

## Safety Planning: Protecting Yourself and Your Children After Leaving an Abuser

If you are reading this, you are most likely searching for advice on how to protect yourself once you have left 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 brave first step of reaching out for help, it's time to create a **safety plan**. A safety plan is a personalized, practical plan that 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 will help walk you through different scenarios that you might come across while living with an abuser. *Some of the things that 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. Having a safety plan ahead of time can help you to protect yourself- and your children -in those stressful moments.

### Physical Safety Planning

- If possible/necessary, change your locks at home. (If you rent, your landlord may require a copy of your protective order to make this happen)
- Change your phone number. Call the telephone company to request caller ID. Ask that your phone number be blocked so that if you call anyone, your abuser won't be able to get your new, unlisted phone number.
- If you work, ask your manager or supervisor about changing your hours. Consider taking a different route to work.
- Ask your coworkers, managers, and supervisors not to reveal any information about your schedule to anyone who calls or shows up to your workplace.
- If you have a protective order (OFP or HRO), keep a certified copy of it with you at all times, and inform friends, neighbors and employers that you have a restraining order in effect.
- Call your local law enforcement (if you feel comfortable) to enforce the order.
- Consider renting a PO Box or applying for Safe at Home, Minnesota's address confidentiality program.
- If you have appointments that your abuser knows about, reschedule them.
- Change which grocery store you go to.
- Alert your neighbors and ask that they call the police (or another trusted friend) if they feel you may be in danger.
- If you can, install motion sensitive lights or a security system for your home. Some counties and organizations have grant money available for this purpose.

### Safety Planning with Children



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

- 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, make sure the school is only contacting you (or a safe relative who is not the abuser) with information about your child.
- Change the route you take to school for pickup/drop off.
- 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.
- If you are concerned for your children's safety during supervised or unsupervised visits, here are some things to think about:
  - If they're old enough, work with your children to come up with ways that they can stay safe during visits. Have them identify where they can get to a phone, how they can leave the house, and who they can go to.
  - If it's safe to do, send a cell phone with the children to be used in emergency situations — this can be used to call 911 or you if they need help.
- If you have to see your abuser to make custody exchanges, here are some things to think about:
  - Avoid exchanging custody at your home or your partner's home. Many cities have safe exchange centers you can use, but public spaces like parking lots or fast food restaurants could work as well.
  - Bring a friend or relative with you to the exchanges, or have them make the exchange.
  - To help the children cope with anxiety about exchanges, figure out something to do *before* the exchange to calm any nerves you're feeling, and something *after* to focus on yourself or the kids, such as going to a park or doing a fun activity.

### Emotional Safety Planning

When you're putting together a safety plan, you might be focusing most of your energy on your physical safety. That's great, but did you know that you can include your emotional health in your safety plan? Emotional safety can look different for different people (everyone has unique needs!), but 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 tough 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 own 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 to just be.
- **Tell yourself "I am valuable!":** You are important and special. 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 bad person. Tell yourself you matter. Believe it.

### [More Safety Planning Tools](#)

#### **Safety Planning Apps**

- MyPlan (also has a website!): <https://www.myplanapp.org/home>
- RUSafe: <https://www.wcspittsburgh.org/rusafe-app/>

\*Remember: if your phone is monitored, downloading an app like one of these might not be a safe option.

Live chat with a trained advocate from Women's Advocates anytime at [www.wadvocates.org](http://www.wadvocates.org)

\*Ask about support groups near you

[Online Resource Hub](#)

[Day One Shelter Network](#)

[Safe at Home: Minnesota's address confidentiality program](#)

[Greater Minneapolis Crisis Nursery](#)

[Agape Oasis Childcare Center](#)

[Washburn Center for Children](#)

[Safe custody exchange centers](#)