive situation requires careful planning. Here are some other tips in addition to the ones covered in your personal safety plan:

- Tell someone about the abuse. Know where you can get help and who can help you.
- Find local resources, such as battered women's shelters, and ask for help in preparing to leave.
- Plan for a quick escape and know to where and how you will get away.
- Get a protective order from a court to keep the abusive partner away from your home and work.

If you are in an abusive relationship, Life Solutions can help. Call the National Service Center at **1-800-647-3327**.

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Contact us:

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