SAFETY PLANNING and STAYING SAFE for victims and survivors of Domestic Abuse

YOU ARE NOT ALONE
NEVER be afraid to ask for help

Developing your own personal safety plan

Whether or not you feel you can leave your abuser - there are things you can do to keep you and your family safe.

Safety Plans can help victims/survivors feel empowered and can provide concrete steps to help avoid situations or positively respond to abusive actions and/or incidents.

Plans should never be shared with the perpetrator

The information and guidance given in this pack are ideas and tips for increasing your safety and for preparing you in advance for the possibility of further violence and/or incidents. The information has been put together with the help of many agencies along with input and suggestions from Women’s Aid staff, victims and survivors.

Remember - you do not have any control over your partner’s violence but you do have choices about how to respond to situations and how you can get yourself (and your children) to safety.

This information is not exhaustive and not everything will apply to you as all situations will be different. But it is hoped that having the information ahead of time may help you to plan and may help you to make decisions easier when you are in a crisis. It is also hoped that you will be calmer and feel more in control if you are aware of all the resources available to help.
Protecting yourself
if you are still with the abuser

• Try to set up speed dials for numbers that you may need in an emergency
• Keep a mobile with you at all times – try to keep it with credit on; however emergency calls can
  still be made and support agencies can accept reverse charges
• Memorise numbers or have them in a place of safety
  (Women’s Aid bought their easy to remember number specifically for this reason)
• Try to keep your mobile with you in all rooms, in case you have to lock yourself in a room
• Make a ‘Safety Plan’ - this should include an escape route - you can get help with this
• Keep any court orders, injunctions, emergency numbers with you at all times
• Where possible, have caller ID on any phones
  (if not, try using an answer phone to check any unwanted calls)
• Discuss any passwords or codes with neighbours, friends, etc.

Some examples might be:
  Lights on / off in a certain room
  Windows open / shut
  Blinds / curtains half shut or half open

Or sentences such as
  “I won’t be able to come over for coffee as my Mum is here”

• Discuss with your neighbours when you want them to call the Police (for example if they see your
  partner at your house)
• Pack a bag with important things that you would need if you had to leave in a hurry - put the
  bag in a safe place or leave it with someone
• Keep a spare set of keys somewhere
• Diary/log any abuse inc. abusive calls, texts, emails, etc

If you are at home and being threatened or attacked

• Exit as quickly as possible
• Try to stay calm and use a calm voice (even though you may not feel calm inside!)
• Do not fight back - it will make you more unsafe (this is different to defending yourself)
• Try to stay near a door / exit
• Try to stay near a phone
• Be aware of different rooms, elevators, stairs, windows, etc.
• Be aware of rooms with weapons such as knives, blades, etc
• Call 999 if you need help
• Go to a neighbour/friend/shop if you need help (you can plan these before the incident)
• Put any previous ‘safety plans’ into practice (inc anything you have planned with children)
• Seek medical help if you need it
• Call the Domestic Violence Police Unit
• Call any of the Support Agencies

If you do leave in a hurry without taking important things, don’t worry,
we can help you to return at a later date -
this is why ‘planning’ to leave can be so important
Supporting a Client or Friend who is in an abusive relationship

Here is a list of some Dos & Don’ts to help you when supporting a client, friend or family member who is experiencing abuse.

**Dos**

- Give priority to the victim’s safety – explore ways of maximising safety whether they decide to leave their partner or not
- Take the victim seriously; they are in possession of the facts
- Believe her/him, their life may be in danger
- Respond positively, this is the time they are in MOST danger
- Tell them the violence is NOT their fault
- Let them know that they are not alone, give them support
- Find out what she/he wants to know
- Ask them if they know what they want to do and how you may be able to help to achieve it
- Ask if she/he has any language or cultural barriers or if they have any disabilities (this will affect how you can help)
- Accept their decisions - even though you may not agree
- Explore options and talk through limiting/avoiding the abuse
- Keep in contact where possible
- Regularly update her/him where possible

**DO encourage your friend, family member or client to TALK TO SOMEONE**

**Don’ts**

- Don’t tell the victim what to do
- Don’t promise things will get better when they leave (perhaps it will be worth it eventually - but this will be the most difficult time)
- Don’t try solving all their problems
- Don’t tell the victim that the partner will change (victims usually hope their partners will change)
- Don’t pressurise her/him into anything they don’t want to do
- Don’t make choices for them
- Don’t tell the victim how the children will feel about the abuse or the situation - they all react and respond differently
- Don’t be judgemental about decisions that she/he makes
- Don’t ask them what they did to provoke the violence
- Don’t ask them ‘why’ their partner is violent
- Don’t give up just because things are taking a long time
- Don’t give up because she/he goes back to the partner (this is difficult for close family/friends)
- Don’t pass messages/gifts between the victim and their partner
- Don’t give out any telephone numbers or addresses - be careful with any correspondence
- Don’t give out information to third parties unless you have permission or they are working with you or helping you
- Don’t set out any pre-conditions for your help such as they must prosecute the perpetrator, obtain injunctions or leave him/her
- Don’t withdraw support if they return to the partner – this may well be a time to ‘increase’ your help and support
Staying Safe after the abuser has moved out
Also read 'Protecting Yourself if you are still with the Abuser'

