

Safety Planning: Planning to Leave an Abuser (with children)



If you are reading this, you are most likely searching for advice on how to protect yourself as you leave an abusive relationship. Reaching out for support is the first step to a life free from abuse, and you are very brave to have taken that step. Now that you've taken the courageous first step of seeking help, it's time to create a safety plan. A personalized, practical safety plan includes ways to remain safe while in a relationship, planning to leave, or after you leave. A good safety plan will have all of the information you need, be specific to your situation, and help walk you through different scenarios that you might come across while living with an abuser. Some of the things you put in your safety plan might seem obvious, and that's okay- in moments of crisis, your brain doesn't function the same way as when you are calm. In a crisis, it can be hard to think clearly or make logical decisions about your safety, but having a safety plan ahead of time can help protect yourself in those stressful moments.

Physical Safety Planning

It's important to remember that violence can escalate when you are planning to leave or are actively leaving an abusive relationship. Here are some things to think about as you prepare to leave. The goal here is to plan and prepare enough beforehand so that you can leave as quickly and quietly as possible.

- Document the abuse.
- Take pictures of physical injuries, and save any medical paperwork you might have from them.
- Keep a journal of all violent incidents, noting dates, events, and threats made, if possible. Keep your journal in a safe place.
- Research and list helpful resources, such as legal advice lines, shelter numbers, etc. (Visit our Online Resource Hub for some ideas!)
- Put together a “go-bag” with:
 - Legal and medical documentation for you and your children/pets: licenses, social security cards/birth certificates, vet records
 - Medications
 - List of important phone numbers
 - A burner phone, if possible
 - Documentation of the abuse
 - Extra money, if possible

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- Think about your support system. Who in your life could help you if they knew what was happening?
 - Make a list of these people, then determine which ones you trust most to help you and keep you safe. Make a plan to tell them about the abuse. You don't have to tell them everything if you don't want to. Come up with a signal to show/tell them that you need help, and plan with them for what to do when that signal is used.
 - If your abuser has kept you away from family and friends and you're anxious about reaching out, connect with them anyway! More than likely, they'll be happy to help you.
- Decide on a trusted friend or family member to tell.
 - Make a plan to tell them about the abuse. Come up with a signal to show/tell them that you need help, and plan with them for what to do when that signal is used.
 - If possible, keep a "go-bag" at this person's house.
 - Try to memorize their phone numbers.
- Plan your exit: which door/window you'll use, at what time of day, how you'll leave the area (drive? Getting picked up? On foot?), and where you'll stay the night.
 - Plan for what you will do if your partner finds out about your plan. Make a Plan B.

Safety Planning with Children

Domestic violence impacts children, too. It's important to make sure your children are physically and emotionally safe when you are planning to leave an abusive relationship. If you are planning to leave an abuser and have children in the home, your safety plan should include ways that your children can stay safe.

- Teach your children when and how to get help:
 - When and how to call 911
 - Help them list people they trust and can talk to
 - Come up with a code word for when things get bad, and plan where they'll go/who they'll call when that word is used.
- Help the children create their own safe space at home, such as a chair with a favorite blanket or stuffed animal. Teach them that they can go to this place when they need to feel safe and/or think about things.
- Come up with a code word that you can use when they need to leave home in case of an emergency and make sure that they know not to tell others what the secret word means.

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- Be prepared in case the children accidentally reveal your plans to leave. Make a Plan B.
- If the children are enrolled in school, make sure someone on staff knows what is going on at home. Make arrangements and changes to prevent the abuser from picking the children up from school, and make sure the school is only contacting you (or a safe relative who is not the abuser) with information about your child.
- Enroll them in a counseling program or support group for children.
- Tell your children that violence is never right, even when someone they love is being violent. Tell them that the violence is not their fault or yours and that when anyone is being violent, it is important to stay safe.
- Let them be kids: Domestic violence often forces children to grow up too fast. Give your children chances to be and act like children- let them run wild at a playground, make a messy art project, or sing a silly song.

