

Partner abuse: Developing a safety plan

The following steps represent my plan for increasing my safety and preparing in advance for the possibility for further violence. Although I do not have control over my partner's violence, I do have a choice about *how* to respond to him/her and how to best get my children and myself to safety.

Step 1: Safety to avoid serious injury and escape violence.

Victims cannot always avoid violent incidents. In order to increase safety, victims of abuse may use a variety of strategies by thinking ahead and planning. Some of the following strategies can be taught and used by children involved.

- A. If I decide to leave, I will get out using the following route/s _____. I will practice how to get out safely by knowing what doors, windows, lifts, staircases or fire escapes I will use; what obstacles may be in the way; the quickest way out. Keep money and car keys ready and put them (place) _____ in order to leave quickly.
- B. Always try to make sure there is petrol in the car.
- C. Tell _____ about the violence and request they call the police if they hear suspicious noises coming from my house.
- D. Teach my children how to use the telephone to contact the police, fire department or ambulance, calling 111. "This is _____, 123, North Road. Mum's getting hurt. We need help now
- E. Use _____ as a code word for my children or my friends to run to a neighbour or call for help to get the police.
- F. If I have to leave my home, I know a safe place to go to is _____ (Decide this even if you don't think there will be a next time). If I cannot go to this place, then I can go to _____.
- G. 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, garage, and kitchen, near weapons or in rooms without access to an outside door).
- H. Use my judgment and intuition. If the situation is very serious, I can give my partner what he wants to calm him down. I have to protect myself until I/we are out of danger. If I have to leave to save my life, I will go fast to the nearest safe place and not worry about taking anything.

Step 2: Safety when preparing to leave.

Victims of abuse frequently leave the residence they share with the abusive partner. Leaving must be done with careful planning in order to increase safety. Abusers often strike back when they believe that a victim of abuse is leaving the relationship.

Some or all of the following safety strategies can be used:

- A. Contact a specialist agency such as a domestic violence centre, women's refuge or local programme provider to discuss my options and to get information and support.

- B. Leave money and an extra set of keys with _____ so that I can leave quickly. I may also leave copies of documents, spare clothing, and medication with a trusted friend.
- C. Open a savings account to increase my independence.
- D. Know or have quick easy access to refuge numbers and support service phone no's.
- E. Ask my family doctor to carefully note any evidence of injuries I have suffered as a result of abuse. Ask to have any injuries photographed if at the emergency department.
- F. Keep change for phone calls on me at all times. To keep my telephone communications confidential, I must preferably either use coins, a phone card or a prepaid mobile. I might get a friend to permit me to use their mobile telephone for a limited time when I first leave. I can guarantee my confidentiality by dialling withholding code 0197 before I dial the number further to block caller ID display or I can ask telecom to put a caller ID block on my phone free of charge. I can ask Telecom for a confidential listing if I do not wish to be listed in the phone book. This is a free service.
- G. Leave at a time when I know my partner is not home and not due home.
- H. Arrange to go to _____ when I leave. I will travel by _____. I can ask the police for a block on tracing my car licence plate.
- I. Sit down and review my safety plan every _____ in order to plan the safest way to leave the residence. _____ (domestic violence advocate/ refuge worker) has agreed to help me review this plan. I will tell a minimum number of people about my plans.
- J. Rehearse my escape plan and, as appropriate, practice it with my children. I will tell my children only what they need to know when plans are well advanced, to avoid stressing them with having to keep a difficult secret.

Step 3: Safety in my own residence.

There are many things that a victim can do to increase safety in her own residence. It may be impossible to do everything at once, but safety measures can be added step by step.

Safety measures can include:

- A. Changing the locks on my doors and windows as soon as possible. Adding secure locks.
- B. Reinforcing doors e.g. using poles to wedge sliding doors, adding wooden /metal bars.
- C. Installing security systems including additional locks, window bars, poles to wedge against doors, an electronic system, etc. May be able to negotiate with landlord re costs for installation if renting.
- D. Installing smoke detectors and purchase fire extinguishers for each floor in my house/apartment.
- E. Installing an outside lighting system (a sensor) that lights up when a person is coming close to my house.

- F. Teaching my children how to use the telephone to make a collect call to me and to _____(friend/minister/ other) or how to ring 111 for the police in the event that my partner takes them.
- G. Telling other people who take care of my children (e.g. school, day care staff, babysitter) which people have permission to pick up my children and that my partner is not permitted to do so.
- H. Teaching my children rules about dealing with unexpected contact: checking the door before answering; going to neighbours or inside if my ex partner appears; telling a teacher if he approaches them at school.
- I. Informing people (neighbours, minister, friend) that my partner no longer lives with me and they should call the police if he is observed near my residence.
- J. Contacting the Electoral Enrolment Centre on 0800 367 7656 and asking for my name and address to be excluded from the published electoral role.

Step 4: Safety with a protection order.

Many victims of abuse obtain protection orders, but one can never be sure if a violent partner will obey or violate protection orders.

