



Community Services Counselling Program

Court Program Safety Planning Guide



Court can be a stressful and overwhelming experience. The Court Program Safety Planning Guide was created to help lessen stress by assisting you in understanding processes, navigate you through the important aspects of the court system, and assist you in enhancing your safety going to court, attending court and leaving court. The Court Program Safety Planning Guide may or may not work for you. Please adapt the guide to work for your individual comfort level and needs for safety.

When scheduling permits, the Court Case Coordinator may accompany you to court. The Court Case Coordinator will arrange to meet you at a designated area on the required floor at the Courts Centre. In cases where you will be alone, the Court Case Coordinator will assist by providing preparation to navigate you through the process at the Courts Centre. If possible, bring a person you trust to support you. It is recommended that children not attend the Courts Centre with you. It is a stressful time for you and your focus will need to be on the matter brought forward. Children are not permitted within the court room.

The information in this booklet is designed to provide helpful information on enhancing your safety. Any action you take, using the information in this handbook, is strictly at your own risk and the Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter will not be liable for any harm or damages in connection with the provision of this information.

Before Court:

- Carry your cell phone and charger at all times. If you do not have a cell phone please request a 911 Emergency cell phone from your Court Case Coordinator.
- Ensure your cell phone is fully charged.
- Pre-program 911 emergency number and your emergency contacts into your cell phone.
- Contact safe friends/family or other supports. Call them before court, after court and upon arriving home to advise them that you are safe.
- Establish a code word with your supports so they know when to call 911.
- Wear comfortable dress clothes to court.
 - If possible, wear neutral or black/gray clothing. Avoid sweats, jeans, hats or bright colors.
 - Avoid belts.
 - Avoid carrying metal items (i.e. Tweezers, scissors, tools, knives, metal nail files, etc.) which may set off the security alarm.
 - Avoid scarves or wearing items on your neck as it may increase the risk of strangulation.

Transportation to court

- Take a taxi or get dropped off by a safe person.
- If taking the C-Train, be vigilant and aware of your surroundings to determine if someone might be following you. Be aware of the station exits and sit close to the C-Train panic button.
- If taking public transportation, travel during busier periods of the day.
- If transporting by vehicle, park in a well-lit public parkade, avoiding enclosed spaces or underground parking. Scan the parking lot when entering and leaving.

Inform a safe person of your safe arrival, location and/or when leaving your known location.

- Request the accompaniment of a safe support to attend court with you.
- Carry copies of all your current court orders i.e. Emergency Protection Order, Restraining Order, Parenting Order, at all times.
- Carry photographs of your abuser and photographs of your children with you at all times.
- Be aware of surroundings walking in and out of the Courts Centre.
- Document all stalking incidents. Contact the Calgary Police Services or Royal Canadian Mounted Police if you feel unsafe.

Process and Safety at Court:

- Before leaving for court, remove all sharp objects (i.e. scissors, nail files, etc.). If there are concerns, your belongings may be searched. This is an important safety measure for anyone visiting the Courts Centre.
- Arrive at the courthouse up to 30 minutes early as there are line ups at court security. Upon arrival at the Court Centre you will go through court security. Everyone accessing the Courts Centre must complete a security check. You will have to remove your belt, coat, watch and some jewelry. Your purse will be sent through an x-ray machine much like airport screening.
- Be aware of your surroundings and emergency exits.
- If you feel threatened or unsafe upon arrival, request a sheriff escort to the courtroom
- If you have any questions or concerns, the sheriffs at the Calgary Courts Centre on the main level can assist or help you. Inform the designated sheriff on the floor where the courtroom is located and express safety concerns (i.e. 12th floor designated sheriff/security personnel).
- Set up specific meeting points (with lawyers, support workers etc.) near court sheriffs/security on the main floor.

- Avoid taking the same elevator as your abuser.
- Check in with clerk and advise them of your name. If you have a Lawyer advise the clerk of your Lawyer's name.
- No drinks or food are permitted in courtrooms.
- Turn off or silence your cell phone before entering the courtroom.
- As you walk into courtroom, bow your head gently (sign of respect) and sit in the back gallery (benches).
- Wait in the courtroom for your case to be called.
- Matters with Lawyers on both sides begin first.
- If the other party has a Lawyer, speak to DUTY COUNSEL (Brown Door) outside the courtroom – Lawyers speak to Lawyers.
- When your matter is called – walk to the front podium – Courts will direct you to sit at the front desk while the other party sits at the other front desk.
 - Speak clearly (answer questions using Yes or No statements).
 - Each client file has only 5-10 minutes to ask for what you want (i.e. request lawyer, adjournment, offer to settle, etc.).
 - Be prepared to offer your solution to court issues.
 - Be prepared to negotiate (Courts like to hear parties work towards a solution).
 - If you do not understand, ask the Courts to repeat the question. Take your time, think through the question and respond. It is important to allow yourself the time to process the question.
 - Keep calm, do not swear, speak loudly or talk over the Judge.
 - Address Judge as "Sir/Madam, Your Honour".
 - Respond politely with "Please and Thank You".
- Confirm next court dates and times prior to leaving front podium or front desks.

If there has been a court order completed, confirm if the order will be mailed to you OR confirm when it will be ready for pick up on the 7th floor.

- As you leave the court room, at the door gently bow your head to the Judge, turn and walk out.
- If you feel unsafe leaving at the same time as your abuser, stay behind in the courtroom by sitting in the benches for 10 – 15 minutes. Ask the Sheriff for assistance if required.

After Court:

- Wait 10-15 minutes until other party has left the courtroom to exit.
- If you feel unsafe, request a Sheriff to escort you out of the Courts Centre.
- Wait in meeting rooms with a safe person outside the courtroom until it is safe to leave.
- Be aware of your surroundings when leaving the Courts Centre.
- If attending court alone, turn on your cell phone outside the courtroom and contact your safe person.

Transportation

- When returning to your car, do a scan of your vehicle to ensure it is safe.
- If you are taking a taxi call the taxi from inside the Courts Centre. Ask the taxi company the arrival time.

Advise your safe person when you are leaving the Courts Centre and advise your safe person upon the arrival at your next location.

- If you feel unsafe, a Sheriff will help escort you to your taxi.
- If your abuser is following you while you are walking outside the courthouse, go to a public place and call 911.
- If the abuser is following you while you are in your car, drive to a place where there are people to help or support you - Calgary Police Headquarters.
- Keep a "Call Police" sign in your car. This can be utilized if your safety is at risk.
- Contact the safe person upon your safe arrival at your home.
- Ensure schools, the daycare, the police and, if applicable, the Children Service's worker has a copy of all your court orders, including Restraining Orders, and Custody and Access Orders, as well as picture of the abuser.

If you would like further counselling, contact the Connect/24-Hour Family Violence and Abuse Helpline or your Community Services Counsellor.

CONTACT 911 IN EMERGENCIES

Other resources:

- Connect/24-Hour Family Violence and Abuse Helpline: (403) 234-SAFE (7233)
- Distress Centre: (403) 266-1601

For Legal Advice Options:

- Calgary Legal Guidance: (403) 234-9266
- Legal Aid: (403) 297-2260
- Lawyer Referral Line: (403) 228-1722
- Student Legal Assistance (University of Calgary): (403) 220.6637
- Resolution Services: (403) 297-6981
- For Emergency Protection Orders and Emergency Protection Reviews – Family Law Office: (403)-297-6380

