

# Domestic Violence Safety Planning Guide



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# Introduction

In an abusive relationship one person, using a variety of tactics, creates an imbalance of power and maintains control over the other person. This often puts the physical and emotional security and well-being of the victim and the victim's children at risk. Whether the victim chooses to remain with the abuser or leave the relationship, safety planning is one strategy to reduce the potential for harm.

Successful safety planning involves collaboration between the victim and a victim services provider trained and experienced in domestic violence intervention. Planning for safety is best accomplished through sincere dialogue and earnest listening so that the victim services provider learns as much as possible about the complexities of the victim's life and broader social condition. To ensure ease of understanding and create a shared sense of comfort, it is important that the communication style and language used is compatible with the victim's. This may require an interpreter or other specific accommodation.

The objective in safety planning is to develop a personalized, practical plan that can help the victim avoid dangerous situations and know the best way to react when in danger. Practicality is important in that planning for safety must take into account the victim's existing support network and available resources. The plan should be relevant whether the victim is still in the relationship, is planning to leave, or has already left the abuser. Every situation is different and each safety plan must be tailored to fit each victim's unique needs and circumstances, and updated on a regular basis, all within a coordinated network of services.

No assessment tool, however thorough, should form the exclusive basis for service provision. However, an appraisal of the level of risk involved is a logical starting point in the development of an effective safety plan (for more information on assessing risk, see "Risk Factors" in Section I of this Guide). Regardless of the situation or level of risk, there is a basic rule that is an essential component of every safety plan for all victims and their children: **when in danger, get out, get safe and get help.**

When their safety plans are complete, victims should have:

- A list of important contacts;
- A means of connecting with emergency services;
- Tactics to avoid or reduce the risk of injury during a physical attack;
- A safe place to go in an emergency and a plan to get there (with their children);
- Information about home security and safety practices in and outside their homes; and
- Quick access to cash, important documents and basic necessities.

All victims of domestic violence face the risk of repeat violence with the potential for lethal consequences. As a result, all victims require access to a range of information and support services, including help with putting in place a safety plan that works for them and their children. The ultimate goal when safety planning with victims is to help them explore their options and assist them in learning how to stay alive and safe.



## A. Connect to Services

### 1. A telephone is your link to emergency and support services when you are feeling unsafe.



- a) Think about which would work best in your situation: a landline phone, a cell phone or both.
- The caller's location from a landline phone can be traced by the 911 operator within a few seconds.
  - If you are injured and unable to use your cell phone, or if your cell phone is destroyed, a landline phone may provide another way for you or others to contact emergency services.
  - If you decide on a landline phone only, consider an extension for your bedroom and other areas of your home or a cordless phone to have with you anywhere in your home.
  - Keep in mind that cordless phones do not work when there is no household electricity.
  - Internet or VoIP (voice over internet protocol) phones require internet service and do not work without household electricity.
  - Are you also at risk when out in the community or otherwise away from your landline phone?
  - What is the cell coverage in your area? What is the cell phone coverage in the areas you frequent?
  - A cell phone must be kept charged and close by to be useful in an emergency.
  - You can make a 911 call from most cell phones without having a contract or prepaid time (provided the cell phone battery is charged).
  - A second cell phone with the capacity to call 911, kept charged and hidden from the abuser, will provide another way for you and others to contact emergency services.
  - Many crisis shelters, victim services providers and domestic violence programs collect used cell phones for distribution to at-risk domestic violence victims.
  - Your home security system and/or personal alarm or panic button may have specific requirements for either a landline or a cell phone.



- b) Consider the following devices and features for your phone(s):
- ✎ A TTY device, relay service or text 911 capability for use by deaf, deafened, hard-of-hearing and/or speech impaired persons.
  - ✎ A saved outgoing message to 911 typed into the TTY memory that includes your address.
  - ✎ Registration of your cell phone number to allow 911 texting (if 911 texting is available in your area) for those with hearing or speech impairments.
  - I** A saved text message to 911 (if 911 texting is available in your area) or to a trusted friend, that includes your address and the language you speak, with or without a speed dial feature.
  - A text app, one-digit dialing and/or pre-programmed messages or texts for selected numbers.
  - Ability to flag unwanted and/or blocked calls for retrieval by the police or the phone company later.

- Ability to limit incoming calls to selected numbers only.
- Automatic rejection of specific and/or intentionally blocked calls.
- Capacity to collect messages and/or record conversations.
- More than one phone number, each with its own ring, so calls may be answered, ignored or left to go to messaging.
- 👤 Large buttons, speed dial, a receiver holder or a headset for those with limited mobility or sight.
- A password or code put on your account by your phone company to protect access to your phone.



How will you get a phone if you do not have one? Which phone(s), other device(s) and features do you need to quickly and easily connect with services? Get a list of phone companies to compare options and costs. What is your plan?

**2. If you believe you are in danger, call 911.**



a) What do you need to know about making a 911 call?

- If the abuser is outside and trying to get into your home, call 911 as soon as possible. If the abuser is inside or gets in, leave your landline phone off the hook after dialing 911 and/or take your cell phone with you. Get out, get safe and get help!
- The 911 operator needs only a few seconds to trace a call from a landline phone. If you have no time to talk, dial 911 and leave the phone off the hook. Once the call has been traced, the 911 operator will send the police to your location.
- 👤 If you have difficulty with verbal communication, a landline or cordless phone will allow 911 calls to be traced and you will not have to say anything.
- If you are calling 911 from a cell phone, the operator may need to know your location to send the police to help you. Tell the operator where you are, or provide a landmark as soon as possible.
- Consider activating or installing a “911 locator only” app for your cell phone. This will allow the 911 operator to identify your location, but not let others track your whereabouts.
- 👤 For TTY access to 911, press the spacebar announcer key repeatedly until a response is received.
- If you flee before calling 911 and without a cell phone, providing it is safe to do so, call 911 from a neighbour’s home, a business or a pay phone. There is no charge for calling 911 from a pay phone.
- You do not need a contract or minutes on your cell phone to call 911. However, the battery must be charged and it has to be handy to be useful in an emergency.

- Have a second cell phone hidden in your home to use in the event that your primary cell phone is destroyed. Even if there are no minutes on it, you can call 911 if the battery is charged.
- L** If you do not speak English, memorize your address and how to say “I need help” in English. Practice until it feels comfortable. If it is safe to do so, name the language you speak and ask the 911 operator for an interpreter.
- Consider other devices (e.g. computer, tablet) you could use to connect with emergency services.
- Have a code word or phrase that you can use to indicate to your children or others in your home that, if it is safe to do so, they should call 911.
- If possible, tape a note with your address or specific landmarks to all the phones in your home.
- The police may place a “premise warning” on your address to flag it and to provide them with important information when you call 911 from your landline phone. The Cellarm Program does the same for 911 calls made from a cell phone. Talk to your victim services provider to find out if either of these is an option in your situation.



What can you do to make it quicker and easier to get emergency services? What will you say if you need to call 911 from your home or elsewhere? Practice different 911 calls with your victim services provider or a trusted friend acting as the 911 operator. What is your plan?

**3. There are other crisis and support services you can call on at different times for various reasons.**



- a) Think about the other crisis response services you may call upon for help.
- Where will you call for information, advice or a referral when you are facing a crisis? For example, what if you need a safe place for you and/or your children to stay, or if you need access to basic necessities?
  - Who can you call on to listen when you and/or your children need support or someone to talk to?
  - Identify the services and/or individuals that are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
  - Is it safe to store your important numbers in your cell phone or on your computer? Do you always have access to your cell phone and/or your computer?
  - Carry the most important contacts on your list with you all the time so you have it when you need it.
  - Where else might you keep your list of important numbers for quick and easy access to them?



Think about the services and people you can contact for help and support when you need it. Decide where to keep your contact lists so they are safe and accessible. What is your plan?

Police: 911 or: \_\_\_\_\_ Victim Services Program: \_\_\_\_\_

Crisis Services: \_\_\_\_\_

Crisis Shelters: \_\_\_\_\_ Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868



Teach your children how to call 911 from a landline and a cell phone. Have them memorize their full names and address, or a landmark that will identify where they are. If you live in a rural area, teach them how to describe where they are. If possible, tape a note with your address or landmarks on your phones. Have them practice what to say. Tell them not to use a phone in view of the abuser as it may put them in danger. Let them know that if they are not able to talk or are done talking, they should leave the phone off the hook. If they hang up, the police may call back and that could put them at risk. Go over every step involved in making a 911 call. For younger children, use a real (unconnected) phone so they get comfortable with it.

