

# Safety Planning

*This is a facilitators' guide to help people in an abusive relationship.*

People in abusive relationships are usually very aware of the dangers they face. They take steps on a daily basis to keep themselves and their family members as safe as possible. Yet staying safe is usually only part of the concern. Often, keeping safe is weighed against standing up for their integrity, dignity and/or values. For example, a woman may choose to take a stand to protect her children from her partner rather than protecting herself.

**This Safety Plan guide can be used to support a person while recognizing the actions already being taken to keep safe.** These suggestions may or may not work for every person.

A person's risks may come from the partner relationship (physical, emotional, financial, spiritual, sexual abuse) as well as from other aspects of the person's life (economics, physical and mental health, family and social supports).

Most important – a person should trust her own instincts and at any time, call **Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter** Family Violence Helpline at 403 234-SAFE (7233) -- toll free at **1-800-606-7233** -- and a counsellor will help adapt a safety plan so that it works best for the individual's situation.

## **Questions to start and frame a safety planning discussion :**

- What safety strategies have been tried? For staying? For leaving?
- How did they work?
- Would she use those strategies again? If not, why not?
- What was her partner's reaction?
- What is the time frame for a new plan?
- What personal and public resources has she identified?
- How does she think her partner will react to these strategies?



## PLANNING AHEAD -- IN CASE YOU HAVE TO LEAVE

**An Emergency Escape Plan focuses on the things you can do in advance in case you have to get away from the abusive person very quickly.** Some women have found the following helpful:

**If possible, try to have photocopies of the following items.** Some women may be able to hide these in a safe place; for other women there are no safe places.

- Passports, birth certificates, immigration papers, for all family members
- School and vaccination records
- Driver's license and registration
- Medications, prescriptions, medical records for all family members
- Welfare identification
- Work permits
- Divorce papers, custody documentation, court orders, restraining orders, marriage certificate
- Lease/rental agreement, house deed, mortgage payment records
- Bank books and statements
- Insurance papers
- Address/telephone book
- Picture of abuser
- Health cards for yourself and family members
- All cards you normally use e.g. credit cards, bank cards, phone, Social Insurance

With so many things to think about when in a crisis, planning in advance can be helpful.

**Try to keep all the cards you normally use with you:**

- Driver's license
- Social insurance cards
- Credit cards/ Banking cards
- Healthcare cards

**If possible, try to keep these other items with you:**

- Cell phone
- Keys for car, home and office
- Chequebook, bank books/statements
- Driver's license, registration, insurance
- Bus pass, bus tickets, or bus or cab fare
- Address/telephone book
- Picture of your abusive partner
- Emergency money

**If possible, when you're leaving the person abusing you, try to take:**

- Emergency suitcase with immediate needs
- Special toys, comforts for children
- Medications/prescriptions
- Items of special sentimental value

## IF YOU NEED TO LEAVE SUDDENLY

**Although you may not be planning to leave, situations may change and you may choose to leave with little notice.**

If possible:

- Look carefully at how you could get out quickly if you are afraid for your safety
- Move into a room with access to an outside door or to a room that has a lock on the door and a phone
- Have a code word with children or friends so they can call the police for help on your behalf.
- Call 911 from a pay phone (no payment required). You can also call the operator by pressing "0" from a pay phone and ask for a women's shelter and you will be connected at no charge.

When, or after, you have been assaulted, call 9-1-1 if you can. Tell them who assaulted you and leave the phone off the hook after your call.

**Other possible safety ideas at home** (if you are living in the same home as the person abusing you):

- If there is a safe place to keep a telephone list, write down phone numbers that could help in a crisis:
  - 9-1-1 in an emergency
  - Calgary Police at 403 266-1234 to report a crime in progress or that has recently occurred
  - Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter (24 hour Family Violence Helpline 403 234-SAFE(7233))
  - Calgary Distress Centre (24 hour crisis line 403 266-1605)
  - Family members, trusted friends or children's friends
- Make arrangements with friends or family so that you can stay with them if necessary and if it is safe
- If you call Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter or other agency, you can dial another number after so the person abusing you cannot press the redial button and find out who you were talking to
- Teaching your children how to use the telephone (and cell phone, if you have one) to contact the police
- You may want to talk with your children and create a safety plan with them

A review of these checklist items could be helpful if your safety is suddenly in danger.

**Pets?** Calgary Humane Society offers Emergency Boarding and Pet Safekeeping for 21 days at little or no charge.  
[www.calgaryhumane.ca](http://www.calgaryhumane.ca) See: "Services"

Contact:

Non-Emergency - All Hours  
403-723-6025

Emergency - Business Hours  
Weekdays 8:00 AM - 7:00 PM  
Weekends 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM

Call 403-205-4455 and select Option 2

Emergency - After Hours  
Weekdays 7:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.  
Weekends 5:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.  
Statutory Holidays 8:00 a.m. - 10:00 p.m.  
Call 403-205-4455 and select option 6.

