

Personalized Safety Plan

The following steps represent your plan for increasing your safety and preparing in advance for the possibility of further violence. Although you do not have control over your partner's violence, you do have a choice about how to respond to him/her and how to best get yourself and your children to safety.

Safety during a violent argument. You can't always avoid violent incidents. In order to increase safety, you may use some or all of the following strategies.

- Practice how to get out safely. What doors, windows, elevators, stairwells, or fire escapes would you use?
- Keep your purse and car keys ready and put them someplace handy in case you need to leave quickly.
- Tell a neighbor about the violence and request that they call the police if they hear suspicious noises coming from your house.
- Teach your children how to use the telephone to contact the police and the fire department.
- Choose a word or phrase as a code for your children, friends and/or neighbors so they will know to call for help if necessary.
- If you have to leave your home, where will you go? Decide this even if you don't think that there will be a next time.
- You can also teach some of these strategies to some/all of your children.
- When you expect there might be an argument, try to move to a space that is lowest risk. Try to avoid arguments in the bathroom, garage, kitchen, near weapons or in rooms without access to an outside door.
- Use your judgment and intuition. If the situation is very serious, you can give your partner what he/she wants to calm him/her down. You have to protect yourself until you are out of danger.

Safety when preparing to leave. Battered women frequently leave the residence they share with the abuser. Leaving must be done with a careful plan in order to increase safety. Abusers often strike back when they believe that their victims are leaving the relationship. Use some or all of the following strategies:

- Leave an extra set of keys with someone so that you can leave quickly.
- Keep copies of important documents or keys with someone or some where.
- Open a savings account to increase your independence.
- Think about other things you can do to increase your independence.
- The RACS shelter hotline number is 634-4911 or 1-800-303-0013. You can seek shelter there 24 hours a day by calling the hotline, whether it is a temporary or long-term need.
- You can keep change for phone calls on you at all times. Know that if you use your telephone credit card, the following month the telephone bill will tell the abuser those numbers that you called after you left. To keep your telephone communications confidential, you must either use coins or purchased phone cards, or get a friend to permit you to use their telephone credit card for a limited time after you first leave.
- Check with family or friends to see who would be able to let you stay with them or lend you some money.
- Leave extra clothes with someone.

- Sit down and review your safety plan in order to plan the safest way to leave the residence. Is there someone with whom you can review this plan?
- Rehearse your escape plan and, as appropriate, practice with your children.

Safety in your own residence. There are many things that a woman can do to increase her safety in her own residence. It may be possible to do everything at once, but safety measures can be added step by step.

- Change the locks on your doors and windows as soon as possible.
- Replace wooden doors with metal/steel doors.
- Install security systems including additional locks, window bars, poles to wedge against doors, etc.
- Purchase rope ladders to be used for escape from second story windows.
- Install an outside lighting system that lights up when a person is coming close to your house.
- Teach your children how to use the telephone to make collect calls to you and to someone else in the event that your partner takes the children.
- Tell the people who take care of your children who has permission to pick up your children and that your partner is not permitted to do so. The people to inform about pick-up permission include school, day care staff, babysitters, Sunday school teachers, and teachers.
- Inform neighbors, friends, and others that your partner no longer resides with you and they should call the police if he is observed near your residence.

Safety with an Order of Protection. One can never be sure which violent partner will obey and which will violate protection orders. Recognize that you may need to ask the police and the court to enforce your protection order. However, this is the first legal step toward independence and safety for you and your children.

- Always keep your protection order on or near your person.
- Give your protection order to police departments in the communities where you usually visit family or friends.
- Inform your employer, your minister, and your closest friend that you have an order of protection in effect.
- If your partner destroys your protection order, you can get another copy you're your county circuit clerk's office in the courthouse, or you can request one from the victim advocate.
- If your partner violates the protection order, you can call the police and report a violation, contact your attorney, call your advocate, and/or advise the court of the violation. The best and safest decision is to contact the police.

Safety on the job and in public. Each battered woman must decide if and when she will tell others that her partner has battered her and that she may be at continued risk. Friends, family and co-workers can help to protect women in the following ways. Each woman should consider carefully which people to invite to help secure her safety.

- Inform your boss, the security supervisor, and your supervisor at work of your situation.
- Ask to have your calls screened at work.
- Never leave work alone. Have security or a co-worker leave with you.
- Drive to the police station if problems occur when driving home.
- Use public transportation.

- Go to different grocery stores, banks, shopping malls, etc., to conduct your business and shop at hours that are different than those you used when residing with the abusive partner.

Safety and your emotional health. The experience of being battered and verbally degraded by a partner is usually exhausting and emotionally draining. The process of building a new life takes courage and incredible energy. In order to stay mentally focused and healthy you can:

- Be prepared. There may be a time when you feel down and ready to return to a potentially abusive situation. Take time to think about if that is really what you want, call a friend or the hotline to talk about it, or decide if that is really going to make you feel better. Remember that you don't need someone else to take care of you. You are strong and capable of taking care of yourself.
- Decide how you are going to react if you have to communicate with your partner in person or by telephone. Make sure you are in a safe public place, refuse to argue with him/her, or hang up if he/she gets abusive.
- Use "I can..." statements with yourself and be assertive with others.
- Think of a statement you can tell yourself whenever you feel others are trying to control or abuse you.
- Read something to help you feel stronger.
- Think about who you can call as resources to be of support of you.
- Think about other things you can do to help yourself feel stronger.
- You can attend counseling and support groups at the Rape and Abuse Crisis Service to gain support and strengthen your relationship with other people. Are there other groups or people that you know of to help you?
- Learn to recognize the true source of your feelings and the behaviors characterized by an abuser. Counseling can help with this.

Items to take when leaving. When women leave partners, it is important to take certain items with them. Beyond this, women sometimes give an extra copy of papers and an extra set of clothing to a friend just in case they have to leave quickly. Items with asterisks (*) are the most important to take. If there is time, the other items might be taken, or stored outside the home. These items might be placed in one location, so that if you have to leave in a hurry, you can grab them quickly.

When you leave, you should have:

*Identification card for yourself

*Your birth certificate

*School and vaccination records

*Checkbook, ATM cards

*Keys-house/car/office

*Medication

Passport, Divorce papers

Lease/rental agreement,

House deed, mortgage payment book

Bank books, insurance papers

Address book

Children's favorite toy or blanket

*Children's birth certificate

*Social security cards

*Money

*Credit cards

*Driver's license and registration

Welfare identification/work permits

Medical records

Small sellable objects

Pictures, jewelry

Items of special sentimental value

Telephone numbers you need to know if you are in Cole County:

Police 911 (if emergency) or 634-6400 (non-emergency)

Jefferson City Rape and Abuse Crisis Service 634-4911 or 1-800-303-0013

Cole County Prosecuting Attorney's Office 634-9180

Work number

Supervisor's home number

School number

Minister or clergy

Other

Keep this information in a safe place and out of the reach of your potential attacker. If you need help in filling out this plan, you may ask the victim advocate with the prosecuting attorney's office or a close and trusted friend.