Show your children where the hidden cell phone is and tell them it is to be kept a secret. Talk to them about using a business or neighbour's phone or a pay phone. Tell them they can call 911 from a charged cell phone without minutes and a pay phone without money. If your children are uncomfortable calling 911, let them know that the Kids Help Phone will do a three-way call so they are not alone when talking to the police. The Kids Help Phone is also a good support when they just need to talk.

With their input, make a list of your children's important contacts and decide where to keep it so it is safe and handy. They may also want to store their important contacts in their cell phones or other devices.



Talk to your children about when and how to call 911. Practice making different 911 calls with them. Help them make a list of important contacts and decide where to keep it. What is your plan?





## B. In an Emergency

### 1. It is important that you have an escape plan to leave your home safely and a back-up plan for when your first route is blocked.



a) Following are some things to keep in mind when deciding on your escape routes:

- Identify which doors, windows, elevators, stairways, etc., provide the quickest and safest exit from your home.
- Can you get to your escape routes from anywhere in your home? Do they provide other choices should you need to make a sudden change in direction when fleeing?
- Have you practiced your escape routes? Can they be done in the dark? What about if you have a child or children with you? Can your children complete the escape routes chosen on their own?
- Have a code word or phrase for your children to let them know when it is time to flee by using one of the escape routes you have practiced with them.
- The light on your cell phone or a small flashlight attached to your keychain may be helpful when escaping in the dark.
- Are you able to keep your escape routes free of obstacles and clutter? Consider moving furniture and other items to allow for a quicker exit.
- Do you need a rope ladder to escape from second floor or higher windows?
- ✎ Think about your mobility and accessibility, as well as your transportation needs and how you will make arrangements when planning your exit (e.g. taxi, bus, Paratransit).
- Take your cell phone and personal alarm or panic button with you. Activate your alarm or panic button as you are fleeing.
- If your vehicle is part of your escape plan, make sure it is kept in good running condition and always fueled.
- Carry your vehicle keys with you. If you have a garage, use a remote door opener to quickly get into your vehicle. Hide a spare key in your vehicle, and keep the driver's door unlocked and all other doors locked.
- Back your vehicle into your parking space for a quicker escape.
- When you are within hearing range of neighbours and passers-by, begin yelling for help and/or honking your vehicle's horn for attention. This may deter the abuser from following you and/or alert others to call 911.



b) Think about where you will go once you have escaped.

- Do you have neighbours who are aware of your situation and could provide a safe place for you and your children to go?

- Are there businesses near you that are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week?
- Do you know where to find phones you can use if you leave before calling for help or without your cell phone (e.g. pay phones, neighbours, businesses).
- If you live in a rural area and are unable to get to your vehicle, is there a building or spot in your yard or surrounding area for you and your children to go?
- Pick a safe place away from your home to meet your children, so you can easily find each other when it is safe to do so.
- If the abuser is chasing you, do not go to where your children have gone as it may put them in danger as well.
- Do you know where the closest medical facility is in case you or your children are injured? What are the facility's hours of operation? Where would you go for medical care if the nearest one is closed?
- After fleeing, return to your home only when you are certain it is safe to do so.



Carefully choose your escape routes and the places you will go to be safe and to get help. How will you prepare your home and vehicle to make your escape quicker and easier? What is your plan?

## 2. You need a plan for when you are not able to flee your home.



- a) Do you know what rooms and areas in your home are the safest to go to when you are in danger?
- Ideally, your safe room has a phone, locks from the inside or contains furniture that can be easily moved to block the door, has a window or door to the outside and/or is within hearing range of others.
  - Have an extra cell phone hidden in your safe room or area. Even if there are no minutes on it, you or your children can call 911 if the phone's battery is charged.
  - Avoid bathrooms, the basement and all other areas that have limited options for escape.
  - Avoid areas with hard surfaces, such as bathrooms, kitchens and garages that could increase the likelihood of injury during a physical attack.
  - Avoid rooms where there are weapons and/or tools or other items that could be used as weapons.
  - Know where all the guns, knives and other weapons are kept. Make sure the guns and ammunition are stored in different places, and that both are locked up and/or kept where they are difficult to get to.

- Avoid arguments in the riskier areas of your home. If an argument is developing, move to a space where you can more easily get out or where there is a phone or other ways of getting help.



Which rooms or areas in your home should you avoid, and which provide the best chance to escape or to get help? What is your plan?

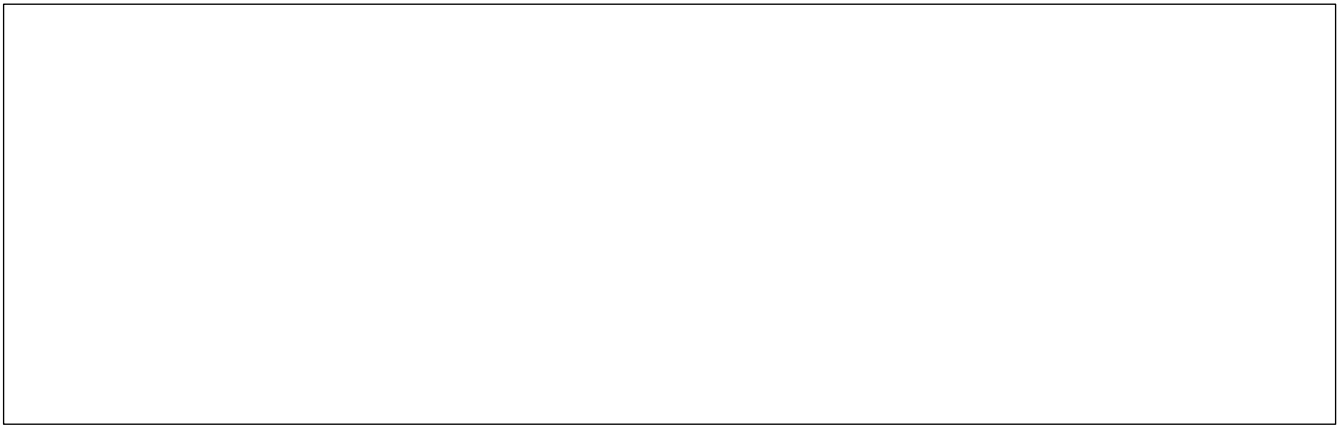
### **3. Silence is the abuser's best friend. Involve others to help keep you and your children safe in an emergency.**



- a) Think about breaking the silence with friends, family, neighbours and co-workers, as well as your children's school and/or daycare.
  - Get to know your neighbours and let them know about your situation. Ask them to contact the police if they hear a disturbance at your home.
  - Scream or shout out to alert neighbours and passersby when you need help
  - Do you know which neighbours would be willing to provide a safe place for you and your children to go to in an emergency?
  - Have a signal or more than one signal, such as half-drawn blinds or something hanging in the window, to let neighbours know that you need help or to call the police.
  - Set up a schedule where friends and family call to check on you at different times. Decide on a code word or phrase that will let them know you need help or to call the police.
  - Tell your children's school, School Resource Officer and/or daycare about your situation. Ask them to call if you have not contacted them ahead of time when your children are absent.
  - Have someone (or more than one person) drop in at unexpected times and make sure the abuser is aware that these people visited unannounced at different times.
  - Carry your list of important contacts with you and know the ones that are available seven days a week, 24 hours a day. Do not rely on keeping the list in your cell phone because your phone may be destroyed or you may have to flee without your phone.



Decide who you will talk to about your situation and how they might help keep you and your children safe. Pick the most important contacts that you need to carry with you all the time. What is your plan?



Make sure your children know they should always have their list of most important contacts with them. Show your children different ways to get out of your home safely. Have a code word or phrase that will let your children know when it is time to flee using one of the escape routes they have practiced.

Let them know the neighbours and/or businesses they can go to for safety and to get help. If you live in a rural area, teach your children the buildings and/or spots in your yard or surrounding area where they should go to be safe. Let your children know that if they are within hearing range of others, it is okay to scream or call out for help as they are fleeing. Tell them that they should stay in their safe place because that is where you will meet them when it is safe to do so.