- Change the locks where possible - Make use of security support that is available free of charge - this includes changing door locks, window bolts, door spy holes etc. *(see below)*
- Where possible, shop and bank in a different place
- Cancel any bank accounts, credit cards etc that you have shared
- Keep any court orders, injunctions, emergency numbers with you
- Keep a mobile with you at all times - try to keep it with credit on however emergency calls can still be made and support agencies will accept reverse charges
- Set up speed dials for emergency numbers
- Change your regular travel routes / habits
- Diary any abusive calls, visits, texts or emails

**Home Safety (Sanctuary) Scheme**

A range of safety & security options are available to you, to assist you in staying safe in your home.

These can include emergency phones (programmed to contact chosen people), change of locks, spy-holes in your door, window locks, fire fighting equipment, extra locks to external doors, security lights, door chains, etc.

There are some features offered that may not be suitable for all victims but nevertheless are still available if you need them. These can include grilles or bars at windows. It may also include ‘a Sanctuary room’ - this is where a room has the door replaced with a solid door, reinforced frames, extra locks, steel hinges and bolts and a door viewer - the room provides a safe place for victims to call for and await the Police.

You may feel some of the options are suitable for you or you may feel you are so unsafe that you have to leave the house or even the town. Either way the choice is yours. If you need help to decide you can ring the Police, the Council or Women’s Aid to talk it through.

**Safety Planning for anyone with a disability**

For each type of disability, different dynamics for leaving or planning will be needed. E.g. issues for someone with physical disabilities will be different to someone with a hearing impairment or different again for someone with a learning difficulty.

If you do need help with your safety planning please ring Women’s Aid on 575757 - we realise some of the information given in this booklet is difficult to put into practice if you have a disability. *Info: Local emergency accommodation has full disabled access and aids to assist you if you need to leave.*

**Confidentiality**

Always be aware of guarding and protecting information including anything that is written down and where it is kept; also think about where you are talking and who can overhear the conversation. Never forget the worst case scenario; in this sort of environment - broken confidentiality could result in physical harm or the loss of someone’s life! Victims are at more risk at the time they leave the relationship.

Breach in confidentiality may also prevent victims from trusting anyone else enough to seek help again.
Are you a child, living in an abusive home?

If abuse is happening at home you probably want to stop it but you might not be sure what you can do. The first thing is to tell someone what is going on. You might be able to talk to the parent who is being hurt or you might be able to talk to the parent who is hurting you. You might also be able to talk to a teacher, friend, neighbour or other family member.

Sometimes you might feel you want to stop the fight and protect the parent who is getting hurt. This can be very dangerous and puts you at risk of getting hurt yourself. If you are scared when there is a fight, you can call 999 and ask for the Police - they will come to your house any time of the day or night.

You may be wondering why the parent who is being hurt doesn't leave or get away - there are many reasons for this and this list may help you to understand:

- They may not have anywhere else to go
- They may not have enough money
- They may still love the person who is hurting them
- They hope that person will change and things will get better
- They don't want you to have to leave the abusive parent
- They don't feel strong enough to cope on their own

**Remember**

You cannot stop the abuse and it is not your fault

ANY VIOLENCE IS WRONG AND DOES NOT SOLVE PROBLEMS

This information may help you and your parent to plan to leave if you need to or help you in an emergency. Your parent who is being hurt can get help and can get someone to talk to.

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**Safety Planning and children**

Talk to the children about what is happening - they do know and they do hear it. If you don’t talk to them about it they will come to their own conclusions which may not be accurate. Try to be honest, without frightening them.

Talk to the children about why you have left or why you haven’t left - this is important as some children feel angry and upset when the victim does leave, but some children feel unprotected and let down when victims don’t leave the abuse.

- Do not encourage children to join in with the abuse: this includes things like name calling, etc.
- Do not tell children they are just like their father/mother when they are showing frustration or anger about the abuse.

**Remember:**
Children will feel more secure with one parent in a stable environment as opposed to two parents in an unstable and violent environment.

Any plans undertaken with children must **NEVER** mean they are responsible for anyone else’s safety.
If appropriate, planning with your child to leave is important too:

- Go through an escape plan with them – plan and find safe routes out of the home and to somewhere safe

- Include different times, days, situations, etc

  Eg - leaving in the dark or middle of the night will be different

  - what would the child do if the adults were drunk

  - what is the plan if you get separated from the children

- Encourage the child to have a packed bag as well - this may include their favourite things or things they don't want to leave behind

- Encourage children to stay out of the way during a fight

- Include running somewhere or hiding somewhere in an emergency (even a corner shop)

- Show them how to use the phone including making a 999 call - find somewhere to keep phone numbers of who they can ring for example supportive family/friends

- Discuss having passwords/codes for example, set sentences, lights on/off, position of lamp, etc. These can help everyone living in the house but also think about how children can raise the alarm to neighbours and/or family

- Discuss who is going to know at school - this is important to a child who will usually be reluctant to talk about the abuse

- Discuss who will be picking the child up from school and possibly who they must never go with; even if there is a good story eg “mum is poorly so ‘X’ has got to pick you up”

- Discuss which family, friends, babysitters, etc., that they can talk to or go to in an emergency - this is important to a child who is confused about the abuse

- Make sure the school know who they can and can't talk to and that they have copies of any necessary paperwork such as court orders, injunctions etc

- Talk to them about what to do if they see the abuser while at school or while with others eg family/friends

- Discuss not giving out addresses and phone numbers

- Discuss what they can and can't say to the abusing parent (for example where they are living?)

