

Guide to Risk Assessment and Safety Planning for Victims of Spousal Assault

Guide to Risk Assessment and Safety Planning for Victims of Spousal Assault

Note: Most victims of spousal assault are women. In this guide the terms *victim of spousal assault* and *battered woman* will be used interchangeably.

The information contained in this Guide is to help Social Workers support victims of spousal assault. Nevertheless, it can be used by any frontline worker helping battered women. Health and Social Services Boards may provide financial assistance to victims of spousal assault to travel with their dependants to the nearest place of safety. The Risk Assessment Guide (Appendix 1) and the Safety Planning Guide (Appendix 2) are intended to help Social Workers decide when a victim needs to be moved, to understand the risk she may face if she stays in her community, and to plan for her ongoing safety. They can also help with case planning and with after care when she returns from her stay at a shelter.

Supporting victims of spousal assault is difficult and complex work. An important point to keep in mind when helping battered women is that they find it very difficult to share the story of their abuse. We should never assume that we know the full extent of the violence that has been committed against them. Victims may never be able to speak freely. Shelter Workers report that the full scope of the violence is usually revealed over a period of time that involves many meetings, the development of a relationship of trust, and the space for the victim to assess for herself the full impact and extent of the violence. Many women also minimize their experience when first meeting with a Social Worker or other support worker and she may not feel that safety planning is necessary. Please be aware of this in your work with victims of spousal assault.

You will note that Sections 1 and 2 of the Risk Assessment Guide document the abuse that has already occurred. Section 3 identifies information to consider when assessing imminent risk of physical danger and asks the victim to judge the batterer's motivation, state of mind, etc. Section 4 assesses the client's present situation and identifies additional factors that must be considered in order to prepare a safety plan with the client. Appendix 2 provides information on types of abuse, safety planning, along with a safety planning tool for the client to keep.

Generally, risk increases with the number of items coded to the left-hand column in any part of the Risk Assessment Guide. Nevertheless, the Guide is not intended as a means of scoring the level of risk a victim is facing, rather its function is to cue Social Workers of issues to consider when supporting victims of spousal assault. In some cases, the presence of a single item on the checklist could indicate imminent risk of physical harm to the client, for example, threats of homicide to the client. **Ultimately, Social Workers must use their professional judgement to decide under what circumstances a victim will be moved.**

The Guide should not be used in isolation or as the only basis on which to determine whether transportation out of the community is necessary. It is important to consult with other frontline workers in the community such as RCMP or Shelter/Family Violence Workers to get a fuller picture of the victim's situation. Without this consultation, documentation on the Risk Assessment guide is limited to what the victim has been willing or able to disclose. Finally, you may try to arrange for a victim to go to a shelter and find that it is full. Please consider other options such as a different shelter or a hotel in a shelter community where the victim can still access counselling even though she cannot stay in the shelter.

When you read the Risk Assessment guide, you will notice that most of the questions are closed (i.e. they simply require yes or no answers). The questions are worded this way to make it easier to record the information. Please probe further to get the meaning that the victim assigns to her answers. She is not simply a source of data, she is a key player in interpreting the meaning of the abuser's actions.

Social Workers should assess the risk facing a battered woman at intake and on a continuing basis since batterers can have periods when they are extremely dangerous. Battered women need to be encouraged to assess the risk they face frequently and to develop their safety plan so they can avoid or react effectively to a partner's assault. This should be encouraged even if she thinks she is not at risk for this right now.

Some issues important to risk assessment in cases of spousal assault follow.

Threats of homicide or suicide. Some batterers threaten to kill themselves, their partners, their children or relatives. They must be considered extremely dangerous. A batterer who is suicidal is often in a desperate crisis situation. This is generally considered a risk factor for further violence. "A man who has threatened to kill his partner or himself when she terminates the relationship or leaves for safe shelter all too often attempts to follow through on his threats." (Hart, 1988, p. 79)

Possession or past use of a weapon. Some batterers own weapons and have used them or have threatened to use them in assaults on battered women. Access to those weapons increases a batterer's potential for lethal assault.