If they are not able to get out, teach your children where the safest rooms and/or areas in your home are. Instruct them to lock or block the door, call for help, or get out and get help if they can. If you have a hidden cell phone, make sure they know where it is and how to use it to call for help. Talk to them about involving others and let them know that it is okay to talk about what is happening at home with people they trust and feel comfortable with.



Choose the escape routes that your children can do on their own. Practice the routes with them at different times of the day and night. Help them decide where to go to be safe and to get help. Show them where the safe places in your home are and what to do once there. Discuss who your children will talk with about what is happening at home. What is your plan?





## C. Physical Attack

### 1. Plan your response in the event of a physical attack.



a) Consider that physically removing yourself before violence occurs is the surest way to be safe.

- Trust your instincts. If it feels like an attack is going to happen, get out, get safe and get help.
- Make note of what usually triggers the abuser's violence. How does the abuser behave shortly before a physical attack? Is there something the abuser typically says before becoming violent? Knowing the signs may give you a chance to leave before, or be better prepared for, an attack.
- Take threats seriously. As a rule, danger is higher when the abuser talks about suicide and/or murder.
- Develop a regular habit that takes you out of the house, such as taking out the garbage or going for a walk. This activity may give you an excuse to leave when you feel that violence is going to happen.
- If it appears that you will not be able to leave, try to find a reason to get your children out and to a safe place where they can get help.
- Are there things you did in the past that have settled the abuser down? If you are not able to escape, try whatever you think will work to calm the situation and prevent a physical attack.
- Be more prepared to defend and/or protect yourself by completing a self-defence course and planning ahead of time how you will respond to an attack.



b) Do you know what choices you have when the abuser physically attacks you?

- It is important to realize that during a crisis, your brain does not work the same way it does normally. Thinking clearly and making sensible decisions may be difficult at the time of an emergency. Having a plan in place ahead of time may help you better protect yourself.
- Have you thought about whether or not you will defend yourself? If the abuser has a weapon, this may not be an option. How does alcohol or drug consumption on your part or that of the abuser affect your decision about defending yourself?
- Remember that any item you use as a weapon to defend yourself could be used against you.
- Your best defence may be making yourself into a small target by curling up in a ball in the corner of the room or behind some furniture.
- Protect your head and face by putting your arms around each side of your head, interlocking your fingers behind your head, and closing your elbows in front of your face.
- Use soft items, such as couch cushions, bedding, floor mats, etc., to shield your body from the full force of the abuser's punches and kicks.

- If you are being strangled (often referred to as choked), the abuser may release the pressure on your neck if you pretend to pass out.
- When a physical attack includes sexual violence, it is important that you receive medical care as soon as possible. Sexual violence can result in sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy and/or physical injury.
- Whatever you choose to do during a physical attack, do not lose sight of your goal to get out, get safe and get help.



What are the signs that the abuser is likely to become violent? What can you do when you notice the signs? What options do you have during a physical attack? Practice protective positions that may reduce your risk of being injured. Think about completing a self-defence class. What is your plan?

## 2. Some physical attacks are more dangerous than others.



- a) If the abuser strangles you (often referred to as choking), or places pressure on your neck in some other way, you are at greater risk of serious, permanent or fatal injury.
- The brain is very sensitive to lack of oxygen. You may pass out within a few seconds of having pressure on your neck. Brain damage can happen in as little as three minutes. Death may occur within four to five minutes if the pressure is not released.
  - Strangulation is a sign that the violence is getting more serious. This means your risk of serious or fatal injury is increasing.
  - You may have no marks or pain, or just minor symptoms; however, you could die days or weeks after being strangled due to brain damage and/or internal injuries.
  - It is important that you get medical care after you have been strangled, especially if you are pregnant. If you passed out or lost control of your bladder or bowels while being strangled, you need to receive medical attention as soon as possible.
  - If you have been strangled, ask your victim services provider or a trusted friend to help you get medical care. If you are suffering physical pain, call 911 for an ambulance as soon as possible.



- b) Similarly to strangulation, blows to the head during an attack may put you at greater risk of serious, permanent or fatal injury.
- Hits or kicks to the head can cause several kinds of head injuries. Even injuries that seem minor and leave no marks may cause brain injury. Up to 50% of serious head injuries are fatal and about 20% result in disabilities.

- Common symptoms of head injury include passing out (even briefly), headache, dizziness, nausea and vomiting, drowsiness, confusion, difficulty walking, slurred speech, memory loss, irrational or violent behaviour, poor coordination, seizures, and numbness or paralysis in any part of the body.
- All head injuries should be checked out by a medical professional. If you are elderly, on medication to thin your blood, have a bleeding disorder, or are a heavy alcohol user, you should get medical care immediately after receiving a blow to the head.
- If you need assistance, ask your victim services provider to help you find and/or get to a medical facility. If you are suffering physical symptoms, call 911 for an ambulance as soon as possible.



c) Think about how the abuser's use of weapons may increase the likelihood of serious or fatal injury.

- We think of guns and knives as weapons. However, any object used in a physical attack is considered a weapon.
- The use of any weapon during a physical attack increases your likelihood of serious, permanent or fatal injury.
- If the abuser threatens to use guns and knives, it can cause serious emotional harm as part of a cycle of intimidation and control – even if the abuser does not carry out the threat.
- Know the law. Spouses must be notified before a firearm licence is issued. Licences may be refused or revoked and firearms may be temporarily or permanently taken away. By law, all guns must be safely stored and unloaded when not in use. Ammunition must be safely stored in a different place.
- Call the firearm line at 1-800-731-4000 for more information.



d) Keep in mind that when you and/or the abuser have been drinking or using mood-altering drugs, you are at greater risk of physical injury.

- You may take mood-altering drugs or drink alcohol to lessen the pain of being abused. This may actually make things worse for you. It prevents you from thinking clearly, reduces your energy, increases your feelings of helplessness, and makes it more difficult to find solutions to your problems.
- Mood-altering drugs and alcohol often lead to exaggerated behaviour because they lessen the user's ability to think rationally. As a result, violence may be more severe when the abuser is drunk or stoned.
- Escaping a physical attack may be more difficult and fleeing in your vehicle more dangerous, if you are under the influence of alcohol or mood-altering drugs.
- If you are drunk or stoned when you are attacked, you are less likely to realize the severity of your injuries and get the medical care you need.



Are there types of violence used by the abuser, or other factors, that put you at greater risk of serious, permanent or fatal injury? What can you do to eliminate or reduce the risk? What is your plan?



The most important part of your children’s safety plan, no matter how old they are, is to get away from where the abuse is happening, get to a safe place and, if possible, get help. Decide on a code word or phrase with your children that can be used to tell them to escape. You should also have a signal if the violence starts when your children are not at home, but are due to arrive at any time. For example, if the porch light is on, or a certain curtain is closed, your children will know that they are to go to a safe place and get help.

Stress with your children that they should never put themselves in danger by trying to protect you, a sibling or anyone else. When children are under stress and worried, it may be hard for them to feel okay “just doing nothing.” This may be especially true for older children. Therefore, it may help your children to have positive actions they can do, rather than a list of only what they should not do. Teach them that there are helpful ways they can respond to the abuser’s violence, such as going to a safe place, calling 911, helping their younger siblings carry out their safety plan, yelling for help as they flee and asking someone for help.



How will you teach your children to get out, get safe and get help in the event of a physical attack? What positive actions will you ask older children to carry out? What is your plan?





