

Safety Planning: Protecting Yourself and Your Children while Living with an Abuser

If you are reading this, you are most likely searching for advice on how to protect yourself in an abusive relationship (or searching for information to give to a loved one who may be experiencing abuse). 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

As you plan to keep yourself safe while living with an abusive partner, here are some things to consider:

- Is your abuser physically violent? What kinds of violence, and what level of force?
 - When you know what kinds of violence to expect, you can better prepare yourself to protect yourself from it.
- Think about the place you're living. Where do you feel safest?
 - Think about rooms that have doors or windows to escape from, or rooms where there are no weapons. If your abuser starts to get violent or escalated, try and get to one of those safe areas.
- If you have access to a vehicle, make a habit to back it into the driveway and keep only the driver's side door unlocked.
- If there are weapons where you're living, such as guns or kitchen knives, try to keep them as inaccessible as possible.
- If your abuser becomes violent and you cannot escape, make yourself as small as possible.
- 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 could trust the 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 make a 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.
- Always have a phone on you, as well as a physical list of important numbers.
- Ideas for important phone numbers:
 - Your emergency contact(s)

- A domestic violence shelter or hotline
- Your doctor's office
- Your list of trusted friends and family (see above)
- Your lawyer or law clinic, if you have one.
- Know where the nearest public phone (or person whose phone you can borrow) is located.

Safety Planning with Children

Domestic violence impacts children, too. It's important to make sure your children are physically and emotionally safe when living in a home where domestic violence happens. If you are living with an abuser and have children in the home, your safety plan should include ways that your children can stay safe when violence is happening in your home.

- 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.
- 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.
- Teach them that although they want to protect their parent, they should never get in the middle of a violent situation.
- 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.”

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

*Ask about support groups near you

[Greater Minneapolis Crisis Nursery](#)



Online Chat with an Advocate at:
www.wadvocates.org
24/7 Crisis Line, Call 651-227-8284
Email resources@wadvocates.org

[Agape Oasis Childcare Center](#)

[Washburn Center for Children](#)