

## PERSONALIZED SAFETY PLAN



**Safety plans may help you anticipate the dangers you may face. Just as abusers continually shift their tactics of power and control, your safety plan is an adaptable tool to help keep you safe in your ever-changing situation.**

### ► WHEN TO USE A SAFETY PLAN

Safety plans can be made for a variety of situations: dealing with an emergency, such as when you are threatened with a physical assault or an assault has occurred; for continuing to live with or to date a partner who has been abusive; or for protecting yourself after you have ended a relationship with an abusive partner.

### ► USE WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW

If you are a woman who has been abused, you probably know more about safety planning and risk assessment than you might realize. Being in a relationship with an abusive partner—and surviving—requires considerable skill and resourcefulness. Any time you do or say something as a way to protect yourself or your children, you are assessing risk and enacting a safety plan. You do it all the time; it's just not always a conscious process.

### ► THINK IT THROUGH

It can be a helpful safety strategy to evaluate risks and make safety plans in a more intentional way. Whether you are currently with your partner or have ended the relationship, and whether you choose to use available services or to involve the police, there are certain things that are helpful to consider in planning for your future safety.

### ► BE AWARE OF DANGERS

If you are planning to leave your partner or already have left, be aware that batterers often escalate their violence during times of separation, increasing your risk for harm, including serious and life-threatening injury. Making a separation safety plan can help reduce the risks to you and your children.

### ► EVALUATE YOUR OPTIONS

Only you can judge who it's safe to tell about your situation and who to ask for help. Sometimes, people who don't have good information about domestic violence respond to women who have been abused in ways that aren't helpful, even when they mean well. On the other hand, you might feel comfortable asking for help from someone you know. It's your decision. The important thing is for you to identify all the people who might be willing and able to help you. Make a list of their phone numbers and attach it to your safety plan for easy reference.

### ► PLAN AHEAD

You don't have to wait for an emergency to ask for help. In fact, it's a good idea to talk to people who can help before there's a crisis. Find out what they are willing and able to do for you. That way, you'll know in advance if you have a place to stay, a source of financial assistance or a safe person to keep copies of important papers.

### ► REDUCE YOUR RISK

No woman has control over her partner's violence, but women can and do find ways to reduce their risk of harm. The following safety plan is a tool to help you identify and evaluate your options and assist you in creating a personalized plan to reduce your risk when confronted with the threat of harm or with actual harm. Use what applies or change it to reflect your particular situation. **Your safety plan does not need to be written down, though you may choose to.** There's no right or wrong way to develop a safety plan. Make it your own, and review it regularly to make changes as needed.

**PERSONALIZED SAFETY PLAN (CONTINUED)****▶ SAFETY DURING A VIOLENT INCIDENT**

- I will use my judgment and intuition. If I think my partner and I are going to argue, I will try to move to a space that is lowest risk, such as \_\_\_\_\_. (Often bathrooms, garages, kitchens, areas near weapons or rooms without an outside exit are most dangerous.)
- If the situation is serious, I can give my partner what he wants to try to calm him down. I have the right to protect myself until I/we are out of danger.

**▶ SAFETY IF STAYING**

- I can tell \_\_\_\_\_ about the violence and request they call the police if they hear noises coming from my home.
- I can teach my children how to use the telephone or autodial to contact the police and fire departments and/or how to contact a safe neighbor for help. I will make sure my children know our address.
- If I have a programmable phone, I can program emergency numbers.
- I will use \_\_\_\_\_ as the code word with my children or my friends so they will call for help if needed.
- If I have to leave my home, I will go to \_\_\_\_\_. If I cannot go there, I can go to \_\_\_\_\_.
- The domestic violence program hotline number is \_\_\_\_\_. I can call it if I need shelter or someone to talk with.

**▶ SAFETY IF LEAVING****Preparing to leave**

- I will call a domestic violence program to get help making my plans. The hotline number for the nearest program is \_\_\_\_\_.
- I will leave money and an extra set of keys with \_\_\_\_\_ so I can leave quickly.
- I will leave extra clothes with \_\_\_\_\_.
- I can open a post office box and have personal mail and bills (credit cards, cell phone, etc.) sent there.

- I will ask \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to see who would be able to let me stay with them or lend me some money.
- I can increase my independence by opening a bank account and getting credit cards in my own name; by taking classes or getting job skills; and/or by getting copies of all the important papers and documents I might need and keeping them with \_\_\_\_\_.
- I can rehearse my escape plan and, if appropriate, practice it with my children.
- If it's not safe to talk openly, I will use \_\_\_\_\_ as the code word or signal to my children that we are leaving, or to my family or friends that we are coming.
- I can keep my purse and car keys ready and put them \_\_\_\_\_ so I can leave quickly.

**Items to consider taking if leaving**

The following items may be helpful to have if you decide to leave, but remember that almost all of these items are replaceable.

- Identification for myself
- My and my children's birth certificates
- My and my children's Social Security cards
- School and vaccination records
- Money, checkbook, bankbooks, ATM cards
- Credit cards
- Medication and medical supplies
- Keys—house, car, work
- Driver's license, car registration
- Insurance papers
- Public assistance ID/Medicaid cards
- Passports, green cards, work permits
- Divorce or separation papers
- Lease, rental agreement or house deed
- Car/mortgage payment book
- Children's toys, security blankets, stuffed animals
- Sentimental items, photos
- My personalized safety plan (if written down)

**PERSONALIZED SAFETY PLAN (CONTINUED)****▶ SAFETY AT HOME****If my partner and I are no longer living together**

- I can, or ask my landlord to, change the locks on my doors and windows.
- I can, or ask my landlord to, replace wooden doors with metal ones.
- I can, or ask my landlord to, install security systems, including additional locks, window bars, poles to wedge against doors, etc.
- I can buy rope ladders to be used for escape from second-floor windows.
- I can install smoke detectors and put fire extinguishers on each floor in my home.
- I can provide my onsite property manager and/or trusted neighbors with a picture of my partner and ask them to notify the police if they see him near my home.