- Discuss safety during contact visits

- Encourage the child to keep a journal of how they are feeling, what has happened, what makes them scared/sad

- Do activities with them that may encourage good conversation about what is happening

- Where possible, discuss any realistic options of the child having a phone (inc speed dials)

You could suggest your child looks at websites for children experiencing abuse for example www.thehideout.org.uk
Staying safe in your car

- Always check your petrol, oil, water, MOT, etc. - this may help to avoid breaking down
- Join a breakdown organisation or keep the number of someone you can call in the event of a breakdown
- Keep the doors locked when driving and remember, when you have windows open fully - anyone can reach in
- Check around visually while you are parking the car and also before you get out of the car
- Park as near to a street light as possible
- Park your car so you can drive straight off without making any manoeuvres
- Keep your mobile phone charged and in credit
- If you are not sure about finding your destination, get the directions before you set out

Safety when walking alone

- Hold your head up, try not to look frightened
- Walk as confidently as possible
- Don't walk down alley ways, short cuts, waste land, etc
- Stick to routes that are well lit
- If possible, tell someone where you are going, which way you are going and when you are expected to arrive
- Keep your mobile phone charged and in credit
- Have a torch with you
- Have a personal alarm with you (these are sometimes available free from support agencies)

Keeping yourself safe at work

- Keep a copy of any court order, injunctions etc at work
- Give a copy of the abuser's photo to the security guard, entrance or reception staff
- Tell your line manager what is happening - you may be able to change duties/venue etc
- Report any incidents to your line manager
- Do not go to lunch alone
- Ask someone to walk you to the car or bus
  Diary or log any contact that the abuser has with you at work via calls, emails, visits, etc

Emergency Accommodation

There is emergency refuge accommodation available in N E Lincs if you feel this is an option to keep you safe. This can either be planned in advance with a support worker for a time when it is safe for you to leave, or some women need help in an emergency - either way call 575757 for help. You can read all about our refuge and services including pictures and client stories - visit our website www.womensaidnel.org - Other emergency housing is also sometimes used.

Moving out of Town

Women's Aid can work with you to help you move town if you feel that is the only way you will be safe. Again this needs to be well planned and you will need to speak to a support worker to help you. Call 575757 if you feel this might be an option for you.
Experience and stories are showing that computers and the internet are making it easier for perpetrators to find out about victims. Large amounts of data and information about us all is kept on computers and many people choose to interact via social networking. Although we can’t change some of this; victims say they feel better for knowing more about how to be careful.

Facebook, MySpace and Bebo are all sites that link people together! They can show where you are, what you are doing and even show photos of you! Some info may be placed quite innocently.

Eg - “we will all be in the ‘???’ pub tonight at 7.30pm”! Not only does this show perpetrators where you will be - it also shows everyone else (and the perpetrator) that you will not be at home tonight!

Mobile phones are equally risky, with more phones interacting with the Internet. Mobile phones can play an important role in the lives of victims of domestic abuse. They can provide a lifeline, yet at the same time allow information about their whereabouts to be gained. Perpetrators can ‘pair up’ or search their partners phones if they are in the ‘vicinity’ and use Bluetooth (e.g. outside a refuge). You should think about changing phones, networks, sim cards, etc. Plans can be made to use different forms of communication with family, friends or support workers as some perpetrators check calls made and received, view text messages/emails and listen to voicemails.

Surveillance tools are now available to anyone. CCTV cameras that interact with the home PC are now available for under £100. Software can be downloaded onto a mobile that turns the phone into a surveillance device. Location tracking can then be used to determine where a mobile is located.

Some ‘tracking’ of victims has been done via Google Earth; 192.com; multimap.co.uk; etc. Some give names, addresses and even directions!

Support Workers can help you with alternative addresses, PO Boxes, etc.

Info: In some cities (if you have the address) you can use Google Earth to view live pictures of a refuge!

Remember .... You can empty your ‘history’ on your computer if you don’t want anyone to see what you have been on.

Unfortunately some of the suggestions and information within this document have come from chaos, crisis, serious incidents, experiences, confrontations and even mistakes!!

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to past and current service users who have helped us put all the information together.

Safety Planning is about identifying risks and planning in advance - it is about planning BEFORE an emergency.

If you need help - call

Police 999 / 112
Domestic Violence Unit 721224
Women's Aid 575757
Victim Support 250251
Rape Crisis 0800 800 5000
N E Lincs Council 326401
Citizens Advice Bureau 232205
Hospital 874111
Childline 0800 1111
Samaritans 3 53111

If you feel you are in immediate danger - ALWAYS call 999