"Ownership" of the victim. Some batterers believe they are absolutely entitled to their female partner, her services, her obedience and her loyalty, no matter what. These batterers are likely to be life-endangering.

Recent relationship problems/separation violence. Some battered women may attempt to leave their abusive partners. If a batterer cannot see a life without his partner and he believes that he is about to lose or has already lost her, he may choose to kill her. This may also happen if the separation puts him in great despair or rage.

Depression. If a batterer has been extremely depressed and sees little hope for the future, he may choose homicide and/or suicide. Depression in adults can include some or all of these signs: weight change, change in eating and sleeping habits, less interest in looking good, no energy, worrying about physical problems all the time, less interest in sex, no interest in usual activities, a very "down" mood, being tense and anxious, staying away from friends and family, feeling worthless and like a "failure", loss of memory and concentration, and looking sad, lost, empty, or flat.

Repeated outreach to law enforcement. Partner or spousal homicide almost always occurs in relationships that have a history of violence. Generally, if a woman has had to call the RCMP during past assaults the batterer is at increased risk for behaving in a life-threatening way.

Escalation of batterer risk. Batterers will often carry out their violence in a way that allows them to avoid the legal and social consequences of their actions. When a batterer begins to act without regard to these consequences, chances of lethal assault increase significantly.

Past assault of family members or acquaintances. People with a history of violence are much more likely to be violent in the future. Wife assaulters who have a history of physical or sexual violence against family members or acquaintances are likely to act in the same way again.

Past violation of conditional release or no contact orders. Batterers who have violated release and/or supervision conditions are more likely to be violent again in the future.

Batterer was a victim of and/or witness to family violence as a child or adolescent. Some men have been victims of or have witnessed family violence as children or adolescents. These men are at an increased risk for wife assault as adults and for repeatedly violent wife assaults.

Recent substance abuse/dependence. Batterers are more likely than non-batterers to misuse substances. Recent substance abuse puts a batterer at greater risk for being violent.

Physical assault in current or past intimate relationships. Most men who have assaulted in intimate relationships in the past are at risk for future violence. This seems to hold true regardless of whether the batterer is arrested and/or receives treatment for his problem.

Past sexual assault/sexual jealousy. The most severe patterns of battering involve sexual assault and extreme sexual jealousy. Men who have behaved this way or have these feelings are at more risk for repeating their violence.

Recent escalation in frequency or severity of assault. A batterer who has recently increased the frequency or severity of assault is at imminent risk for being violent.

Animal/property abuse or threats to harm pets and personal property. A batterer who harms animals or damages personal property is also likely to be physically violent towards his partner.¹

¹The information above is from Kropp, P.R., Hart, S.D., Webster, C.D. & Eaves, D. (1995). Manual for the spousal assault risk assessment guide (2nd ed), Vancouver, BC: The British Columbia Institute on Family Violence; Hart, B.J. (Ed.) (1992). Accountability: Program standards for batterer intervention services, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence; and Hart, B.J. (1989). Safety for women: Monitoring batterers' programs, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

APPENDIX 1

Risk Assessment for Victims of Spousal Assault

1. Severity of Present Abuse

- a) Was there use of, or threat to use, a weapon?
Yes No Unknown
- b) Was a weapon available? (If yes, what weapon)
Yes No Unknown If yes specify: _____
- c) Was a mood altering drug (i.e. alcohol, etc.) consumed by the batterer before the abuse?
Yes No Unknown
- d) Did the batterer make jealous comments before the battering incident?
Yes No Unknown
- e) Did the client require medical treatment?
Yes No Unknown
- f) Was police intervention necessary?
Yes No Unknown
- g) Is the abuser in the home now?
Yes No Unknown
- h) Is the client fully aware of the options available to her through the Justice System and Social Services?
Yes No Unknown

2. History of Abuse

- a) How long has abuse been present in the relationship?
greater than 2 years 0-2 years Unknown
- b) How frequently has the abuse occurred?
1/month greaterthan 1/month Unknown
- c) Has the client received medical treatment for injuries caused by the abuser in the past?
Yes No Unknown