**▶ AT WORK**

- I can inform my boss, the security supervisor and the employee assistance program, if available, about my situation. The number of the EAP office is \_\_\_\_\_.
- I can ask \_\_\_\_\_ to screen my calls and visitors at work.
- When leaving work, I can \_\_\_\_\_.
- If there's trouble when traveling to and from work, I can \_\_\_\_\_.

**▶ SAFETY IN PUBLIC OR IF BEING STALKED**

- If I suspect I am in imminent danger, I will locate a safe place for myself (police stations, residences of family or friends, domestic violence shelters, local churches, public areas etc.).
- I can document my partner's actions and keep it in a safe place. This may include taking photos of destroyed property/vandalism, saving answering machine messages, keeping letters/notes, etc.
- I can change my patterns—avoid stores, restaurants, banks, doctor's appointments, self-service laundries and other places where my partner might find me.

- I can tell \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ about the situation and provide them with a photo or description of my partner and any possible vehicles he may drive. I can ask them to call the police if they believe my children or I are in danger.
- When I am out of the house, I will try not to travel alone and will try to stay in public areas.

**▶ WITH AN ORDER OF PROTECTION**

- I will keep my protection order \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Always keep it on or near your person.)
- I will give copies of my protection order to the local police or sheriff and to departments in towns where I visit friends and family.
- I will give copies to my employer, my religious advisor, my closest friend, my children's school and daycare center and \_\_\_\_\_.
- If my partner destroys my order or if I lose it, I can get another copy from the court that issued it.
- If my partner violates the order, I can call the police and report a violation, contact my attorney, call my domestic violence program advocate, and/or advise the court of the violation.
- I can call a domestic violence program if I have questions about how to enforce an order or if I have problems getting it enforced.

**▶ PROTECTING MY CHILDREN**

- I can teach developmentally appropriate safety strategies to my children.
- I can teach my children how to make a collect call to me if they are concerned about their safety.
- I can teach my children how to use the telephone or autodial option to contact the police and fire departments and how to contact a safe neighbor for help. I will make sure they know our address.
- I can tell my children's caretakers who has permission to pick them up and make sure caretakers know how to recognize those people.
- I will give the people who take care of my children copies of custody and protection orders, as well as emergency numbers.

**PERSONALIZED SAFETY PLAN (CONTINUED)****► SAFETY AND TECHNOLOGY**

- Each day there are advances in technology. I can ask someone familiar with technology or domestic violence about the ways that my partner may monitor me.
- I will use a computer that my partner doesn't have access to when I look for help, a new place to live, etc. It may be safest to use a computer at a public library, Internet café, community center or \_\_\_\_\_.
- I can ask my friends and family to be careful about who they give my e-mail address to and to use the Bcc: option when copying me in on e-mail.
- When making or receiving private calls, I will not use a cell phone that I share with my partner because my partner may have access to cell phone billing records and phone logs and may have enabled settings on my phone that allow him to track my whereabouts. My local domestic violence shelter may have a donated cell phone I can use.
- I will ask the court systems, post office and other government agencies how they protect or publish my records and request that they seal or restrict access to my files to help protect my safety.

**► MY EMOTIONAL HEALTH**

- If I am feeling down, lonely or confused, I can call \_\_\_\_\_ or the domestic violence hotline \_\_\_\_\_.
- If I have left my partner and am considering returning, I will call \_\_\_\_\_ or spend time with \_\_\_\_\_ before I make a decision.
- I can attend support groups, workshops or classes at the local domestic violence program or \_\_\_\_\_ so I can build a support system, learn skills or get information.
- I will look at how and when I drink alcohol or use other drugs. If I am going to drink or use other drugs, I will do it in a place where people are committed to my safety.

**► KEEP YOUR PLAN IN A SAFE PLACE**

Only you can decide if it is safe to have a written safety plan. If you decide to keep a written safety plan, make sure to find a place to keep it where your partner won't find it; maybe you can ask a friend to keep a copy for you. Whether it's safe to write down your plan or not, it's still important to make one.

**► WHAT CAN A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAM DO FOR ME?**

Local domestic violence programs are a vital resource, providing free and confidential assistance to women victimized by domestic violence and their children. They provide emergency safety services, such as shelter and 24-hour crisis hotlines. But you don't have to stay in a shelter to get help from a program. Most also provide a full range of non-residential services to women who have been battered.

Domestic violence program advocates have accurate information about domestic violence and are experienced in providing assistance to women who have been battered and their children. They understand the criminal justice, family court and social service systems, and they are familiar with other community resources that might be useful to you.

In addition to giving you good information, advocates often can accompany you to court, to the police station or to social services offices. They can provide you with practical and emotional support. Getting help from someone who has experience working with survivors of domestic violence and who knows how to work with the different systems can make things a lot easier for you.

**NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE****800-799-SAFE (7233)**

**Toll-free, 24-hour crisis intervention  
and referrals to domestic violence  
programs in your area.**

This personalized safety plan was adapted from ones developed by AWARE in St. Louis, the Office of the City Attorney, San Diego, the National Center for Victims of Crime Stalking Resource Center and the National Network to End Domestic Violence Safety Net.