## D. Criminal and Civil Justice Systems

### 1. A protection order may help keep you and your children safe.



- a) Do you know what your options are, and what the process is, to get a protection order?
- When placed on a protection order, the abuser is told to have no direct or indirect (through another person) contact with you except through a lawyer. The abuser will probably be ordered not to be near or at your home, your workplace or where you go to school. There may be other conditions put in place. Breaching (disobeying) any of the conditions on an order is against the law. The abuser may be charged criminally for breaching the order, if it is reported to the police.
  - After being charged for committing a crime against you and released, either by the police after being arrested or by a judge after appearing in court, the abuser is likely to be placed on an order that will include protective conditions. At the time of the crime and/or after the abuser is arrested, but before the abuser is released from police cells, tell the police what protective conditions you want. If the abuser is held to appear in court, tell the Crown Prosecutor what conditions you need to feel safe before the abuser's court appearance.
  - In a situation that may turn violent, even if a crime has not occurred, you may ask for an Emergency Intervention Order (EIO) from the police, Mobile Crisis Services or Victim Services. A special Justice of the Peace will hear why you are afraid and what makes your situation an emergency. If the Justice grants the EIO, the abuser will be told about it by the police, and then the abuser will be on protective conditions for a period of time (usually a few weeks). An EIO is not a criminal offence; however, breaching (disobeying) an EIO may lead to criminal charges and a criminal record.
  - You may apply for a peace bond by providing a written statement to the police explaining the abuser's history of violence and saying why you are afraid. If there is evidence of a crime in your statement, the police may decide to charge the abuser instead. If your peace bond application goes ahead, the abuser is likely to be placed on protective conditions while deciding to either agree to the peace bond, or to disagree and let a judge decide at a hearing. You will be asked to testify about your fear if there is a hearing. If the peace bond is granted, the abuser will be placed on protective conditions for a specified period of time (usually between six and 12 months). A peace bond is not a criminal offence; however, breaching a peace bond may lead to criminal charges and a criminal record.
  - You can apply for a civil restraining order on your own. However, as the process requires a formal submission and a hearing that involves both parties, you may want to hire a lawyer. After hearing both sides, the judge will decide whether to grant the order. If granted, ask the judge for the order to be enforceable by the police so there are consequences if it is breached.
  - If convicted (found guilty) of a crime against you, the abuser may be placed on an order with protective conditions for a period of time. The order may start at the time of sentencing or after the abuser has served some time in jail. Before sentencing, in your victim impact statement and by

talking to the Crown Prosecutor, make it clear what protective conditions you would like. If you need help preparing and/or presenting your victim impact statement, or are not sure about the outcome of the abuser's court case, ask your victim services provider for help and/or for the information you need.

- You can get a copy of any protection order that you are named in from the courthouse or through your victim services provider. You should carry your protection order with you all the time.



b) What can you do to make your protection order more effective?

- A protection order may not keep your abuser away from you. It is only as good as the abuser is willing to obey it. With or without a protection order, you need to be cautious.
- While a protection order may not keep the abuser away from you, it does give the police the power to arrest the abuser when contact is first made, before something more serious happens.
- It is important to keep a copy of your protection order with you, so that you have it to show to the police or others when you need to.
- If the abuser breaches the protective conditions, tell the police. A breach of any court ordered condition is a crime. If you do not report a breach the abuser may believe you are not serious about wanting to be protected.
- Do not have contact with the abuser when there is a protection order in place. If you need to talk to the abuser do so only through a lawyer or after getting the protection order changed by a judge.
- Give a copy of your protection order to your family, friends and neighbours. Also give a copy, along with a picture of the abuser, to your workplace security and/or receptionist and the first contacts of other places you frequent.
- If your children are named on the protection order, give their daycare, school, School Resource Officer and places they frequent a copy of the order and a picture of the abuser.
- Ask all those you tell about the protective order to call the police if they see the abuser near you, your home or other people or places listed on the order.
- Even though it may take some time before the police arrest the abuser for breaching the protective conditions, you and others should report every time you see that the order is being breached.



Think about getting a protection order both before and after leaving the abuser. Consider which one would work best in your situation. If you need help getting a protection order, contact a victim services provider. How would you make a protection order more effective? What is your plan?

## 2. Although it may not seem important now, evidence you collect now may be very important later on.



- a) Consider gathering evidence that could be used by the police, or in a civil or family court matter.
- If you receive medical treatment for injuries you received during a physical attack, ask the medical professional to document the injuries. Make a note of the date, time and from whom you received the medical care so you have it to refer to in the future.
  - Following a physical attack, after you are in a safe place, have a friend or family member take photos of any injuries you sustained. This can also be done at a hospital or a shelter.
  - Save evidence of assaults such as bloodied or damaged clothing, damaged or destroyed property and weapons that were used. Store bloodied clothing in a paper bag. If you cannot keep the actual items, take pictures of damaged clothing and/or property and the weapons used.
  - Start a dated journal that includes a description of every assault, threat, confinement, intimidation and destruction of property. This information will be useful for getting a protection order, having charges laid or when dealing with civil or family court matters.
  - Take pictures of threatening or harassing text messages. Take screen shots of information on a computer and/or a smart phone.
  - Make sure your Instant Messenger saves messages. Print threatening or harassing instant, text and email messages (with headers).
  - Keep your journal, and all the evidence and pictures you collect, in a safe place where the abuser will not find it.
  - Do not store photos and other evidence on your phone or computer's hard drive. If your phone is destroyed or you leave without it, and/or the information is removed from your hard drive, it may be lost forever.
  - Tell a trusted friend or family member what is happening in your relationship. Ask them to keep track of the dates, with a short summary, when something happens.



- b) The time right after being sexually assaulted can be confusing. Know what to do and how to ensure that evidence of the assault is not lost.
- After a sexual assault, once it is safe to do so, go directly to the hospital or a medical clinic and ask for an examination and health care services. Do not bathe or shower. You may ask to have your injuries documented and other medical evidence collected. These will be useful if you decide to report the assault to the police.
  - Medical evidence should be collected as soon as possible after a sexual assault and must be collected within specific periods of time: 120 hours (five days) for evidence of sexual assault, and 72 hours (three days) for evidence of drug-facilitated assault.
  - Keep the clothes you were wearing during the sexual assault. Do not wash them. While decide whether or not to report the assault to the police, store the clothing in a paper bag.
  - There is no time limit for reporting a sexual assault. Even if it happened months or years ago, the police can still investigate. However, reporting promptly will help ensure that as much evidence as possible is collected. The longer the delay, the greater the likely loss of evidence. Some evidence will be lost forever.



What evidence will you collect and where will you store it. How will you document what is happening?  
Who will you ask to help you? What is your plan?

### 3. Prepare to safely and fully participate in the criminal and/or civil justice system.



- a) Consider how involving the police might help you stay safe.
  - When the police respond to an incident involving you and the abuser, ask them to file a report. There should be a report filed for every domestic incident they respond to, even when no charges are laid or no other action is taken.
  - No one knows what took place better than you. Tell the police the details of what happened. Describe it in your own words and take as much time as you need.
  - When under stress, if you often act in a way that may not seem right for the situation (e.g. giggle or talk too much), let the police know this so they understand why you are behaving as you are.
  - Provide a statement to the police. A statement will provide a document of the incident in your own words.
  - Show the police any injuries or damaged property, as well as any weapons used during the incident. Ask them to take pictures of your injuries and damaged property and collect other evidence.
  - Tell the police if anyone witnessed the incident. Witnesses help to prove what took place.
  - Show the police your protection order(s) and, if you have children, your custody and access order(s).
  - Tell the police if the abuser has a pattern of abuse, a problem with alcohol or drugs, and/or any mental health issues. Let them know if the abuser owns weapons or has access to them. These will help explain your fear and the level of danger involved in your situation.
  - Ask the police to remove all guns from your home and help get an order that will prohibit the abuser from owning or having guns.
  - If you receive medical care after a physical attack, get the name of the doctor who saw you and ask for your injuries to be documented. Provide a copy of the medical document to the police or sign a medical release form so the police can get a copy.
  - After a sexual assault, you can call the Sexual Assault Crisis Line or the Victim Services Program nearest to you to arrange to have someone with you at the hospital or the police station. Note the names of the workers who provide support.

- Let the police know what conditions you want the abuser to be on after being released and ask to be notified if/when the abuser is released from police cells or court.
- Keep a record of every time you involve the police in case you need it for civil or family court. Make a note of the name and/or badge number of each police officer you deal with.
- If you and/or any of your children are named as a victim in a police investigation, let the police know if you want to receive updates about the investigation and any court proceedings that follow.



b) Send a clear message by following through with testifying in criminal and civil proceedings. Think about what you can do to make it less stressful and safer.