I recognize that I may need to ask the police and the court to enforce my protection order. The following are some steps that I can take to help the enforcement of my protection order:

- A. I will keep my protection order _____(location) (Always keep it on or near your person). I will have copies for my handbag, work and home.
- B. I will ensure my local police station has received a copy of my protection order from the court. The police local to my partner's residence should also have been sent a copy. There is a record of protection orders that all police departments in NZ can access by computer to confirm a protection order. However, it is recommended by NZ police that a hard copy of any protection order is available to be sighted if I am elsewhere in NZ. If I frequently visit other places in New Zealand, I might file my protection order with the police in those places.
- C. I can call the local family court if I have some problem with my protection order.
- D. I will inform _____ (employer, school, minister, closest friend) that I have a protection order in effect. Protection orders cover children in the relationship, it is important that the school knows.
- E. If my partner destroys my protection order, I can get another copy from the family court or my lawyer. If my partner violates the protection order, I can call the police and report a breach, I can contact my lawyer and call my support person.
- F. If the police do not help, I can contact my advocate, victim advisor at the court or lawyer and file a complaint with the police family violence liaison officer or the District Commissioner or the police complaints authority (0800 503 728).

Step 5: Safety on the job and in public.

Each victim of abuse must decide if and when she will tell others that her partner has abused her and that she may be at continued risk. Friends, family, whanau and co-workers can help to protect victims. Each victim should consider carefully which people to invite to help secure her safety.

I might do any or all of the following:

- A. Inform _____ (boss, security supervisor, colleagues) at work of my situation.
- B. Ask _____ to help screen my telephone calls at work.
- C. When leaving work, I can make sure I am accompanied, carry a personal alarm and /or mobile phone and check I am not being followed. If I am, I go straight to the nearest police station _____.
- D. I can ensure someone knows when I should be home and if I go out where I am going and when I should be back.
- E. If I use public transport, I can vary my travel times and routes.
- F. Go to different grocery stores and shopping malls and shop at hours that are different than those when residing with my partner. Vary my pattern of going places, so my movements are not predictable.
- G. Use a different bank and take care of my banking at hours different from those I used when residing with my partner. I could use alternative banking methods i.e. phone or internet.

Step 6: Safety and drug or alcohol use.

Most people in this culture use alcohol. Many use mood-altering drugs. Much of this use is legal and some is not. The consequences of using illegal drugs can be very hard on a victim of abuse, may hurt relationships with children and be disadvantageous in other legal actions with the abusive partner. Therefore, victims should carefully consider the potential cost of the use of illegal drugs. Beyond this, the use of any alcohol or other drug can reduce a victim's awareness and ability to act quickly to protect them from the abusive partner. Furthermore, the use of alcohol or other drugs by the abuser may give him/her an excuse to use violence. Therefore, in the context of drug or alcohol use, a victim needs to make specific safety plans.

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

- A. If I am going to use, I can do so in a safe place and with people who understand the risk of violence and are committed to my safety.
- B. I can access support services such as Alcoholics Anonymous, CADS, and al anon.
- C. If my partner is using, I can make information re support services available to him or _____. If it is safer than staying, I can leave the home temporarily if he is affected by alcohol or drugs.
- D. To safeguard my children when I am using, I might send them to a friend, neighbour or relative.

Step 7: Safety and my emotional health.

The experience of being physically and emotionally abused by partners is usually exhausting and emotionally draining. The process of building a new life for myself takes 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:

- A. If I feel down and ready to return to a potentially abusive situation, I can practice self care by taking even a little time doing something I know will make me feel better, such as go for a walk, sit on the beach, exercise, phone a friend. Other things I can do are _____.
- B. When I have to communicate with my partner in person or by telephone, I can prepare myself before contact with being clear about what I want to say. _____.
- C. I can read _____ to help me feel stronger.
- D. I can call _____ to be of support of me.
- E. Other things I can do to help me feel stronger are _____.
- F. I can attend workshops and support groups at the women's refuge or other local support group _____ to gain support and strengthen my relationship with other people.

Step 8: Items to take when leaving.

When leaving an abusive partner, it is important to take certain items. Beyond this, it can be useful sometimes to give an extra copy of papers and an extra set of clothing to a friend in advance, just in case leaving has to be done quickly.

Money: Even if I have never been in paid employment, I can legally take 1/2 of the funds in any joint bank accounts. If I don't take any money from the accounts, my partner could take all money and/or close the account and I may not get my share until the court rules on it if ever.

When I leave, I should have some or all of the following things. These items might be placed in one location, so that if I have to leave in a hurry, I can grab them quickly.

- Identification papers
- My own and my children's birth certificates
- Adoption papers
- Marriage certificate
- Passport(s)
- Immigration documentation
- Protection orders
- Dissolution of marriage and/or custody papers, power of attorney
- Driver's licence and registration
- Insurance policies
- Will
- WINZ documents
- Community services cards
- IRD number
- Bank account details and statements
- Money, chequebook, cash card, credit cards
- Medical records - for all family members
- School and vaccination records
- Phone card
- Keys - house/car/office/garage
- Medication
- Lease/rental agreement, house deed, mortgage payment book
- Small saleable objects
- Address book, list of phone no's (refuge, support person/s, family court, etc)
- Photo of abuser
- Pictures, jewellery
- Children's favourite toys and/or blankets
- Items of special sentimental value

≈ SUPPORT IS JUST A PHONE CALL AWAY ≈

Telephone numbers I need to know:

Police department – emergency – 111

Police department – local police station _____

Police department – local, after hours _____

Domestic violence centre/ local support provider _____

Women's refuge _____

Work _____

Family Court _____

Minister _____

Other _____

If you need help in filling out this plan, you may ask a police family liaison officer, counsellor, refuge worker, domestic violence advocate or a close and trusted friend.

Plan review date: _____

I will keep this document in a safe place and out of the reach of my potential abuser

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