How to have these conversations: Let them know how much you love them and that you support them no matter what. Tell them that you want to keep them safe, so you have to come up with a plan to use in case of emergencies. It's important to remember that when safety planning with a child, they might tell this information to the abusive partner, which could make the situation more dangerous. 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 (abuser) becomes violent."

Safety Planning: Planning to Leave an Abuser



Emotional Safety Planning

When creating a safety plan, you might focus most of your energy on your physical safety. That's great, but did you know you can include your emotional health in your safety plan, too? Emotional safety can look different for different people (everyone has unique needs!). Still, the goal of emotional safety planning is the same- developing strategies and coping mechanisms to help you accept yourself, your feelings, and your choices while dealing with abuse.

When you're developing your safety plan, consider including emotional safety planning. Here are a few ways to start:

- **Build your support system:** Reach out to trusted friends or family- even if you haven't spoken in a while because of the abuse, they'll be glad to hear from you. Supportive people can give you the space to process challenging situations and think through your options.
- **Think small, achievable goals:** Be gentle and patient with yourself, and work at a pace that feels doable. Your goal for the day might be calling one local hotline or finding out about a new support group. You don't have to do anything you aren't comfortable with, but when you're ready, your small goals will have laid the groundwork for you.
- **Create your Happy Place:** When you're living with abuse, it can be helpful to carve out a physical space for yourself to relax, recharge, and feel safe. Whether it's a room or closet full of comfortable blankets, a favorite tree in a nearby park, or a chair by a window, you deserve a safe place.
- **Tell yourself, "I am valuable!":** You are important and unique. Remind yourself of that! When living with abuse, simply remembering your worth can work wonders for your emotional health. It is not your fault when someone chooses to abuse you, and being abused does not mean you're a terrible person. Tell yourself you matter. Believe it.

More Safety Planning Tools

- MyPlan SafetyPlan App (also has a website!) <https://myplanapp.org/>
- Bright Sky SafetyPlan App (also has a website!) <https://wcpittsburgh.org/bright-sky/>

REMEMBER: If your phone is monitored, downloading an app like one of these might not be a safe option.

You can all one of our experienced advocates anytime if you would like do discuss your options. Our advocates can be reached via our hotline at (479)968-3110 or via email, rivalleyshelterstaff@gmail.com. Please make sure you are in a safe place before contacting one of our advocates.

Creating a Personalized Safety Plan



A safety plan is personalized, practical plan for where to go, what to do, and who to call if you are being hurt or abused by someone close to you. It's important to have a safety plan because when we're in crisis our brains have trouble processing. Having details written down ahead of times makes it easier to remember what to do in an emergency.

Remember - This plan is for you! Take the parts that work for your life, and leave the rest. Share this plan with one or two trusted people and keep it in a private place.

Abuse is not your fault. You deserve safety, respect, and support in your relationships.

STEP ONE - Assessment



Check the behaviors or actions that this person has taken to harm, scare, or control you:

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Control money | <input type="checkbox"/> Cheat on you | <input type="checkbox"/> Partner threatens suicide if you leave |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Keep you from working | <input type="checkbox"/> Call you names or make you feel small | <input type="checkbox"/> Force you to do something sexually that you don't want to do |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Keep you from getting work done | <input type="checkbox"/> Keep you from leaving the room or the house | <input type="checkbox"/> Treat you like a servant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Force you to work | <input type="checkbox"/> Expose you to a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STD/STI) | <input type="checkbox"/> Force you to have an abortion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stop you from calling for help | <input type="checkbox"/> Hit, slap, or punch you | <input type="checkbox"/> Keep you from sleeping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pull your hair | <input type="checkbox"/> Get you pregnant on purpose without your consent | <input type="checkbox"/> Keep you from going to school |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Choke or put their hands around your neck | <input type="checkbox"/> Tell you what to do, where you can go, what you can wear | <input type="checkbox"/> Call or text you constantly |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Threaten you with a weapon | | <input type="checkbox"/> Accuse you of cheating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Isolate you from family and friends | | |

Many of these tactics can be used in a day, a month, or a lifetime. Even if you have experienced none of these tactics specifically, you may still be experiencing abuse if you are in fear for your health, safety, or freedom.

