

YOU CAN'T CONTROL YOUR ABUSER's violence, but you can plan how to respond to future violent incidents and how to get to safety if you decide to leave. (This is a step in taking your personal power back.) I will offer advice and templates for three safety plans in this section. The first will be for safety while remaining in an abusive relationship. The second is for leaving in a hurry and the third is for use if you have time to prepare to leave your home.

Although some of the things in your safety plan may seem obvious, it's important to remember that your brain doesn't function the same during a crisis as it does when you are calm. When adrenaline is pumping through your veins it can be hard to think clearly or make logical decisions about your safety. Having a safety plan laid out in advance can help you protect yourself in those stressful moments.

SAFETY PLAN

LEAVING IN A HURRY

Where are you going to go?

- * If you need to get out immediately and you can drive, drive to the nearest police station. If you have a cell phone with you, call 911. Inform them about the situation and ask for an officer to meet you outside. Stay on the line until you are with law enforcement in person.
- * If you are on foot, and it is an emergency situation, run toward people. If there is a gas station, restaurant, or a store near you, run there. Call 911 as soon as possible. Inform them about the situation and stay on the line until you are with law enforcement in person.
- * If you are on foot, and it is an emergency situation, but there is not a public area near you, find shelter. This will likely need to be inside of a neighbor's house. Call 911 as soon as possible.

What do you need to take with you?

- * If you have access to a cell phone, take it. It could be your only immediate lifeline.
- * If you are being pursued by your abuser and you can grab something to use in self-defense, you may want to. For example, pepper-spray or foam to their eyes may give you a little extra time to escape. If you take any type of weapon, be sure that you stay in control of it. We don't want your abuser to use it against you.
- * Shoes on your feet and a coat if one is needed are also good, but getting to freedom is the most important thing. If you cannot grab those things when leaving in a hurry, don't worry about them. Do what you need to do to survive.
- * If you have contacts written down somewhere that would help you in leaving and you are able to, grab that. If not, 911 is an easy number to remember and every other contact can be found later.

How are you going to cover your tracks?

- * If there is more than one vehicle at the home, you could grab all of the keys so that they can't come after you in another vehicle.
- * If you're on foot, hide if you can do it safely. Run in a straight shot if hiding would put you in more danger.
- * If possible, use cash instead of cards and don't go to people that the abuser knows.

Who can support you in your effort to leave?

- * 911 is your best bet initially, unless you already have a plan in place. You can get more resources once you're in a safe location.

After you're in a safe location:

- * Talk to your local Crisis Center, battered women's shelter, police department, etc. to learn about your options.
- * Evaluate your individual situation. Are you safe in a hidden shelter locally? Do you need to get farther away than that? (Note: There are people who will transport you farther away if need be. See *Leaving an Abusive Relationship Barriers & Ideas* for more information.) If you work, should you quit your job? If you are a parent, should you keep your kids in their schools or pull them out? (Some shelters offer homeschool options to help you hide. If you are going to keep your kids in their schools, consider getting a protection order.)
- * Create another safety plan.
- * You may need to change jobs, schools, churches, clubs, etc.
- * Plan to continue using cash or get a prepaid debit card. (If you stay in a shelter, you shouldn't need money right away.)
- * If you still have your cell phone, I recommend getting the information off of it and getting rid of it. If you must keep it for evidence, pull the battery out. Get a different prepaid phone to use. (Tip: Phones without internet capabilities are harder to track.)

SAFETY PLAN

LEAVING IN A HURRY

* If you have internet access, change social media passwords to something your abuser wouldn't know. Changing your passwords will hopefully prevent your abuser from getting into your accounts and trying to use them as a weapon against you.

* Stay off of social media while you're hiding.

* You can create a false trail if you believe it is necessary. Reserve or rent a hotel room, set up appointments to view properties with real estate agencies, visit schools,

etc., in a city hours away from where you plan to go. Ask them questions that will require them to call you back. Give them the phone number your abuser has access to, not the number to the place you are going. *Warning:* Do not make these phone calls before you leave. If anyone calls you back while you are still with the abuser, or if the abuser is able to check your phone to see what numbers you have called, the abuser would be tipped off that you are preparing to leave, which could put you in great danger.

Where will I go?

What will I take with me? (Can I safely put these things together in a container so that I can just grab one thing if I need to run? Or can I store it somewhere other than home?)

How am I going to cover my tracks?

Who can support me in my effort to leave? 911 or

Do I believe a false trail is necessary? If so, what can I do to create one once I'm safe?

What/Who am I fighting for?

SAFETY PLAN

LEAVING WITH PREPARATION

If you have a good amount of time to prepare to leave, try to set money aside. This might mean that you can only save a few dollars per week; the most important thing is that you save whatever amount you can that will not tip off the abuser and put you in further danger.

If you have not worked outside of the home and worry about your ability to support yourself after you leave, you can try to get job skills by taking classes. You can do this through a community college or a vocational school. If you need to keep such training a secret from your abuser, you might be able to audit college classes to gain skills. When you audit classes, the college will let you go through all of the training for free, but you will not be graded or get a degree. That is an option if you just need the know-how without the certification for a job.