- If you are testifying in a criminal matter, ask your victim services provider to refer you to a court orientation session to help you be more prepared.
- Whether going to civil or criminal court, arrange for a courthouse tour ahead of time. Take note of where the courtroom and courthouse exits are located.
- Ask your victim services provider about secure waiting areas in the courthouse. If there is a secure waiting area, ask your victim services provider to arrange for you to use it.
- Tell the Crown Prosecutor ahead of time if you want to ask the judge to let you testify with a support person beside you, from behind a screen or from outside the courtroom.
- If you are the victim of sexual assault or criminal harassment, or were under 18 years of age at the time of the crime, and if the abuser is self-represented (does not have a lawyer), tell the Crown Prosecutor ahead of time if you do not want the abuser to be allowed to question you in court.
- Let the police and/or court security know ahead of time if you are concerned for your safety while at the courthouse and/or when in the courtroom.
- Do not attend court alone. Arrange to have someone go with you, preferably a victim services provider who is familiar with the courthouse, court personnel and court procedures.
- Arrive at court early when it is less likely that you will have contact with the abuser. Stay close to your support person.
- ✎ If you have special needs that will require extra equipment or services for you to testify and/or present a victim impact statement in court, let your victim services provider or the Crown Prosecutor know ahead of time so arrangements can be made.
- L** If you need an interpreter to testify and/or present your victim impact statement in court, let your victim services provider or the Crown Prosecutor know ahead of time so it can be arranged.
- Let court security know if the abuser tries to approach you, is harassing you or making threatening gestures while in the courthouse.
- If the abuser pleads guilty or is found guilty, you may provide a victim impact statement. You may be allowed to present it with a support person beside you, from behind a screen or, if the necessary equipment is available, from outside the courtroom. Let your victim services provider or the Crown Prosecutor know your wishes ahead of time.
- If the abuser pleads guilty or is found guilty, you may ask the judge to order the abuser to repay you for any financial loss you suffered because of the crime committed against you. This is called restitution. Your victim services provider can help you fill out the form used to apply for restitution.

- Leave the courthouse with your support person and, if you are feeling at risk, ask court security to watch while you walk you to your vehicle.
- After a plea or a finding of guilt, the abuser may receive a sentence that includes supervision, programming and/or protective conditions. Any of these may help keep you and your children safe.



Would you consider reporting incidents to the police? Why or why not? How could you make the criminal and civil justice system processes less stressful and safer? Who could help you as you go through the civil and/or criminal justice systems? What is your plan?



In a way that is right for their ages, explain to your children what a protection order is. Make sure they understand that, with or without a protection order, their goal in any dangerous situation is to get out, get safe and get help. If they are named in the protection order, your children's school, School Resource Officer, daycare and other places they frequent should be given a copy of the order, as well as a picture of the abuser. Older children should carry a copy of their protection order with them.

If your children are the victims of a crime, and/or if they have been subpoenaed (ordered) to testify in court, get them involved with the Victim/Witness Program nearest you. The Victim/Witness Coordinator will help them prepare for court, assist in making going court safer and less stressful and, with your input, make referrals to other support services.



How will you explain what a protection order is to your children? How will you tell your children what they should do when the abuser disobeys the protection order? How can you make the civil and/or criminal justice system less stressful and safer for your children? What services will you connect them with to help them through the process? What is your plan?



## E. Planning to Leave

### 1. When planning to leave the abuser, make sure you have the documents and other items you will need after you leave.



a) Do you know what information, documents and items you should always have in your wallet or purse?

➤ Stock your wallet or purse with:

- Your identification.
- Identification for your dependent children.
- Debit, credit and calling cards.
- Your list of important contacts.
- Keys for your home, vehicle and safety deposit box.

➤ Always have cash in your wallet for emergency use.

➤ Try to keep your wallet or purse in a handy place where you can grab it easily as you flee.

➤ Do not trust your cell phone to keep important contacts or information as it may be left behind or destroyed.

➤ Do not leave a paper or computerized directory of your contacts where the abuser may find it.

➤ Create multiple ways to store important numbers and keep them in places where the abuser will not find them.



b) What are the items you will need in the short term should you have to leave in a hurry?

➤ An “emergency bag” is a collection of important items that you will need for the short term when you flee. It should be stored in a safe place where you will have easy access to it, day or night, when you need it.

➤ Items to have in your emergency bag may include:

- Cash, chequebook, debit card, credit card and phone card.
- Must-have medications, physical aids, glasses, hearing aids, etc.
- House keys, vehicle keys, keys to other properties, safety deposit box key, etc.
- Toiletries, baby food, formula, diapers, baby bottles, etc.
- Extra clothing for you and each of your children.
- Current pictures of you, your children and the abuser.
- Small items of sentimental value, jewellery, photographs, etc.
- Special toys and/or comforts for your children.
- A list of other items you would like to have should you get a chance to return to your home to collect more belongings.

- An extra copy of all the documents listed below.



c) What documents will you need if you have to leave for a lengthy period of time or permanently?

- Make copies of critical documents and store them someplace safe – in a safety deposit box, at your workplace or with a trusted friend.
- Following is a list of various important documents that you might need after you leave:
  - Passports, birth certificates, work and student IDs, driver’s licences, social insurance cards and First Nations status cards.
  - Permanent resident or citizenship papers, work permit, visa and other immigration papers.
  - Social assistance, disability and/or worker’s compensation documents.
  - Children’s identification, custody and access orders, paternity or adoption records and school records.
  - Deeds to your home and other properties, lease or rental agreements and property insurance policies.
  - List of account numbers, bank books, debit and credit cards and passwords.
  - Vehicle registrations, package policies, motor club card (e.g. CAA).
  - Copies of loan and investment records, life insurance policies, income tax returns and pay stubs.
  - Marriage certificate, separation or divorce papers, proof of common-law status and protection orders.
  - Health cards, medical records, medication, prescription information and vaccination records for you and your children.
  - Address book or a list of the names and contact information (phone numbers, addresses, emails, etc.) for friends, family, professional services (doctor, dentist, lawyer, etc.), children’s school and daycare and other community agencies.
  - A list of household contents (a copy of, or similar to, the one provided to insurance companies). With or without photographs or video, include the contents in each room in your home, the garage and storage structures. These may be useful when dividing property.



What will you carry in your wallet or purse all the time? What documents will you make copies of and where will you store them? What will you put in your emergency bag and where will you store it? What is your plan?



## 2. Be well prepared to make leaving as safe and seamless as possible by gathering the information you need ahead of time.



a) Who are the professionals in your community you can learn from?

➤ Talk to a victim services worker, a shelter worker or the police about getting a protection order before or after you leave. Get information on the process and ask for help if you need it.

➤ The abuser's history of using violence will help you understand the level of danger you and your children may be in after you leave. It is important that you know all the risk factors. Ask your victim services provider to complete a risk assessment with you so you are better able to safety plan.

➤ Talk to a lawyer about your financial and legal rights, responsibilities and options. If you have children, you will want to talk about custody, access, child support, etc. There is work that can be done ahead of time so you are ready to start the legal process right after you leave.

**L** If you are a permanent citizen, even if the abuser is your sponsor, you cannot lose your status or be removed from Canada for leaving the abuser. For confirmation, contact Citizenship and Immigration Canada at 1-888-242-2100.

**L** If you are not a permanent citizen, you should seek the advice of an immigration lawyer before contacting Citizenship and Immigration Canada. This is especially important if your children could be allowed to remain in Canada and you may not.

**L** If the abuser and you have a pending joint immigration application, talk to an immigration lawyer about sponsoring your family members alone and/or removing yourself from a joint application for the abuser's family members.

➤ It may be a safer to go to a shelter than a place the abuser knows about. In addition, shelter staff will help you with next steps. Call the shelters in your area for more information.

✎ If you have special physical or dietary needs, prior to leaving, check to see if the shelter you want to go to is able to accommodate your needs.

✎ If the abuser is also your caregiver, find out what is available in your area and arrange for other caregiver service to start right after you leave.

✎ If you have a personal caregiver, check with the shelter of your choice to see whether your caregiver may accompany you and/or go to the shelter regularly to take care of your needs.

➤ If you are transgender, find out ahead of time if the shelter of your choice accepts trans individuals.

**L** If English is not your first language, before you leave, check to see if the shelter of your choice has access to an interpreter or electronic translation services in your language

**L** Ask service providers and other professionals to check with you before using an interpreter. Make sure the interpreter being considered is trustworthy and is not someone who may alert the abuser.

✎ If you have teenage or dependent adult children, ask about the shelter's policies about age and if they make exceptions for special needs teenage or adult children accompanying their parents.