- d) Has police intervention ever been required?
Yes No Unknown
- e) Has the abuser ever harmed pets or damaged personal property?
Yes No Unknown

3. **Presence of Indicators of Imminent Risk of Physical Harm**

- a) Has the batterer made threats of homicide or suicide to the client?
Yes No Unknown
- b) Does he currently possess a weapon or has he used one in the past to commit an assault?
Yes No Unknown
- c) Does he act like he "owns" the client? (Some batterers believe they are absolutely entitled to their female partner, her services, her obedience and her loyalty no matter what)
Yes No Unknown
- d) Has the couple recently experienced serious relationship problems? (Examples of serious relationship problems are: excessive arguing, lack of respect for each other's feelings etc.)
Yes No Unknown
- e) Does the batterer seem depressed?
Yes No Unknown
- f) Has the client made repeated calls to law enforcement regarding the batterer?
Yes No Unknown
- g) Is the batterer taking increasing risks in his abusive behaviour towards the client? (Batterers will often carry out their violence in a way that allows them to avoid the legal and social consequences of their actions. When a batterer begins to act without regard to these consequences, chances of lethal assault increase significantly)
Yes No Unknown
- h) Has the batterer physically assaulted family members (other than client) or acquaintances in the past?
Yes No Unknown

- i) Has he ever committed violations of conditional release from custody or no contact orders?
Yes No Unknown
- j) Was the batterer a victim of or a witness to family violence as a child or adolescent?
Yes No Unknown
- k) Has the batterer recently abused substances or is he dependent on them? If yes, what substances?
Yes No Unknown Specify substances: _____
- l) Has the batterer committed a physical assault in his current or past intimate relationships?
Yes No Unknown
- m) Has the batterer committed past sexual assaults or expressed sexual jealousy towards the client?
Yes No Unknown
- n) Has there been a recent escalation in frequency or severity of assault?
Yes No Unknown
- o) Has the batterer been prescribed drugs for depression, schizophrenia or some other mental illness?
Yes No Unknown
- p) If the batterer has been prescribed drugs for depression, schizophrenia or some other mental illness, is he presently taking the prescribed drugs?
Yes No Unknown
- q) Does he drink alcohol when he is taking the above medication? (Does the batterer mix alcohol with pills)
Yes No Unknown

4. **The Client**

- a) How is the client feeling right now? (in her words)

- b) Does the client want to leave the community?
Yes No
- c) Why does she want to leave the community? (in her words)
- d) What are her options if she stays in the community?
- e) Is there a friend or relative who is aware of the abuse and willing to help the client?
No Yes Unknown
- e) Has the batterer ever threatened the client's friend or relative?
Yes No Unknown
- f) Have you helped the client to prepare a safety plan? (see Appendix 2) Once completed, please attach a copy of the safety plan to this assessment.
No Yes
- g) Have you consulted with the RCMP, Family Violence Workers, and nurses in your community to get their input on the client's situation?
No Yes

Assessment

Degree of Risk

Interpretation of Risk

- | | | |
|----|--------|---|
| 1. | LOW | The client is at minimum risk for further abuse should she return to the abuser. |
| 2. | MEDIUM | The client is at medium risk for further abuse should she return to the abuser. |
| 3. | HIGH | The client is at high risk for further abuse or potential homicide should she return to the abuser. |

Client advised of degree of risk: Yes No

Client's reaction to above (use quotes):

Signature of Interviewer

Signature of Client

Date:

Date:

APPENDIX 2

Safety Planning

The Cycle of Violence:

In an abusive relationship there is a cycle of violence that has three distinct phases. During the first phase, tension, frustration and anger on the part of the batterer build up gradually over time. The tension-building phase leads to an explosion of violence which may last a short or long time. The explosion is followed by the honeymoon phase, during which the batterer may apologize and try to make up. It is in the tension-building phase that the safety plan should be put into effect.