Whether you plan on taking your children with you or not, it is a good idea to talk to a lawyer who specializes in domestic violence and custody issues beforehand, especially if you're planning to leave the state. The Legal Resource Center for Violence Against Women might be a good resource for you. They specialize in interstate custody matters for victims of abuse. They can provide legal information and referrals to free attorneys who can help you figure out if leaving the state with your children would violate any criminal laws. If you are going to take your children with you, make plans that will not violate a custody order that is already in place or any criminal parental kidnapping laws where you live. (Don't give your abuser legal ground to use against you.) If you are not going to take them, be aware that it may make it harder (legally) for you to get them back later. It may also put your children in increased danger.

As far as the act of leaving goes, it is best to do it when your abuser doesn't expect it and when it would be a while before he/she would notice you have gone. The more time you can give yourself to get away before they're aware that you have left, the better. Also, you can ask your local police department what kind of support they can give as

you leave. Some police departments will send an officer to escort you out of the house. Others will not. The more you know about legal options where you live, the better you can plan and prepare!

Where are you going to go?

- * Talk to your local Crisis Center, battered women's shelter, police department, etc. to learn about your options.
- * Evaluate your individual situation. Would you be safe going to a local hidden shelter? Do you need to get farther away than that? (Note: There are people who will transport you farther away if need be. See Leaving an Abusive Relationship Barriers & Ideas for more information.) If you work, are you going to quit your job? If you are a parent, are you going to try to keep your kids in their schools? (Some shelters offer homeschool options to help you hide. If you are going to keep your kids in their schools, consider getting a protection order.)
- * Be aware: Going to neighbors or family or friends who are known to your abuser is not safe, for you or for them. Leaving an abuser and for a while afterward are very dangerous times. You need to be somewhere they won't know.

What do you need to take with you?

- * Any evidence of the physical abuse. (For your safety, keep this evidence in a safe place that the abuser will not find – this may mean that you have to keep it somewhere other than your home. See Leaving an Abusive Relationship Barriers & Ideas for tips.) Evidence could include:
 - * pictures of injuries (best if taken with something that will include the date)
 - * torn or bloody clothes
 - * pictures of your home being messed up after violent episodes
 - * records from doctors or the police that document the abuse (you will

need to ask for a copy from them)

*any type of journal that you kept details of the abuse in (including dates, times, and descriptions)

*any type of media evidence of abuse (texts, emails, voicemails, and even written threats or admissions of violence)

*** A Go Bag - the following are some ideas for what you might include. If you have to leave with nothing in order to get away safely, do that. Safety is the first priority.**

- * a copy of birth certificates and Social Security numbers for self and children**

- * passports/driver's license/Concealed to Carry Permit/ other ID (or copies of them)**

- * medications and copies of prescriptions**

- * insurance information**

- * a prepaid debit card and/or cash**

- * credit card, or at least the numbers, for your records (not to use). Using these cards will allow your abuser to track you.**

- * copy of legal documents: marriage license, divorce decree, custody papers, leases, house deeds, jointly owned assets, separation agreements, Protection Orders**

- * recent pictures of self, children, and the abuser**

- * important phone numbers**

- * toiletries**

- * valuable jewelry**

- * a spiritual or motivational book**

- * sentimental toy(s)**

- * an extra set of any important keys**

- * Are you taking a pet with you? If so, here are some additional things you might want to take with you:**

- * food**

- * medicines**

- * proof of ownership (receipts from adoption or purchase of your pet, a city license, veterinary or vaccination records, ID and rabies tag)**

- * a leash or carrier**

- * a toy**

How are you going to cover your tracks?

- * Do not go "hide" with people your abuser knows. They will be some of the first places your abuser will look for you.
- * Many communities offer hidden places to stay. Find out what is available in yours.
- * You may need to cut ties with known places. This means you may need to change jobs, schools, churches, clubs, etc.
- * Use cash, not cards. If you must use a card, get a prepaid debit card.
- * It may not be safe to take your cell phone with you. If you share a phone plan with your abuser, they can track your location and they will know everyone you contact. If you don't share a plan, they can still monitor your location and contacts through your phone with the right software. You can get a different prepaid phone to take with you. (Make sure that you have all of your contacts' information.) Tip #1: some Crisis Center type organizations will provide you with a phone. Tip #2: phones without internet capabilities are harder to track.
- * Change social media passwords to something your abuser wouldn't know. Stay off of social media while you're hiding. Changing your passwords will hopefully prevent your abuser from getting into your accounts and trying to use them as a weapon against you.

Who can support you in your effort to leave?

- * What local organizations help women in domestic violence situations and how do they help?
- * Is there anyone in your life that you can talk to about anything who will not judge you or betray your trust?
- * You can also call the hotlines listed in the resource section of this book for information, resources, and emotional support.
- * Is there anyone who would help support you financially as you get

away from your abuser? (Include EBT, the food bank, and other forms of community assistance here too.)

After you have left:

You can create a false trail if you believe it is necessary. Reserve or rent a hotel room, set up appointments to view properties with real estate agencies, visit schools, etc. in a city hours away from where you plan to go. Ask them questions that will require them to call you back. Give them the phone number your abuser has access to, not the number to the place you are going.

Warning: Do not make these phone calls before you leave. If anyone calls you back while you are still with the abuser, or if the abuser is able to check your phone to see what numbers you have called, the abuser would be tipped off that you are preparing to leave, which could put you in great danger.

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