

Safety Planning in the Home

When Living with Abuser

- What are some cues, behaviors, or circumstances that are present before abusive situations happen? (i.e. time of day, substance abuse, discussion about money, locations, certain relatives or friends visiting, stress level of partner, etc.)
- What are the safe areas of the house where there are no weapons and there are ways to escape? If arguments occur, try to move to those areas.
- If violence is unavoidable, make yourself a small target. Dive into a corner and curl up into a ball with your face protected and arms around each side of your head, fingers entwined.
- If possible, have a phone accessible at all times and know what numbers to call for help. Know where the nearest public phone is located. Know the phone number to your local shelter. If your life is in danger, call the police.
- Let trusted friends and neighbors know of your situation and develop a plan including a code word and visual signal for when you need help.
- Practice how to get out safely.
- Keep weapons like guns and knives locked away and as inaccessible as possible.

Living with Abuser with Children

- Teach your children how to get help, whether that be with the neighbors or calling 911. Teach them that they shouldn't try to intervene in moments of violence, even though they may want to protect their parents.
- Plan a code word to signal to them that they should get help or leave the house. (Make sure that they know not to tell others what the secret word means.)
- Identify a room in the house that they can go to when they're afraid, and something calming they can focus on for comfort.
- Instruct them to stay out of areas containing items that could be used to harm them, including kitchens and bathrooms.
- Don't run to where the children are, as your partner may hurt them as well.
- Practice how to get out safely. Practice with your children.

How to Have These Conversations with your children

- Make sure your safety planning is age appropriate. A safety plan will look different for a younger child than it would for a teen, but your love and support will look the same.
- Let your child know that what's happening is not their fault and that they didn't cause it.
- Let them know how much you love them and that you support them no matter what.
- Tell them that abuse is never right, even when the person being violent is someone they love.
- Tell them that you want to protect them and that you want everyone to be safe, so you have to come up with a plan to use *in case of emergencies*.

- Help them make a list of people they're comfortable talking with and expressing themselves to, and make sure they can contact those people if needed.
- If possible, enroll them in a counseling program or therapy. Try to find a program that is culturally relevant and specialized in child counseling. If you ever need resources, our advocates can help find support in your area.
- It's important to remember that when you are safety planning with a child, they might tell this information to the abusive partner, which could make the situation more dangerous (ex. "Mom said to do this if you get angry.")
 - When talking about these plans with your child, use phrases such as "We're practicing what to do in an emergency," *instead of* "We're planning what you can do when dad/mom becomes violent."

Preparing to Leave Your Abuser

Because violence could escalate when someone tries to leave, here are some things to keep in mind before you leave:

- Keep any evidence of physical abuse, such as pictures of injuries.
- Keep a journal of all violent incidences, noting dates, events and threats made, if possible. Keep your journal in a safe place.
- Know where you can go to get help. Tell someone you trust and is easily accessible to you what is happening to you.
- If you are injured, go to a doctor or an emergency room and report what happened to you. Ask that they document your visit.
- Plan with your children and identify a safe place for them, like a room with a lock or a friend's house where they can go for help. Reassure them that their job is to stay safe, not to protect you.
- Acquire job skills or take courses at a community college as you can.
- Open a checking and savings account in your name at a different bank than your partner.
- Try to set money aside or ask friends or family members to hold money for you.
- Leave money, an extra set of keys, copies of important documents* and extra clothes and medications in a safe place your partner will not look or with someone you trust.
- Always keep our hotline number handy: 281-342-4357. Save it in your phone under something innocent, like the name of a restaurant you like to eat at.

***Keep photos of these documents in a secure digital file. In some cases, photos will be sufficient proof of documentation, and in other cases, the photos will make it easier for you to replace the document if you need to leave without it.**

When You Leave Your Abuser

- Make a plan for how and where you will escape quickly.
- You may request a police escort or stand-by when you leave
- Plan your response if the abuser reaches out with promises to change or threats if you don't return.
- If you have to leave in a hurry, use the following list of items as a guide to what you need to bring with you:

Make sure to make copies of anything your abuser is likely to notice is missing. It is a good idea to make copies of everything and leave them with a trusted family member or friend in case you have no time to grab anything when making a quick getaway.

Identification

- Driver's license
- Birth certificate and children's birth certificates
- Social security cards
- Passport
- Money and/or credit cards (in your name)
- Checking and/or savings account books

Legal Papers

- Protective order
- Copies of any lease or rental agreements, or the deed to your home
- Car registration and insurance papers
- Health and life insurance papers
- Medical and school records for you and your children
- Immunization Records
- Work permits/green Card/visa
- W2s & Paystubs
- Divorce and custody papers
- Marriage license

Emergency Numbers

- Your local police and/or sheriff's department
- Our number: 281-342-4357
- Friends, relatives and family members
- Your local doctor's office and hospital
- County and/or District Attorney's Office

Other

- Medications for both you and your children
- Eyeglasses, contact lenses, hearing aids, and any other medical devices you or your children need
- Extra set of house and car keys (keep in specific area for quick access)
- Valuable jewelry
- Pay-as-you-go cell phone
- Address book
- Pictures and sentimental items
- Several changes of clothes for you and your children
- Emergency money

After You Leave Your Abuser

Your safety plan should include ways to ensure your continued safety after leaving an abusive relationship. Here are some safety precautions to consider:

- Change your locks and phone number.
- Call the telephone company and ask that your phone number be blocked so that if you call anyone, neither your partner nor anyone else will be able to get your new, unlisted phone number.
- Change your work hours and the route you take to work.
- Change the route taken to transport children to school or consider changing your children's schools.
- Alert the school authorities of the situation.
- If you have a protective or restraining order, keep a certified copy of it with you at all times, and inform friends, neighbors and employers that you have a protective/restraining order in effect.
- Call law enforcement to enforce the order and give copies of the protective/restraining order to employers, neighbors and schools along with a picture of the offender.
- Consider renting a post office box or using the address of a friend for your mail (be aware that addresses are on restraining orders and police reports and be careful to whom you give your new address and phone number). (Apply for address confidentiality program on www.texasattorneygeneral.gov)
- Reschedule appointments that the offender is aware of.
- Use different stores and frequent different social spots.
- Alert neighbors and request that they call the police if they feel you may be in danger.
- Replace wooden doors with steel or metal doors. Install security systems if possible.
- Install a motion sensitive lighting system.
- Tell people you work with about the situation and have your calls screened by one receptionist if possible.
- Tell people who take care of your children or drive them/pick them up from school and activities about the situation.