**All 24 Hour Vet Clinics will also be able to assist in an emergency.**

**If you are not living in the same house as the person abusing you, here are some options:**

*Some safety options have costs which may or may not be affordable.*

- Change all locks on the doors and windows, install a peephole in the door, change the locks on your garage and mailbox
- Get a cell phone and pre-program 9-1-1 and numbers of people to call
- Have your phone number unlisted. Block your number from being displayed when calling out
- Changes to your home:
  - Install an outside lighting motion detector
  - Install smoke detectors and fire extinguishers on each floor
  - Install security systems, additional locks, window bars, poles to wedge in sliding door jams and window sills

If you have a **restraining order**, a **no-contact order** or other **protection orders** :

- Understand the terms of the order and keep a copy with you at all times.
- Keep a copy of the order with a friend or safe person.
- Let family/ friends know that you have the restraining order. Ask them to contact the police if your partner contacts them to find you.

Sometimes abuse takes the form of stalking. Stalking is any unwanted and repeated contact, even if it isn't threatening.

Some safety measures have costs and may not be affordable. You can only do what you can do. You shouldn't feel badly about not being able to make these changes.

Alberta Justice developed laws to help people hurt by family violence, abuse and stalking. These laws include special orders that can be put in place by a judge and require the abuser to stay away from the family members who are being abused.

**IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD:**

- Talk to a trusted neighbour and ask them to call the police if they hear a fight or are concerned
- Change your routine by using different grocery stores and shopping malls, shopping at different times of day and taking different routes to work and any other place you regularly go to
- Keep your identity hidden. Remove your name and other personal information from as many listings as possible such as apartment building, listings on websites and social media like Facebook, etc.

Your day-to-day life may include many patterns that your partner also knows.

Making changes to these routines form part of safety planning.

**AT WORK:**

If it is safe:

- Tell your boss, the security supervisor, and other key people or friends at work about your situation
- If it is possible, ask to have your calls screened at work; it would also help to have these calls documented

**WHEN ARRIVING OR LEAVING WORK:**

- If possible, let someone know when you'll be home
- If you have a car:
  - Carry your keys in your hands or, if you can afford it, get a car security system
  - Be alert when walking to and from your car by scanning the parking lot and walk with someone if possible
  - Carry a purse-sized flashlight
  - If you leave work after dark or are working late, move your car closer to the entrance during your break
  - If you think you are being followed, make four right turns. If the same car is behind you, you can assume you are being followed and should go to a police station or public place to call the police.
  - If your abuser is following you, drive to a place where there are people to support you, e.g. a friend's house, police station, or a public place
  - If you have underground parking, consider parking across the street and in a well lit area
  - If you are walking, take a route that is populated
  - If you see the person who is abusive to you on the street, try to get to a public place, eg. a store
- When using public transit, if possible get off at a stop different than might be expected or wait to exit until you see that other people are also exiting.

## ON LINE / COMPUTER SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

**Connecting with friends and families through social media and by texting can be convenient and form an important part of your emotional support system.** But with an abusive relationship, being on line and using devices like smart phones can be another area of safety risk.

### **Here are some things you might want to consider:**

Before joining any on line community (Facebook, MySpace, etc.) or writing a blog, consider who can see your information. For instance, whenever you post a picture, it is possible for someone to figure out where you live, who else lives there, your commuting patterns, who you spend time with, etc.

### **Privacy Settings and Passwords**

- Check privacy settings on all social media sites you use
  - Control who can access your information
- Check this information often as it changes
- If you can do it safely, change passwords on any bank accounts or online accounts and keep the password private.
- Google your own name to see where there is information about you
- Set up a Google Alert (free) for your own name to know when or if new information about you is posted somewhere.

### **Deciding where and how to take part in on-line communities**

Consider removing all of your accounts and pages, like Facebook.

- A different account can be created under a name that cannot be guessed by those who know you.
- Your partner may learn information about you through family and friends in common
- Your children may also share information so helping them with their privacy settings is useful.

Most of us have more information about our lives on line than we realize.

There are websites that may help:

Safekids.com

commonsensemedia.org

getsafeonline.org

Stalking Resource Center: [ncvc.org](http://ncvc.org)

### **Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and Stalking**

Cell phone and smart phone settings can be set to disable Global Positioning Systems (GPS) so that your device does not tell someone else where you are. NOTE: a 9-1-1 operator will still be able to know your location to help you in a crisis, even if your GPS is disabled.

Every cell and smart phone manufacturer provides information on line to help you adjust settings.

### **Getting help from the police**

If you are being stalked, try not to communicate with the abuser.

If you go to the police for help, the police will advise that you clearly communicate once to the stalker that you don't want contact.

As well, Facebook and other on line communities have 'Help' sections that offer safety suggestions and considerations for you and for your children.

It will help police help you if you have print copies of all unwanted communication plus a record (date and time) of all unwanted contact.



## AN EMOTIONAL SAFETY PLAN

**Looking after your emotional well being during this time may be easier by surrounding yourself with those who give you comfort and support your choices.**

### **You are not to blame for the abuse**

People who are abused are not responsible for that abuse, yet sometimes people can make you feel that you are.