✎ Find out if the shelter is able to accommodate your cultural needs and/or will allow you to carry out your specific cultural practices.

✎ If you are not currently using special transportation services and are eligible, consider applying for the service before you leave.

- Check out what is available for the care of your pets when you leave. If you do not have a friend or family member who will care for them, the Humane Society may be able to find someone who will provide temporary care.



b) What other preparatory work can you do to make leaving safer and easier?

- Ask your lawyer, financial institution, service providers and others with whom you have shared your plan to leave no messages on your phone or computer, to block their numbers when calling you, and to ask if it is safe to talk before starting a conversation.
- Set up a money account and get a credit card that the abuser does not have access to and through companies the abuser does not deal with. Ask that no statements or calls be made to you. Get a post office box or have them go to a trusted individual's address instead.
- Plan for your financial future. Check out programs that provide financial assistance for basic needs, pay for one-time moving costs, help with setting up in a new home and/or provide student loans.
- Research the agencies that will help you find a job or get into an educational or training program.
- Build a strong support network. You will need support from understanding people you can trust.
- Tell at least one trusted person about your plan and where you will go. If it is likely the abuser will report you and/or your children missing, you or your confidant can tell the police that you are safe.



What information do you need to gather before leaving? Where can you get the information you need? What work can you do ahead of time to make leaving easier and safer? What is your plan?

### 3. The most dangerous times for domestic violence victims are when they are planning to leave and right after they have left.



a) Consider how the abuser might track your activities and what you can do to prevent it.

- Assume that the abuser has access to the stored numbers on your phone(s) and your recent incoming or outgoing calls. Regularly clear numbers and dial a safe number after contacting services on your landline phone.
- ✋ If TTY is used, ensure that the memory is erased and set up a code word for service providers so they know they are communicating with you.
- To ensure tracking and/or locator apps are not put on your cell phone or added to a joint or family cell phone plan, activate the lock code in your phone, or remove the option through your cell phone company.

- Some cell phones come with location tracking services but have a “location on/off” or “911 only” option. Some allow the user to turn location services on or off for each application, such as the phone’s camera. You may also contact your cell phone company to ask if location tracking services are activated and have them disabled except for 911 calls.
- The abuser may add optional tracking services to your joint or family phone plan to secretly track all the phones, including your children’s phones, on the plan.
- If you are not familiar with apps on your cell phone, delete them. If an app cannot be removed, it may be safest to get a new cell phone. If removing the app or getting a new phone will raise suspicion, find different ways to communicate with your helping agencies and individuals.
- Some social networking applications share the user’s cell phone location as part of a status update. If a cell phone connects via a Wi-Fi network, the connection may also disclose information about the phone’s location.
- You can cut off communication from your cell phone by putting it on airplane mode or turning it off and removing the battery. While it is off, your whereabouts will not be communicated. However, when the phone is back on, your location information may be shared again.
- If you have a joint plan or get your phone bills online, the abuser may have access to it as well. Be aware that even toll-free calls may show up on your phone bill.
- The abuser may have ways of tracking communications and searches on your home computer that are difficult to prevent. Clearing the cache and history files may raise suspicion. Consider using your work computer, someone else’s computer or a public computer to search websites and communicate with agencies related to your plan to leave.
- Consider opening a free email account that your abuser does not know about. Check it from public or other safe computers only.
- When exiting family violence websites, make use of the safety feature that prevents the tracing of viewed pages.
- Your travels may also be traceable through credit card bills or statements and social media updates.



b) How can you make your time prior to leaving less stressful and less dangerous?

- Do not tell the abuser that you intend to leave until after you have safely left. If the abuser has suspicions, you need to put an immediate safety plan in place.
- What time of day or day of the week is the safest for you to leave? Is there a time when the abuser is going to be away for a significant period of time?
- ✋ Most transportation services require 24-hour notice, so make your transportation plans in advance. Use care by giving the transit company the name of a place you regularly go, instead of where you really want to go, so the abuser will not be suspicious.
- When you leave your home, take your children with you. If you try to get them later, the police cannot help you remove them from their other parent unless you have a valid court order that gives you custody.
- Request a police escort, or ask a friend, neighbour or family member to accompany you when you leave.



How could the abuser track your activities? What can you do to prevent the abuser from getting information about your plan to leave? What else you can do to make leaving less dangerous? What is your plan?



When gathering information before leaving, look for age appropriate websites and support services that your children can visit after you leave. Talk to your children about the public nature of the internet. Let them know what can and cannot be shared with others directly or over the internet. If they accompany you to locations you do not want the abuser to know about, make sure their devices are safe or turned off.

If older children are reluctant to leave their home, spend time working through their concerns and reassuring them so they feel more comfortable going with you when you leave and understand your priority is to keep them safe.



How will you stress the importance of using caution about the information your children share? How will you talk to them about leaving and make sure they are with you when you leave? What is your plan?



## F. After Leaving

### 1. There are important considerations and decisions you must make if you and the abuser have children together.



a) Think about what you need to do to protect your children.

- If you have not already done so, contact a lawyer with knowledge in the area of domestic violence and family law as soon as possible after leaving.
- Talk to your lawyer about getting an ex parte custody order, a protection order for you and your children and/or supervision for the abuser's visits with the children.
- If the abuser has visitation rights, consider using a safe exchange service. Other options include using a third party to pick up and drop off the children, arranging transportation for older children, and having the exchange happen in a public place. Depending upon the ages of your children, you could stagger the pick-up and drop-off times so you do not have contact with the abuser.
- Tell your children's school and/or day care who can pick them up and who cannot. Provide copies of protection and custody orders and a picture of the abuser.
- Make sure staff and parents at every place your children spend time know about your situation and do not let your children go with anyone you have not approved.
- Tell your children's school and/or daycare that you will always let them know when your children are going to be absent. Have a plan in place in the event they do not arrive when expected and you have not called.
- Have a code word that you can use with your children's school and/or daycare to indicate that you need help.
- Arrange to have separate parent-teacher conferences to make it safer for you to participate and talk about your child's progress and other issues.
- If you are concerned that the abuser will take the children, accompany them to and from school and other activities, and talk to your children about how to get help in an emergency situation.
- If you believe the abuser has abducted your children but will not leave the province or the country, report it to the local police right away.

**L** If you think the abuser may abduct your children and take them out of the country, you may ask to put their names on Passport Canada's System Lookout List by calling Passport Canada toll free at 1-800-567-6868 (Canada and the United States). For more information email [enqserv@international.gc.ca](mailto:enqserv@international.gc.ca) or call toll free at 1-800-267-8376 (in Canada) or 613-944-4000.

**L** If you believe your children have been abducted and taken out of the country, report it to the local police, the RCMP Detachment nearest you, Passport Canada (see above), and Canada's Consular Services toll free at 1-800-387-3124 (in Canada) or 613-996-8885 (collect where available and

direct where not). You should also secure the services of an Immigration lawyer. If you are outside Canada, contact the nearest Canadian government office abroad (for a list with phone numbers, go to [www.travel.gc.ca/offices](http://www.travel.gc.ca/offices)).

- If you have specific concerns for your children's safety, talk to your children's School Resource Officer and/or report your concerns to Child Protection during the day or Mobile Crisis Services after regular office hours.



How can you ensure your children are with you when you leave and what do you need to do to keep them safe after you have left? What is your plan?

## **2. The abuser may try to maintain control by getting information about you and your activities after you have left.**



- a) Consider the many ways the abuser may be able to get information about you and your activities.
- If you have moved and your address is unknown, share it with only those you trust and ask them not to pass it on. Avoid identifying information, such as your name, on your house or apartment mailbox and buzzer panel. Get a post office box for receiving mail.
  - If you are in the home you shared with the abuser, change all the utilities to your name. This will restrict access to account information and prevent the abuser from cutting off your utilities.
  - If you and the abuser dealt jointly with businesses, inform them that you and the abuser are no longer together. If statements are going to the abuser's home, change that by closing those accounts and opening new accounts in your name only.
  - Change all passwords, PIN numbers and security words. Do not replace them with usual numbers or words (birth dates, mother's maiden name, first pet, etc.) as these are likely known to the abuser.
  - Ask all the businesses you deal with to allow access to your account information only after you provide an obscure password.
  - If the abuser is able to track your cell phone or computer activity through service records, discontinue using the service providers. Obtain new accounts through different service providers. If you get new devices, do not import data to them from your old ones.
  - Work with your new cell phone company to ensure the settings give you the best possible privacy and safety (e.g. installing "911 locator only").

