

Safety Planning For Women With Abusive Partners or Ex-partners

A safety plan is important because it is easier to plan ahead than to plan while dealing with a crisis. The suggestions in this document represent some safety tips that have been learned from women dealing with abusive current and former partners. The suggestions should only become part of your safety plan if they fit with your knowledge of your own unique situation. You likely also have things you are doing to keep yourself/your children safe that are not included in this list.

- ◆ Trust your intuition and instincts; do not doubt yourself if you feel unsafe.
- ◆ Practice how to get out of your home safely. What doors, window, elevators, stairwells or fire escapes could you use? If appropriate, practice it with your children.
- ◆ Alert your neighbours to call the police if they hear a fight.
- ◆ Choose a code word to use with children, friends and/or family so they can call for help.
- ◆ If an assault seems possible, try to move to a space that is lowest risk (try to avoid bathrooms, garages, kitchens, rooms near weapons and rooms without access to an outside door).
- ◆ Plan ahead for where to go in an emergency (explore possibilities including family, friends and local transition houses/safe homes).
- ◆ Find someone who will support and listen to you without making judgments.
- ◆ Keep extra car keys, money and clothes in a hidden place or at a friend's.
- ◆ Seek medical attention for all injuries. Be aware that you may have suffered physical damage you are not aware of, such as internal bleeding or concussions.
- ◆ Ensure that colour photographs are taken of all injuries. It is important to take pictures as injuries change in appearance, such as bruising that appears some time after an assault.
- ◆ Save torn or bloody clothing.

- ◆ Report assaults to the police (be aware that the police must proceed with recommending charges if there is evidence to do so, regardless of your wishes).
- ◆ Preserve evidence such as written notes of apology, bank statements, and other documents.
- ◆ Record abusive incidents in a journal; keep the journal in a secret spot. Do not give your journal to anyone unless subpoenaed to do so. If you give your journal to Crown counsel, they are required to turn it over to defense and you may be cross-examined on it.
- ◆ Keep a list of names and numbers of all people who have witnessed any abuse or threats (their evidence may be useful later).
- ◆ Familiarize yourself with family finances.
- ◆ If necessary, find out if you would qualify for social assistance and how much money you would have to live on.
- ◆ If necessary, take courses or re-enter the work force. If that is necessary but not possible in your situation, familiarize yourself with courses and job training that would be available if your situation changes.

If separating:

- ◆ It may not be safe to tell your partner you are leaving. Some possibilities for leaving include when your partner is in the shower, asleep, at work, or out of town, or when you are picking up children from school, going to medical appointments, or going to work.
- ◆ If you have children, take them with you when you leave. Take copies of children's medical papers, birth certificates and other important documents.
- ◆ Take copies of important documents/items with you when you leave. If you are planning to leave put these items in one place if possible. Some important documents/items include:
 - Personal identification
 - Children's birth certificates
 - Your birth certificate
 - Social Insurance Cards
 - School and Vaccination Records
 - Checkbook
 - ATM card
 - Credit cards
 - Keys - house/car/office

- Driver's license and registration
- Medications
- Social Assistance Identification
- Work permits
- Landed immigrant papers
- Citizenship papers
- Passports
- Divorce papers
- Medical records
- Lease/rental agreement, house deed, mortgage papers
- Bank Books
- Previous tax returns
- Insurance papers
- Small saleable objects
- List of important phone numbers
- Address book
- Pictures
- Jewelry
- Children's favourite toys and/or blankets
- Items of special sentimental value

◆ Keep change or a pre-paid phone card available for telephone calls (if you use telephone credit cards, the following month the bill will tell your partner/ex-partner which you called).

If separated:

- ◆ Change the locks on doors and windows.
- ◆ Replace wooden doors with steel/metal doors.
- ◆ Install security measures such as additional locks, window bars, poles to wedge against doors, an electronic system, etc.
- ◆ Purchase rope ladders for escape from second floor windows.
- ◆ Install smoke detectors and purchase fire extinguishers for each floor in your home.
- ◆ Install an outside lighting system that lights up when a person is coming close to your home.
- ◆ Inform your employer of your situation.
- ◆ Change your route to work.

- ◆ Change your start and end time at work.
- ◆ Walk with someone to your car.
- ◆ If your partner follows you, drive to a place where there are people.
- ◆ Use different grocery stores, shopping malls and banks than those you used when residing with your partner.
- ◆ Change the hours you conduct your shopping/banking.
- ◆ Teach your children how to make a collect call to you and to a trusted family member or friend, in the event that your ex-partner takes the children.
- ◆ Tell people who take care of your children which people have permission to pick up the children, and that your ex-partner is not permitted to.
- ◆ Inform your neighbours that your ex-partner no longer lives with you and to call the police if he is seen near your residence.
- ◆ Keep a copy of any protection orders with you at all times.
- ◆ Inform necessary people that you have a protection order (employer, children's schools, child care)

Sources:

Abusive Relationships: Planning For Your Safety, Prince George and District Elizabeth Fry Society (1995)

Personalized Safety Plan, Barbara Hart and Jane Stuehling, Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Abuse (1992) available online at www.mincava.umn.edu/hart/persona.htm

Safety Resource Kit for Abused Women, Battered Women's Advocacy Centre London, Ontario (1996)