Recognizing the Abuse:

Recognizing the different types of abuse helps you see when tension is building in your relationship. You may be experiencing one, all or a combination of the four kinds of abuse listed below:

A. Emotional abuse: He belittles you; calls you names; constantly criticizes you; blames you for his behaviour and for anything else that happens; controls where you go, who you see, how you spend your time; controls the money; is terribly jealous; threatens suicide if you leave; threatens physical abuse; threatens to take the kids from you; tells you that you're crazy.

B. Physical abuse: He slaps, pushes, punches, kicks, spits on you; pulls your hair; burns you with cigarettes; restrains you or physically prevents you from leaving; chokes you; throws things at you; threatens you with weapons; hits you with objects; deprives you of sleep or food; forces you to eat or drink when you don't want to; forces you to take drugs or alcohol against your wishes.

C. Sexual abuse: He forces you (by any means -- threats, physical force or use of weapons) to have intercourse when you don't want to, or to perform any sexual act you don't want to; he constantly grabs you in ways, places or at times that you don't like; he doesn't believe you or won't listen to you when you say no to sex; he forces you to wear clothes or be nude when you don't want to; he uses objects to perform sexual acts with you when you don't like it; he forces you to have sex with someone else, or to watch him have sex with someone else, or to have sex with him with others watching; he accuses you of fooling around with other men or women.

D. Property abuse: He breaks or threatens to break your possessions; he kicks, punches or uses objects to make holes in walls or force your doors open; he smashes dishes and other breakables when he is angry; he hurts, maims or kills (or threatens to kill) your pets; he burns, throws out or gives away your possessions without your

permission; he steals your pills, money or possessions; he forces you into illegal transactions.

Before an Attack - the Tension Building Phase:

1. Let someone know what is going on. You will gain emotional support. Telling someone about what you are experiencing is the first step in escaping the violence. As well, a friend or a neighbour may be able to call the police when you are unable to, or provide you with shelter or transportation.
2. If you or your partner have a car, try to get an extra set of car keys made. Hide the keys outside the house where you can grab them quickly.
3. Try to open a separate bank account in your name and transfer money (even very small amounts) into it whenever you can. Hide some get-away money in a place your partner is not likely to find it -- such as in a tampon box, or wrapped in tinfoil in the freezer.
4. Hide or leave a package of necessary items with a trusted friend. These items may include: extra car keys, money, list of phone numbers (shelter, social services, counsellor, lawyer, police, friend and/or relative), medication, important legal papers, identification cards, diapers, clothes, etc.
5. If your children are old enough, tell them what's going on and include them in your plan. Set up a code word or signal so that when they hear it, they will get out of the house themselves or call the police. Have emergency phone numbers (police, ambulance, taxi, neighbour, HELPLINE for kids) near the phone where the children can find them quickly.
6. Think of opportunities for leaving, such as when:
 - he takes a shower;
 - he leaves the house for any reason (and you know you have enough time to get away to safety);
 - he passes out or is asleep;
 - he's at work or out of town;
 - you are going to pick up the kids from school or a friend's place.

7. Consider some excuses for getting out of the house:

- you say you need to go to the store, and are taking the kids with you (so that he can have some peace and quiet; so they can run off some energy; or any other excuse that might work);
- you say you have an appointment at the health centre and will take the kids along to have them checked at the same time;
- you are going out to get cigarettes;
- you are taking the kids for a walk;
- if possible, try to arrange a code or signal with a friend (where you phone her and give her the code word and she phones you back and invites you out; or she calls the police).

The purpose of this plan is to help you and your children stay safe. Decide what plan will work best for you.

During an Attack:

1. If you sense an attack coming, get closer to the door to avoid being cornered and to help you get out of the house.
2. During an attack, there is probably nothing you can say or do to make him stop. He is not in a rational state of mind so you cannot reason with him.
3. Try not to panic or lose your temper. These are understandable reactions, but you will need to be clear-headed to think about what to do. Getting angry and insulting him may make him angrier. This will make things worse for you. Save your anger for when you are safe from physical attack.
4. If you need to:
 - defend and protect yourself - especially head and stomach;
 - call for help - scream or if you can get away, run to the nearest person or home; say you are being hurt and that you need help;
 - call the police - or have someone else do it - the police have a responsibility to protect you;
 - get away - if it is unsafe to stay at home, call a neighbour, friend or cab;
 - find shelter and take the children with you.