- If you cannot afford to buy a new cell phone, ask your local domestic violence program or shelter for a donated one that can be used to call 911.
- Get unlisted and unpublished phone number(s). Block your numbers when calling out. Have a pre-recorded anonymous message on your phone and do not identify yourself by name.
- Create new email, social media and instant messaging addresses that do not disclose your identity. Send yourself messages to make sure your real name is not displayed. Be cautious when updating your status on social media sites as they may reset to your real name.
- Block unwanted emails and instant messages, senders and/or contacts.
- Give your new phone number(s), email, social networking and instant messaging addresses only to those you trust and ask them not to pass it on.
- If you receive an unexpected or blocked call from someone asking for information (e.g. utility company, police officer, your children's school), ask for a number and call them back after confirming that they are who they say they are.
- If the abuser seems to know where you go, have your vehicle and the belongings you travel with inspected for a GPS device. If a GPS device is found, destroy or disable it.
- Ask friends not to blog, or post information, photos or videos regarding you or your children on their social networking pages. Photos posted could be geo-tagged, thereby disclosing your location.
- Consider legally changing your name.
- If you are in extreme danger, talk to your victim services provider about relocating, and establishing a new identity, without leaving a trail.



b) Are there routines and activities that you need to change to reduce your risk?

- Ask the police to accompany you if you need to return to your home to retrieve personal belongings.
- Think about moving in with family or friends, or getting a roommate or a boarder. Living with other adults may enhance your safety and will also help you financially.
- Consider the people, places and activities you need to avoid after you leave in order to keep yourself and your children safe.
- Become more watchful. Always be aware of your surroundings.
- Consider changing your daily routines such as the time of day or day of the week you go to certain places or do certain activities. It may mean changing where you shop, bank, socialize, worship, etc.
- Vary your routes to work, school, daycare and other places you frequent.
- When using public transportation, avoid isolated stops. Sit by the driver and ask for the police to be radioed when the abuser is following you or waiting for you at a stop.
- 👤 Specialized transportation routes are usually fixed so be prepared to work with the driver or others to plan for your safety.
- Tell people in your neighbourhood, your landlord, postal workers and others that the abuser no longer lives with you. Consider asking them to call the police if they see the abuser around your home. Give them a picture of the abuser and a description of the abuser's vehicle.
- Continue the regular check-ins from friends and family with the code words or phrases for when you need help.

- If you have to communicate with the abuser, arrange to do so through your lawyer or by letter, email, text, etc. If you are communicating with the abuser by phone or in person, arrange to have a trusted individual with you.
- If you agree to meet the abuser alone, do so in a public place. Tell someone where you will be and when you will be back. Plan what they should do if you do not return and cannot be reached.
- Know who your visitors are before opening the door. Ask for identification from service and delivery workers before allowing them access to your home.
- Provide friends and family with a specific knock so you know it is them at your door.
- Never go walking alone, particularly at night. Walk with a friend and stay in well-lit, populated and familiar areas. If you are being followed, do not be afraid to ask or yell for help as you make your way to a busy public area, an occupied residence or an open business.
- Know where the exits are in the public buildings that you often go to so you can escape quickly.



Consider all the ways the abuser may get information about you and your activities. What can you do to block that access? What routines and activities do you need to change to be safer? What is your plan?

### **3. Your home should be a haven where you feel safe and are able to relax.**



- a) Consider what you can do to make your home safer.
- If you are in a new home, choose your escape routes and decide on the places you and your children can go to be safe and get help.
  - If you remain in the home you shared with the abuser, change or re-key the locks as soon as possible.
  - Change the code to your home security system and tell the security company about your situation. Have a code word to ensure that the abuser cannot get into or obtain any information about your home security system.
  - Replace or install deadbolt locks with at least a 2.5 cm throw on all exterior doors. Replace exterior wood doors with solid core or metal ones and ensure that the interior locks are at least one metre from any glass in the door. Check to see that hinge pins are non-removable, door jambs are securely attached and strike plates are secured to the door jambs with at least 6.35 cm screws. Install 180° peepholes in exterior doors and place them low enough for your older children to use.



- Get lengths of two-by-four lumber to wedge under door knobs and against something solid for added security.
- Keep your house, garage, apartment, mailbox, vehicle and other doors locked at all times. Put all spare keys in a safe place.
- Make sure all windows have locks or bars that prevent opening from the outside. Check double-hung windows to ensure they are securely pinned and add back-up locks on metal and basement windows.
- Place sticks (used hockey sticks work well) or bars in the tracks of patio doors and sliding windows.
- Ensure that curtains or blinds cover windows completely. If you cannot afford curtains or blinds, bedsheets, blankets, beach towels, or and large pieces of material will also work to cover windows.
- Ensure that air conditioners in windows and walls are well secured from the inside.
- Purchase rope ladders for escaping from second or higher floor windows.
- Get a home alarm system and/or security cameras. This will protect you, as well as your property when you are not there. Add a loud exterior alarm that can be activated from several locations within in your home. Display signs to warn that there is an alarm system and/or security cameras on the premises.
- ✎ Flashing lights, vibrating pagers or fans can be hooked up to alarm systems and/or motion detectors to warn those who have a visual or hearing challenge.
- If you cannot afford an alarm system, place items (stacked tin cans, noisy toys, etc.) in front of locked doors. If they are moved, they will make noise that will wake you or alert you that someone is trying to get in.
- Use chimes or bells to alert you when windows are being tampered with.
- If you have inside windowsills, place clear glass jars on them so that they will fall and break if the abuser tries to get in. The sound of breaking glass will wake or alert you.
- Install smoke detectors and fire extinguishers on each floor of your home. If you live in an apartment, find out where the fire alarms and fire extinguishers are located.
- If you remain in the home you shared with the abuser, consider moving your furniture around, or strategically adding pieces of furniture, so it is not familiar.
- If you are moving into an apartment, avoid basement and ground floor suites. Choose a building with security doors and a buzzer system. Provide the abuser's picture to others in the building and tell them not to let the abuser in and to tell you of any attempts made to get into your building.
- If you live in an apartment, check the floor before getting off the elevator and be aware of doorways in hallways. Ask that mirrors be installed so you can see before turning corners in hallways.
- Consider getting a dog that will bark when someone approaches your home. Get a "Beware of Dog" sign. Keep in mind that a dog who knows the abuser is not likely to react to the abuser's presence.
- ✎ A service dog will signal the presence of someone it knows well, which could be a signal that the abuser is nearby.

- If you return home to find windows or doors tampered with, do not call out or go in. Call the police from a neighbour's home or a nearby business and return only when the police say it is safe.



b) Think about ways you can make your home exterior, garage and vehicle safer.

- If you live in an apartment make sure the parking area, the entrance to your building and the hallways in the building are well lit all the time.
- Ensure that your home's exterior is well lit - particularly the entrances to your house and garage. Install a porch light that is too high for easy removal. Install motion sensitive lighting around your home.
- Check that your garage door closes tightly and all the doors to your garage have good locks. Get a customized remote garage door opener and a garage light that can be turned on from inside your home.
- Trim back bushes and other vegetation to below window level around your house and garage. Trim lower tree limbs to above window level.
- 👤 If you have a medical alarm or panic button, ensure that it works in your yard and garage, as well as from everywhere in your home or apartment building.
- When you are going to be gone for a period of time, have lights, televisions and/or radios set on a timer to make your home look occupied.
- Always have your keys ready when you arrive at your car or residence door.
- Get an anti-theft device (e.g. a club for your steering wheel) for your vehicle and use it whenever and wherever your vehicle is parked, including in your garage.
- Make sure that all keys are removed from the vehicles when they are parked in your garage.
- Park your vehicle in open, well-lit areas close to where you are going. If possible, back into parking spots for a quicker escape.
- As you return to your parked vehicle, scan the area and carry your keys and cell phone so they are handy. Walk around your vehicle to ensure nothing has been tampered with. Always look inside before getting in and keep your car seats forward for a better view. Check your brakes before driving off.
- If you are being followed while driving, do not go home or try to lose the vehicle following you. Stay on well-lit, busy streets. Avoid unfamiliar streets and areas. Use your cell phone to call for help. During the day, drive to the nearest police station. At night go to a hospital emergency, a fire hall or a busy business and ask (or honk) for help.



c) What can you do to make your workplace safer?