They may not do so directly, or you might be left with a bad feeling after talking with others. Trust your own feelings.

Some women find it helpful to think of the ways they have resisted abuse. There may be many ways, in your words or facial expressions, your thoughts, your feelings, and your actions that helped you resist the abusive behaviours.

### **Seek support that works for you**

Consider talking to and seeking support from people who honour and respect your actions, and who recognize your courage and strength.

Any relationship break-up involves loss and grief, even with an abusive partner. Often you have difficult choices and you may be afraid. Many people assume that leaving an abusive partner is straightforward and easy. But, leaving an abusive partner is often very difficult and complex. Be kind to yourself. This time may be easier for you by spending your time with those who are supportive and don't question or doubt your decisions and choices.

No one asks to be abused.

Everyone resists abuse.

The only one responsible for the abuse is the abuser.

## A CHILD'S SAFETY PLAN

**Children, like adult victims, can feel caught between protecting their feelings versus maintaining their safety.** The following ideas about safety planning may or may not fit for you and your children. Find a safe place and time to talk with your children about their feelings.

### To help children stay safe, many women encourage children to:

- Leave the room or area if children are afraid for their safety
- if a parent is getting more abusive, children can go to a room with access to an outside door or a room that has a lock on the door and a phone.
- Have children not answer a door themselves.
- Children should know how to use the telephone to contact the police. If the children are young, practicing can help.
- Help children learn their full name and address.
- Talk to the children's school and daycare about court orders and safety concerns. Memorize the phone numbers for daycare or schools your children attend.

If there's a concern that a parent could abduct the children, a conversation can cover ideas for getting help. For example, children might be taught how to make a collect call and the phone number of a trusted friend.

Some women can arrange for their children to go to a neighbour or friend's house when a partner is being abusive.

A discussion with your children can include these tips:

1. **Be aware** – *At school:* Where am I? Who can I talk to? Who can help me? Where can I go to feel safe? *Other places:* eg. To the mall: Who will I let know where I am going? Who am I going with? Where are safe places in these surroundings? Where are not so safe places that I should not go alone?
2. **Take charge** – If something scary happens, what should you do? Suggestions for taking charge: Use my words, say "No!" Act confidently. Walk away. Have a buddy.
3. **Get help** – Who can I contact for help if I feel scared? How can I reach mom or a trusted adult? Phone numbers? What is a code word that I can use to let mom or a trusted adult know I feel scared?
4. **Feel safe** – I know it is unsafe when this happens \_\_\_\_\_ I know it is unsafe when I feel \_\_\_\_\_. What can I keep with me that makes me feel safe? If I feel sad, what can I do to make myself feel better?

Reassure your children that they are not responsible and shouldn't feel badly if they aren't able to follow the Safety Plan you develop with them.

### ***Children can rehearse what they will say when calling for help:***

Phone 9-1-1.

An operator will answer:

*"Police, Fire, Ambulance."*

Your child says:

*"Police."*

Then your child says:

*"My name is \_\_\_\_\_."*

*I am \_\_\_\_ years old.*

*I need help. Send the police.*

*Someone is hurting my mom.*

*The address here is \_\_\_\_\_."*

*The phone number here is*

*\_\_\_\_\_."*

**CONTACT INFORMATION FOR SERVICES**

Emergency Services	911
Calgary Police Services	403 266-1234
Victims Assistance Unit	403 206-8398
<b>SHELTERS (CALGARY &amp; AREA)</b>	
Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter (24 hour)	403 234-7233 Toll free: 1-800 606-7233
YWCA Sheriff King Shelter (24 hour)	403 266-0707
Awo Taan Native Women's Shelter (24 hour)	403 531-1972
Wheatland Community Crisis Society (24 hour)	403 934-6634
Kerby Rotary House (for Seniors)	403 705-3250
<b>HOSPITALS/HEALTH</b>	
Foothills Hospital	403 670-1110
Peter Lougheed Hospital	403 943-4555
Rockyview Hospital	403 541-3000
Alberta Children's Hospital	403 955-7211
HealthLink (translation service available)	403 943-5465
<b>OTHER RESOURCES</b>	
Calgary Community Connections	211
Distress Centre	403 266-1605
Men's Counselling Service	403 299-9680
Women's Resource Centre	403 264-1155
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**NOTES**




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Copies of this Safety Plan can be downloaded at [www.calgarywomensshelter.com](http://www.calgarywomensshelter.com).

This Safety Planning guide was revised November 2010.

Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter was the first organization in Western Canada to support Calgaryans experiencing family violence and has changed the lives of more than 100,000 women and children, youth and men over the past 35 years with family violence and abuse crisis support, counselling and prevention services.

Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter services are free for clients; all of our services respect confidentiality and focus on individuals' strengths; all of our services are working towards a society free from family violence.

Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter is active as an advocate an educator on the issue of family violence and abuse and works collaboratively with sector partners locally and internationally.

Administration:

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[www.calgarywomensshelter.com](http://www.calgarywomensshelter.com)