After an Attack:

It is important to get medical help immediately for three reasons:

1. You may have suffered physical injuries you are not aware of, such as internal bleeding or a concussion.
2. In addition to physical injuries, assaults can lead to severe emotional damage. It is best to get help right away and ask for counselling to decrease the emotional damage.
3. By being seen in a health centre or hospital emergency room, you are establishing a permanent medical record of the assault, which can provide valuable evidence should you decide to take further legal action.

Save any torn or bloody clothing. Get someone to take pictures (in colour) of your injuries if you can. These can serve as important evidence in convincing people your situation is serious.

A friend or relative who can go with you to the hospital can provide moral support and often can help you to settle yourself and get your story straight.

Try to line up possible witnesses of the attack to confirm your story.

Valuable Information about Leaving the House

1. If you leave your children at home, you may have problems later in getting legal custody of them should your partner decide to challenge your right to custody. However, a court will take into account the fact that you were escaping a violent situation. The sooner you return to get your children, the better your case will be.
2. Some women have found that it is best to try to calm their partners down and then leave the next day when he's gone. Only you can be the judge of what will be most effective in your situation and you should follow your instincts.
3. A common threat used to intimidate women who leave is that they will be prosecuted for desertion. To prove this in court your partner must show that you left without cause. If you or your children are being threatened or beaten, you have sufficient legal cause to leave without adverse consequences.
4. A practical problem in leaving is that your partner may make it difficult for you to get any property you may have left behind. Even if you leave with nothing but the shirt on your back, you can request police help to return for your personal belongings (or your children, for that matter).

5. If at all possible, try to take important family documents with you, such as your own and your children's birth certificates, your marriage certificate (if you're married), your lease or deed to the house, your husband's most recent pay stub or your previous tax returns, your immigration papers (if any) and bankbooks. You may need these documents in future legal proceedings to obtain welfare, unemployment or other assistance, an independent visa or citizenship status, etc.

Your personal safety and the welfare of your children are the most important things!!!! You can deal with property and custody issues after you leave.

CREATING A SAFETY PLAN²

Any social worker or family violence worker who knows about the violence that a woman is facing can help to increase her safety. This section focuses on making a “take home” safety plan. But, you can also help her gain an understanding of her situation, as well as get important safety resources. Remember:

NEVER MINIMIZE A WOMAN’S SAFETY SITUATION

BE AWARE OF RESOURCES FOR BATTERED WOMEN
IN YOUR OWN COMMUNITY

MAKE CONTACT AND DEVELOP COOPERATIVE
RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER WOMEN’S ADVOCATES
IN YOUR COMMUNITY

RESPECT A WOMAN’S CHOICES - BY BEING BATTERED
SHE HAS LOST POWER AND CONTROL, YOU CAN HELP
HER REGAIN HER OWN “EMPOWERMENT” BY
RESPECTING HER JUDGMENT

Attached is a “hand-out” section for women to take away with them in order to create their own personalized safety plan. It should be kept in a safe place. She may choose to complete it with her advocate/counselor, her support network (friends or family), or by herself. It is important to emphasize that she does not have control over her partner’s violence. She does, however, have choices about how to respond and how she may get herself and her children to safety.

²London Battered Women’s Advocacy Centre, 1994

Date: _____
Review Dates: _____

PERSONALIZED SAFETY PLAN

The following steps are my plan for increasing my safety and preparing for possible further violence. Although I do not have control over my (ex)partner's violence, I do have a choice about how I respond and how to get myself and my children to safety.

STEP 1: SAFETY DURING A VIOLENT INCIDENT. It is always possible to avoid violent incidents. In order to increase safety, battered women may use a variety of strategies.

I can use some or all of the following strategies:

If I decide to leave, I will _____
_____. (Practice how to get out safely. What doors, windows, elevators, stairwells or fire escapes would you use?)

I can keep my purse/wallet and care keys ready and put them (place) in order to leave more quickly.

I can tell _____ about the violence and ask that they call the police if they hear suspicious noises coming from my home.

