

Safety Planning works

People who have experienced violence in a relationship have told us safety planning can help.

You can't change the abuser, but you can act to increase your safety by thinking about your next steps.

Every day people who experience or live with violence take the first steps to change their lives.

There are people trained to help you develop a plan that can increase your safety.

Call, and you can make it happen.

Planning for your safety

Resources:



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What is Safety Planning?

Safety planning is thinking and acting in a way that can increase your safety and the safety of your loved ones.

You can do safety planning whether you stay in a relationship or if you are able to leave an abusive relationship.

Safety planning is something you do to help yourself feel and be “safe” when you are being hurt or afraid of being hurt.

If you are being abused by a spouse, family member, your boy/girl friend, someone at work or school, a personal care assistant, or anyone else, there are things you can do that may help increase your safety.

In fact, you are probably already doing things to make you and your children more safe. Here are some examples:

- You may ask someone for help.
- You may call a domestic violence hotline or the police.
- You may try to end the relationship.
- Sometimes you may try not to say things that might “upset” the abusive person.
- You may teach your children how to call for help.
- You may change your job or school.

It is easier to safety plan if you have someone to help you. Try contacting someone who can help you think about all your different choices and options.

Call the Family Violence and Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-838-8238 for information on a program in your area.

What do I need to know about Safety Planning?

You are the expert on your life. Your own experience is the best tool in planning for your safety.

Planning often involves thinking about many choices. If Plan A doesn't work... what is Plan B?

There are many kinds of dangers or risks when you are being abused. When planning, consider all of the risks.

Think about different **places** you may not be safe: home, work, school, other places you often visit and your abuser knows about.

Think about different **times** you feel unsafe:

- Right after you try to leave the relationship
- When drugs or alcohol are around
- When you are alone with the person
- If the person gets violent (starts yelling, hitting, threatening)

Consider your own and your children's emotional safety as well as physical safety. When you start to make a safety plan, you will want to think about different kinds of safety, like:

- Emotional/mental (what will you do if you or your children get scared or are very upset)
- Physical (where will you go? are there ways to protect yourself and your children?)
- Financial (money, insurance, checking account, credit cards)

Above all, trust your feelings and instincts. Remember...you are the expert on your life!

To get started, think about...

Where and when you might be in danger:

- Are you living with the abuser?
- Do you work or go to school in the same place?
- Do you have children with this person?
- Do you need this person to help you bathe, use the bathroom, or eat? Does this person pay for your medications or equipment?
- Do you have the same friends or visit the same family members?
- Do you shop in the same places?
- Will you go to court at the same time?
- Are there signs before the abuse starts, like a look, or drinking or using drugs, or yelling?

What will you need if you decide to leave?

- money and credit cards?
- medications?
- birth certificates and other ID?
- adaptive equipment?
- items for your children?
- what else?

Remember you deserve to be safe and free from abuse. You can take actions to increase your safety.

Then think about...

What you can do to be safe

These are ideas that other people have shared:

- **When things seem very dangerous, try to think about what calms down the abuser.** This might give you time to think about what to do next.
- **Tell people about what is happening** and let them know how they can be helpful. For example: if it is safe to do so, tell your neighbors and ask them to call the police if they see or hear any fights or something unusual. You can talk with your employer and make a plan for what to do if your abuser shows up at work.
- **If the abuser is a personal care assistant or takes care of you, talk to someone about getting an emergency caregiver** or find someone else who can help you for a little while.
- **If your abuser works with you, read your company's policies about stalking, harassment, and workplace violence so you know what your rights are.** You can talk to your supervisor about the abuse, if you feel safe to do so. Write down when abuse happens at work.
- **If you sense that your partner is about to become violent, try to get to a place where there is an exit door and/or a phone.**
- **If you don't live with the abuser, try to change your routine.** Consider shopping and banking in a different place than usual. Try to get rides with friends or take someone along with you when you go out. Consider changing your phone number and locks.
- **Remember that an abuser can track your comings and goings through your cell phone.** If you have a cell phone, change the number to one your abuser doesn't know.
- **Be careful when you use a computer.** Some people know how to figure out passwords. Other people know how to see what you looked at on the internet. If you use a TTY or similar machine, make sure you erase its memory so the abuser cannot see who you called or what you said.

Take warning signs seriously

Talk with someone and make a safety plan right away if...

- You have recently left the abuser or changed the relationship.
- The abuser has made threats to kill you, her/himself, your children, your pets or someone close to you.
- The violence happens more often or there is more sexual violence.
- You are going to court about criminal charges, divorce, or custody of children.
- The abuser has threatened you with a weapon or used one against you.
- The abuser has threatened to hospitalize you or to have you arrested.
- You are moving on with your life, feeling better, making more money, setting more limits, and the abuser resents the changes.
- The abuser has taken or broken equipment that you need, like a TTY, wheelchair, or cane.
- The abuser feels as though he or she has nothing left to lose.

Call the Virginia Family Violence and Sexual Assault Hotline at 1.800.838.8238 (v/tty) and ask for help with making a Safety Plan.