

**INFORMATION ON SAFETY PLANNING**

**FOR WOMEN**



# INFORMATION ABOUT ABUSE

## THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

In an abusive relationship most often 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.

## **GETTING HELP**

### **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, 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) 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.

Leave before if possible.

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 or community worker (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.

It is important to know that you may leave more than once.

### **VALUABLE INFORMATION ABOUT LEAVING THE HOUSE**

1. If you leave your children at home, they may be unsafe.
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 get your personal belongings from your home.
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.**

## SAFETY PLANNING

### WHAT IS A SAFETY PLAN?

A safety plan is an plan that helps you to reduce the risks that you and your children face. If you are abused, you probably know more about safety planning than you think. You have already learned how to protect yourself and your children by knowing what to say and do and what not to say and do. You probably do it all the time.

This safety plan has more details and things for you to think about. There is no right or wrong way to do a safety plan. Check off and fill in the things that work for you. Make it your plan. Review it often. Make changes as you need to.

It is important to remember that your plan will change as your life circumstances change.

There is help for you to develop a safety plan. You can ask your social worker, family violence worker or some other person in the community to work with you on this.

### PLAN AHEAD

You don't have to wait for an emergency to ask for help. It is best to talk to people who can help you before there's a bad emergency. Each person's abuse and situation is different. You can't always tell when your partner is about to abuse you.

Safety Plans should be made ahead of time with the help of a social worker, family violence worker, or someone else you trust. They can tell you things to think about. They help you think about things that you would not have thought of alone. Review and update your safety plan often. Keep your safety plan for as long as there is contact with your partner and longer.

### MAKING YOUR SAFETY PLAN

Safety Plans will help you be as safe as you can be from future abuse. They are used by people who:

- Want to leave, but it is not safe
- Are not sure about leaving, but need help in case he gets violent
- Have left and the threat of violence is still there

## A SAFETY PLAN CAN HELP YOU

- Get help in an emergency
- Get away safely
- Keep children safe
- Safely get your clothes, pets or other personal items

## KEEP YOUR SAFETY PLAN IN A SAFE PLACE

Make several copies. Social Workers can do this for you. Find safe places to keep your plan where your partner won't find them. You can keep one at work, with a friend, neighbor or family member. Be sure you only leave copies with people you trust won't tell your partner about it. Try to always have a copy close to you.

## WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN A SAFETY PLAN?

- How to get away if there is an emergency
- How to get help if leaving is not a choice
- Where to go if you leave
- How to be safe at a new place
- How to keep in touch with people who will help you
- How to keep your children safe
- How to protect "what is yours" (personal property, clothes etc.)
- How to stay safe in public and at work
- Anything else that you and your children need to feel safe.