I can also tell _____ about the violence and ask that they call the police if they hear suspicious noises coming from my home.

I can teach my children how to use the telephone to contact the police and fire department.

I will use _____ as my code word with my children or my friends so they can call for help.

If I have to leave my home, I will go to _____, (Decide this even if you don't think there will be a next time.)

If I cannot go to the place above, then I can go to
or _____.

When I expect we are going to have an argument, I will try to move to a space that is lowest risk, such as _____. (Try to avoid arguments in the bathroom, by the telephone, garage, kitchens, near weapons or in rooms without access to an outside door.)

I will use my judgment, experience and intuition. If the situation is very serious, I can give my partner whatever is necessary to maintain my own and my children's safety. I have to protect myself until I/we are out of danger.

STEP 2: SAFETY WHEN PREPARING TO LEAVE. Battered women frequently leave the residence they share with the battering partner. Leaving must be done strategically in order to increase safety. Batterers often strike back when they believe that a battered woman is leaving a relationship.

I can use some or all of the following safety strategies:

I will leave money and an extra set of keys with
so I can leave quickly.

I will keep copies of important documents or keys at
.

I will open a savings account by _____, to increase my independence.

I can get legal advice from a lawyer who understands woman abuse.

Other things I can do to increase my independence are:

The local shelter number is _____. I can seek shelter and support by calling this help line.

I can keep change for phone calls on me at all times. I understand that if I use my telephone credit card, the following month the telephone bill could tell my batterer those numbers that I called after I left. To keep my telephone communications confidential, I must either use coins or I might get a friend to let me use her telephone credit card for a while when I first leave.

I will check with _____ and _____ to see who would be able to let me stay with them or lend me some money.

I can leave extra clothes with _____.

I will sit down and review my safety plan every _____ in order to plan the safest way to leave the residence. _____ (women's advocate or friend) has agreed to help me review this plan.

I will rehearse my escape plan and, as appropriate, practice it with my children.

STEP 3: SAFETY IN MY OWN HOME. There are many things that a woman can do to increase her safety in her own residence. It may not be possible to do everything at once, but safety measures can be added step by step.

Safety measures I can use include:

I can change the locks on my doors and windows as soon as possible.

I can replace wooden doors with steel/metal doors.

I can install security systems including additional locks, window bars, poles to wedge against doors, an electronic alarm system, etc.

I can purchase rope ladders to be used for escape from second floor windows.

I can install smoke detectors and purchase fire extinguishers for each floor in my house/apartment.

I will teach my children how to use the telephone to make a collect call to me and to (friend/helper/other) in the event that my (ex)partner abducts them.

I can install the “call blocking” option on my telephone. This will allow me to make telephone calls, even to the batterer, without my number being identified on another telephone’s display mechanism.

I will tell all the people who provide child care for my children about who has permission to pick up my children and who does not. The people I will inform about pick-up permission include:

_____ (school),
_____ (day care staff),
_____ (babysitter),
_____ (Sunday school teacher),
_____ (teacher),
_____ and
_____ (others).

I can tell _____ (neighbour),
(clergy), and _____ (friend) that I am separated and they should call the police if my (ex)partner is seen near my residence.

STEP 4: SAFETY WITH A PROTECTION ORDER. Protection orders are legal restrictions on movement and actions that come in different forms: peace bonds, restraining orders, bail conditions, parole conditions, child custody/access orders, etc. Many batterers do obey protection orders, but one can never be sure which violent partner will obey and which will

violate probation orders. It is often necessary to ask the police and the courts to enforce a protection order.

The following are some steps that I can take to help the enforcement of my protection order.

I will keep my protection order document(s) (original if possible) in _____ (location). (Always keep it on or near your person. If you change purses, that's the first thing that you should check).

I will inform my employer, my clergy support, my friend and _____ that I have a protection order in effect.

If my partner destroys my protection order, I can get another copy from the courthouse, my lawyer, or _____.

If my (ex)partner violates the protection order, I can call the police and report the violation, contact my (ex)partner's parole officer, contact my lawyer and/or my advocate, and/or advise the court of the violation. (Report every violation of the order.)

