



Three  
Oaks

SHELTER • COMMUNITY  
OUTREACH

# SAFETY PLANNING

## What is a safety plan?

If you are in an abusive relationships, the development of a safety plan allows one to identify steps they can take to increase the safety of themselves [and their children] and become prepared for the potential for further violence.

Your safety plan will include information and actions specific to you to increase your safety in the community, at home and when preparing to leave.

**Remember, that the safety of you [and your children] is what matters the most.**

## Why create a safety plan?

If you are trying to leave an abusive relationship, it is important to plan for safety. This can help you better identify your options. When leaving an abusive relationship, a safety plan is even more important due to the risk of escalated or lethal violence. We recommend that your safety plan is reviewed often to increase your familiarity. This can support you in feeling more comfortable pursuing the steps in your safety plan. It is important to revise your safety plan if your situation changes or the violence you are experiencing increases.

Planning for safety is a way to assist you in reclaiming both your power and your life. You [and your children] deserve to live a life free from violence.

## When creating your safety plan, remember:

- You are not responsible for the abuse and/or violence your [ex] partner has inflicted upon you.
- You are not to blame for the abuse that your children have been exposed to.
- You cannot control your [ex] partner's abusive and/or violent acts, but it is possible to increase the safety of you [and your children].

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## Emotional Safety Plan

Trying to survive in or escape an abusive relationship can be emotionally, physically, spiritually and mentally draining. It is crucial to take care of yourself, even during the most difficult times.

After escaping an abusive relationship, it is important to discover coping mechanisms that support you in your healing journey.

- Get connected to local resources. Three Oaks offers various services that support women and their children experiencing domestic violence. Three Oaks is here to support you in navigating your experience safely.
- Join women's groups. This can reduce feelings of isolation and allow a sense of community.
- Take time for yourself. This may be activities you enjoy such as movies, reading, meditation, listening to music, going for a walk, etc.
- Allow yourself to feel your emotions. You may feel angry, depressed, overwhelmed and they are all completely normal. Give yourself permission to process these emotions. This could be through journaling, speaking openly about these feelings to a counsellor or through meditation.

**As a woman who has or is experiencing domestic violence, there are many different aspects to your experience.**

You may still be experiencing abuse, even if you have escaped the relationship. This could mean that you are still experiencing the same fear for you and your children's safety while trying to survive the impacts of trauma and abuse you endured.

After leaving, there are many barriers that come after leaving an abusive relationship, including lack of financial support, issues securing housing and employment maintenance difficulties. With these practical problems, you may also experience feelings of hopelessness and isolation. This is why the creation of a safety plan can support you in defining options that work best for you [and your children.]

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## What to take with you when you leave:

- Identification: Drivers License, SIN number, status card, citizenship papers, immigration papers passport, birth certificates, permanent resident or citizenship cards
- Vehicle registration and Insurance
- Prescription medication
- Medical records
- Social Assistance documentation
- Legal documents: marriage certificate, divorce papers, restraining order documents, court orders, etc.
- Lease/rental agreement, house deed, mortgage payment book
- Bank books, cheque book, bank statements
- School records
- Credit cards, bank cards
- Picture of spouse/partner

### **Memorize at least one phone number that can be utilized in case of emergency.**

This may be a friend or family's phone number. Ensure that you speak about your safety concerns and a plan to whichever friend or family member you are calling. Be sure that you have created a plan with them. This plan might be having your friend come to your home or calling the police on your behalf.

### **Teach your children how to use a phone to contact 911.**

Be careful with placing such large responsibility on children.

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## Safety in the Home

It is not always possible to escape or avoid a violent incident, which is why it is crucial to prepare strategies and review tips that can support you in increasing the safety of you [and your children]. There are various signs that may signify further escalation. These signs may be emotional outbursts, irritability, impatience, shortness of temper. Your own feelings of increased fear or like you are walking on eggshells could also indicate violence will soon escalate. Remember, you are not responsible or in control of your [ex] partner's behaviour or abusive/violent actions.

- **Review your emergency escape plan.** If you have children, review the plan with them.
- **Trust yourself.** Use your judgment to determine the safety risks when your partner begins to escalate. When you notice signs of escalation, you may send your children to a friend or family's home.
- **Verbal self-defense.** If it's possible, you may consider *pretending* to agree with your partner in order for them to calm down. This may allow you time to escape.
- **Call 911.** Call the police as soon as it safe to do so.
- **Plan your emergency exits.** Teach these exits to your children.
- **Be aware of where the weapons in the home and where your emergency exits are.** If an argument seems unavoidable, try to have it in a location that has access to exits. Avoid being in the bathroom, kitchen or near known weapons.
- **Have a bag packed and ready.** Keep it in a secret, but accessible location.
- **Identify a neighbor that you can tell about the violence.** Ask them to call the police if they hear a disturbance coming from your home.
- **Create a code word.** Use this with family, friends or your children to signal that you need the police.

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## Safety When Preparing to Leave

There are various things you can put into place to prepare to leave an abusive relationship. These can be altered to be unique to your situation. By implementing these in advance, you [and your children] can be prepared to escape quickly.

- **Utilize the checklist.** Follow the *What to Take with You When You Leave* checklist to ensure all important items are brought with you.
- **Emergency cash.** Start putting aside money for when you leave the abusive relationship. Keep this money in cash format and hidden away.
- **Take your children with you.** Keep in mind that if you cannot take your children with you, the police cannot assist you in removing them from the other parent without a court order.
- **Make arrangements for your children to stay with family in advance.** Have your children stay with someone you trust when you are preparing to leave.
- **Keep significant items to your children near by.** If you have to leave quickly with your children, it is important to have items that comfort them.
- **Pack an emergency bag.** If an argument seems unavoidable, try to have it in a location that has access to exits. Avoid being in the bathroom, kitchen or near known weapons.
- **Open a bank account in your own name.** This will help you to increase your independence.
- **Start moving important items to a friend or family's house.** Slowly move items to the home of someone you trust so that your partner does not notice.
- **Connect with a counsellor or contact the local women's shelter crisis line to review your safety plan.**
- **Memorize a local shelter number.** If you do not have a place to stay after leaving, contact your local women's shelter.

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## Safety in the Community

There are things you may choose to implement to increase you [and your children's] safety. Here are some suggestions of how to increase your safety while in the community.

- **At work.** Decide who you will inform of your situation at your place of work. This may include management and security if possible. Provide a photo of your abuser if you can. You may also choose to share with a colleague instead. This can be dependent on your comfortability and who you trust at your workplace.
- **Safety plan when leaving work.** Arrange with security or a colleague to escort you to your vehicle, bus, taxi, etc. Tell a friend you are leaving work and that you will text them in 'xyz' time. Tell the friend to contact the police if they do not hear from you in 'xyz' time.
- **If you are being followed:** Drive to a place where there are people to support you, such as a police station.
- **Use different grocery stores, shopping malls, etc.** Try to go into the community during hours that your ex partner would be at work.
- **Distribute important documents.** Make sure school and day care have a copy of all court orders, including restraining orders, custody and access orders, as well as a picture of the abusive partner.
- **Instruct those who know of your whereabouts to tell your abusive partner, if asked, that they do not know where you are or how to contact you.**
- **Check your vehicle for a tracking device.** Check your car for a Global Positioning System (GPS) which your abuser may have installed in or under your car to track your movements.
- **Connect with a counsellor or contact the local women's shelter crisis line to review your safety plan.**
- **Memorize a local shelter number.** If you do not have a place to stay after leaving, contact your local women's shelter.

**24/7 Crisis Line: 613-966-3074 or toll free 1-800-267-0533**