Creating a Personalized Safety Plan



STEP TWO - Warning Signs



What are some signs or situations that (usually or often) hint that this person might be about to harm, scare, or control you?

Examples:

- My partner gets really loud and physically threatening when drunk. When I know this person is going to the bar for the night, I send the kids to my sister's house so they don't wake up and get scared when this person comes home.
- When this person starts muttering cuss words under their breath, I know they're going to start to yell or hit soon. I try to leave the house for a walk, or stay in another room with the door closed.

Warning signs for my situation:

1

2

3

STEP THREE - EMERGENCY CONTACTS



It's important to know who to call for help in an emergency. Write essential phone numbers in this section, you so don't have to try and find them and remember them.

24/7 Hotlines

- 911
- The Arkansas Crisis Line: 988
- Arkansas 211 Resource Database: 211
- Arkansas Coalition Against Sexual Assault: (800)656-4673
- The River Valley Shelter: (479)968-3110

Creating a Personalized Safety Plan



STEP THREE - EMERGENCY CONTACTS



If I feel confused, depressed, or scared I can call one of these people and know they will have my back:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

In an emergency, I can call these people or organizations to help me, pick me up, or increase my safety:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

If an emergency, for safe places, that I can go to are:

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

STEP FOUR: Go-Bag



When I need to leave (for a night, a few days, or for good) I can pack a "Go-Bag" full of the items I'll need. Circle or highlight the items that apply to your situation:

For Me:

- Medications
- Vital documents
- Change of clothes
- Cash or credit card
- Burner Cell Phone
- Keys

For kids:

- Medications
- Vital documents
- Comfort items
- Formula
- Diapers
- Change of clothes

For pets:

- Medications
- License and vet paperwork
- Extra food

Creating a Personalized Safety Plan



STEP FIVE - Safety Tips



Below are some tips that may help you stay safe in, or leaving, an abusive relationship. Some of these might not be useful for your situation. You are free to choose what works for you, and ignore the rest!

In my home:

- I can ask my landlord to change the locks,
- I can install security system or more lights outside

In my neighborhood:

- I can tell my neighbor to call 911 (or another #: _____) if they see my abuser or hear something happening at my house
- I can tell my kids' daycare/school who is allowed to pick them up and/or ask them to call me if my abuser shows up

At work:

- I can tell this person: _____ to call 911/security if they see my abuser nearby
- I can ask coworkers not to tell any customers or callers what my schedule is
- I can ask my boss to switch my hours or location so my abuser can no longer harass me at work

I can try to avoid place where I know my abuser might be. such as:

- Their workplace: _____
- Their gym: _____
- Their friends' homes or neighborhood: _____

I can change my route to and from work by:

Example: have someone drive me, taking the 64 instead of the I-40, etc.

With my kids:

- I could teach my kids when and how to call 911 or another safe adult
- I could create an emotional safety plan with my kids (see page 5)

Creating a Personalized Safety Plan



STEP SIX: Emotional Safety



Living in an abusive relationship is hard on your emotional health, too. What techniques help me feel grounded and safe when scared or stressed?

Check those that apply and write in your own.

- Deep breathing
- Mindfulness
- Going for a walk
- Listening to music
- Rubbing my hands together
- Smelling a candle
- Hugging my kid
- Cuddling an animal
- Stretching my body

What can I tell myself when I'm feeling down on myself?

Circle those that apply and write in your own.

- Making life changes is difficult.
It won't always feel easy, but I
can do this.
- My home should be a haven of
peace, warmth, and safety.
- I'm worth of love just as I am.