If the police do not help, I can contact my support worker, my (ex)partner's parole officer, or my lawyer as well as filing a complaint with the RCMP.

I can also file a private criminal complaint with the Justice of the Peace in the jurisdiction where the violation occurred. I can charge the batterer with a violation of the protection order and all the crimes committed in violation of that order. I can call the local shelter to help me with this.

STEP 5: 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 ongoing risk. Friends, family and co-workers can help to protect women. Each woman should think carefully about who to ask to help her.

I might do any or all of the following:

I can inform my boss, the security supervisor and at work of my situation.

I can ask _____ to help screen my calls at work.

When leaving work, I can

.

When going home if problems occur, I can

.

If I use the bus/taxi, I can

.

I can use different grocery stores/shopping malls and shop at different times than I did before to reduce the risk of contact with my (ex)partner.

I can also

.

STEP 6: SAFETY AND DRUG OR ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION. Most people in North America drink alcohol. Many take mood-altering drugs. Much of this consumption is legal and some is not. The legal consequences of using illegal drugs can be very hard on a battered woman, may hurt her relationship with her children and put her at a disadvantage in other legal actions with her abusive partner. Therefore, women should think carefully about the potential cost of using illegal drugs. But beyond this, the use of any alcohol or other drugs can reduce a woman's awareness and ability to act quickly to protect herself from her abusive partner. Furthermore, the use of alcohol or other drugs by the batterer may be used as an excuse for violence. A woman needs to make specific safety plans for when she drinks or takes drugs.

If drug or alcohol consumption has occurred in my relationship with the abusive partner, I can increase my safety by some or all of the following:

If I am going to use alcohol or drugs, I can do it in a safe place and with people who understand the risk of violence and care about my safety.

I can also _____.

If my partner is consuming, I can

.

To safeguard my children, I might _____ and

.

STEP 7: SAFETY AND MY EMOTIONAL HEALTH. The experience of being battered and verbally degraded by partners is usually exhausting and emotionally draining. The process of building a new life requires much courage and incredible energy.

To conserve my emotional energy and resources and to avoid hard emotional times, I can do some of the following:

1. If I feel down and ready to return to a potentially abusive situation, I can
.
2. When I have to talk with my partner in person or by telephone, I can
.
3. I can try to use “I can...” statements with myself and to be assertive with others.
4. I can tell myself - “ _____ ” - whenever I feel others are trying to control or abuse me.
5. I can call _____ , _____ , and _____ as other resources to support me.
6. I can find out about and attend workshops and support groups in the community by calling the local shelter for information.

STEP 8. ITEMS TO TAKE WHEN LEAVING. When women leave abusive partners, it is important to take certain items with them. Beyond this, women can sometimes give extra copies of papers and an extra set of clothing to a friend just in case they have to leave quickly.

Items with asterisks on the following list are the most important to take. If there is time, the other items might be taken, or stored outside the home. Keeping them all together in one location makes it easier if a woman needs to leave in a hurry.

When I leave, I should take:

- ✓ Identification for myself
 - ✓ Protection Order papers/documents
 - ✓ Social insurance cards
 - ✓ School and vaccination records
 - ✓ Checkbook, bankcards
 - ✓ Keys - house/car/office
 - ✓ Medications
 - ✓ Divorce/separation papers
 - ✓ Lease/rental agreement, deed, mortgage
 - ✓ Insurance papers
 - ✓ Address book
 - ✓ Jewelry
 - ✓ Items of special sentimental value
- Children's birth certificates
 - My birth certificate
 - Immigration papers
 - Money
 - Credit cards
 - Driver's license and ownership
 - Passport
 - Medical records - for all family members
 - Bank books
 - Small saleable objects
 - Pictures/photos
 - Children's favorite toys and/or blankets

Telephone numbers I need to know:

RCMP _____

Battered Women's Program _____

Wife Assault Help line (24 hours) _____

Lawyer _____

Work number _____

Supervisor's home number _____

Minister/Rabbi/Priest/Elder _____

Other: _____
