

Safety Planning Tips

Safety planning is a process to help victims think through options prior to a dangerous incident so they can plan their next steps. These safety planning tips provide information about things to consider when creating a safety plan and items to pack in advance to leave quickly. For more information about safety planning, contact a local domestic violence program.

During a Violent or Dangerous Incident

- Plan a safe place to go if you have to leave suddenly.
- Plan a primary and backup escape route out of your home.
- Practice getting out of your home safely.
- Try to avoid rooms that have only one exit like bathrooms, or that have no phone or cell phone to call for help.
- Be aware of items in your home that could be used as weapons, such as guns, knives, even cords used for strangulation.
- If you are being attacked, curl up and protect your head and heart.
- Arrange a signal with a trusted friend or neighbor for when you need help.
- If you have a disability that impacts your mobility, plan how best to escape or who to call for help.
- Keep your purse or wallet ready to leave suddenly.
- Consider getting a first call alert system that you can use if you are feeling threatened or unsafe.

Preparing to Leave (Temporarily or Permanently)

- Hide an overnight bag packed with your identification, important documents, medication and a change of clothes. Be sure to include things like glasses, hearing aids, dentures, or canes.
- Make copies of all your important documents and hide them in a safe place. Tell someone you trust the location of the hiding place.
- If you have a car, back into your driveway so you can quickly drive away. Keep the gas tank full. Hide a spare set of keys.
- Open your own checking and/or savings account. Have a credit card in your name only. Be sure to use a password your abuser will not guess.
- Contact Social Security or pension programs if you need to change how you currently receive payments. If you have representative payee, be sure this person is aware of your situation. If the representative payee is someone you no longer trust, change representative payees.
- Get a Post Office Box so your abuser cannot track you by where you have your personal mail forwarded.
- If you are 60 years of age or older, contact your local aging or tribal program about assistance with emergency housing, health care benefits, or financial assistance you might need or want.
- Call your local domestic violence program for assistance with safety planning and information about counseling and legal services. You can also call the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](https://www.nvhw.org/) at 1-800-799-7233 (SAFE) or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY).
- Be aware that your abuser can discover your plans or location by monitoring your phone, cell phone, TTY, your email or computer searches, and your car. Your abuser can place a locator device in your personal belongings or your car. Also, many cell phones have a GPS device inside. Ask for help if you need assistance if any of these actions have been taken.
- Consider getting a domestic violence stay away or restraining order. If you are a person over 60 years of age you may qualify for additional protections in some states. Your local domestic violence program can assist you with these orders.
- If you are concerned about your immigration status, speak with an immigration expert. You may qualify for special protection and consideration under the Violence Against Women Act.

After You Have Left or Separated From a Former Spouse, Partner, Family Member, or Caregiver

- If you are still in the family home, change the lock. Add security devices such as motion activated exterior lights, a metal security door or gate, or an alarm system.
- If you haven't already done so, get Post Office Box for forwarding your mail and for deliveries. Open your new bank accounts and be sure to use a password no one will guess.
- Consider getting caller ID and an unlisted phone number. Many domestic violence programs can assist you with obtaining cell phone to call 911.
- Keep your Restraining Order with you. Make several copies. Keep one on your person, one in your car, and give a copy to a trusted friend or family member. If you haven't already gotten a restraining order, consider getting one now. Your local domestic violence program or adult protective services can often help you to obtain the court order.
- Let your neighbors or facility staff know about anyone who is no longer welcome on the premises. Ask them to call you and the police if they see that person(s) entering or loitering around your property.
- Let your co-workers or persons you volunteer with know about your situation. Ask them to screen your calls, walk you to and from your car, and keep a copy of your restraining order in your desk. Your employer may want to want to obtain a work-place restraining order.
- Avoid the stores, banks, and pharmacies you used previously. Establish new services or tell your previously used services who you are avoiding. They may be willing to help you avoid a situation that could become dangerous.

Improving Your Current Living Space

- Phones: Have a charged cell phone that you carry everywhere with you.
- Handrails: Have grab bars and handrails installed (e.g., bath tub, stairs) so you have something to hold on to if you lose your balance.
- Lighting: Increase the wattage of light bulbs and ensure that closets, stairs, entrances, and walkways are well lit. Add motion lights outside your home so you will know if someone is outside.

- Hearing: If needed, increase the volume on the phones. If needed, use a smoke detector with strobe lights.
- Mobility: Keep floors clutter free and electric cords out of the way. Use slip resistant area rugs.

Protecting Your Emotional Health and Safety

- Get counseling, attend workshops, or support groups. Do whatever you can to build a supportive network of friends and family to support you.
- If you are thinking of returning to your abuser have a friend, family member, or counselor you can call to support you.
- If you must communicate with your abuser, consider ways to do so safely. Meet in a public place, take a friend for support, or call the abuser from a phone other than your own.
- Leaving an abusive situation is a process; it does not happen in one day. There may be many times when you are tempted to contact your abuser 'just to talk,' to handle unfinished business, or to discuss how hurt or angry you are. Call a trusted friend or counselor first. Once you have aired your thoughts with a trusted friend or counselor, you may be able to eliminate your need to call your abuser all together.