- Tell your employer and co-workers about your situation and have a safety plan for your workplace.
- Provide a copy of your protection order, the abuser's picture and a description of the abuser's vehicle to the frontline staff, security officers, parking attendants, and other co-workers as needed.
- Tell co-workers when they should call the police.
- Ensure that there is no personal information given out about you by anyone in your workplace.

- Choose one or two people from your workplace to check on you if you do not arrive at work and have not called in. Have a code word or phrase that will let them know that you need help. Give them your emergency contact information and tell them when the police should be called.
- Have someone at work screen your mail, phone calls and visitors. Use your voicemail to screen your phone calls. Save all calls that are harassing or threatening. Block unwanted emails or send them directly to a folder where you do not have to read them until you choose to.
- Talk to your employer about changing your work location, your workspace within the same location, the hours you work, your phone number(s) and/or your email address.
- Arrange your hours of work so that you do not work alone. As much as possible, ensure that you avoid coming in or leaving work when there is no one else around or when it is dark.
- Ask for a parking spot close to your workplace entrance. Have your name removed if it is used to identify your parking spot.
- If your workplace has underground or parkade parking, consider parking somewhere more in the open.
- Request accompaniment, or walk with someone else, when walking between your vehicle or the bus stop and your workplace. Continually scan the area and always carry your keys and your cell phone for easy access.
- If the abuser follows or attempts to attack you as you approach your vehicle, in addition to yelling for help, activate the automatic alarm to draw the attention of your co-workers or others close by.



Decide where and when you may be at risk. How will you make your home, vehicle and workplace safer? Who will you ask to help make your home, vehicle and workplace safer? What is your plan?



Go over the escape plan for your new home with your children, including where they should go to be safe and to get help. Practice the new escape routes with them. Make sure they know where the safest rooms or areas are in your new home in case they are not able to escape. Tape notes, with emergency contact numbers and your new address or a landmark, on every phone in your home and all cell phones. Have a code word or signal to alert your children when they should flee your home, stay away and/or call for help.

If your children are at risk, ask them to change the routes they take to the places they go often, as well as their daily and weekly routines. Make sure they know that doors and windows should always be locked and curtains drawn at night. Teach them how to set your home alarm and instruct them to set it whenever they are the last ones to leave your home, if they are home alone and at night. Talk to your children about

answering the door and phone and the information they should not provide. Remind your children that they need to take care when sharing information and pictures online.



Teach your children how to stay safe at home and when they are out. Suggest routines they may need to change. Make sure they know what information they cannot share with others. What is your plan?



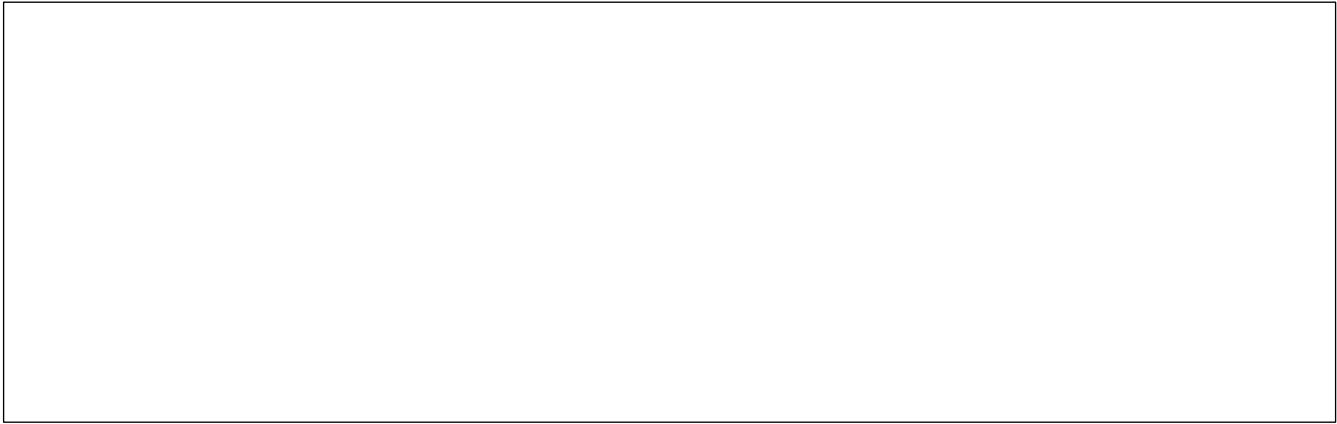
If parents come to an agreement about custody, access and/or child support after separating, this is the best outcome. However, when there has been violence in the relationship, it may not be possible to reach an agreement and may put you at risk if you try to negotiate with the abuser. You may be wise to seek the services of a lawyer. If you do not have a lawyer and/or cannot afford one, you can contact Legal Aid or the Family Law Information Center (306-787-5837 or toll free at 1-888-218-2822). A lawyer should protect your right not to be pressured into an agreement that is not in the best interests of you and/or your children. If mediation is recommended, make sure you tell the mediator about the history of violence in the relationship.

In Saskatchewan, parents involved in a family law matter may be required to attend the Parent Education Program as part of the court process. The program is open to the public and, given that it includes valuable information on parenting after separation and divorce, it is a good resource whether required or not. All sessions are free of charge, but registration is required. For more information contact the Parent Education Program office toll free at 1-888-218-2822 in Regina, or 1-877-964-5501 in Saskatoon.

It is important to have a very specific written arrangement regarding custody (e.g. every second weekend from 5 PM Friday to 8 PM Sunday) as opposed to one that is loosely defined (e.g. reasonable access at reasonable times). In addition, your custody order should include a clause stating that the police will respond if the children are not returned within a certain period of time. If you believe the children may be harmed during visits, ask the judge to order supervision during their visits with the abuser. If supervision by a third party other than a professional service is ordered, make sure you are comfortable with the third party chosen. Although it is rare, a judge may deny violent parents access to their children.



Make a plan for the legal steps you need to take for custody, access and child support. Decide what services you need to work with to get the outcomes that will protect your children. What is your plan?



If contact with the abuser is risky for you, arrange safe transfers of the children through your local exchange program, or by having a trusted third party pick up and deliver the children for visits with the abuser. It may also be a safe option to transfer the children in a public place. If your children are old enough, they may be able to meet the abuser at someone else's home or a nearby business. You may want it specified in the custody order or in a protection order that the abuser is to remain in the vehicle when picking up and dropping off the children.

Sit down with your children and develop a safety plan for their visits with the abuser. Make sure they know how to contact you if they have concerns, and how to call 911 in an emergency. Ensure that they have memorized your cell phone number and the abuser's address. Set up regular check-in times when you will call. Have a code word or phrase they can use when talking to you to let you know that they need help. Keep a written record of problems with visitation, including when the abuser does not show up for scheduled visits or does not bring the children home on time. Know what to do if you believe the abuser will abduct the children, or has done so.

If you think your children are at risk while they are with the abuser, contact Child Protection Services during the day or Mobile Crisis Services after regular business hours. To ensure that your children are protected from abuse and neglect, Child Protection Services will assess both parents - you and the abuser - and determine what is best for your children.



Develop a safety plan with your children for when they are on visits with the abuser. Decide on the professionals you will call on to help protect your children from harm or neglect, or if you believe they have been abducted. What is your plan?





## G. Stalking

### 1. Occasionally abusers become obsessed with re-establishing a relationship or getting revenge for what they see as unfair treatment. This is when abusers become stalkers.



#### a) What should you know about stalking?

- Stalking occurs when one person is obsessed with another and shows it through repeated contacts and actions or behaviours that are uninvited and unwanted by the victim.
- Some stalkers repeat one or two behaviours over and over again. Others engage in a variety of different activities.
- Some stalkers go back and forth between behaviours that show affection and are intended to win the victim back (e.g. sending flowers) and behaviours that show anger and are intended to get revenge (e.g. slashing tires).
- Often starting with minor incidents, the stalking behaviours may become more frequent and more threatening as time goes on.
- When stalking behaviour begins, it is not uncommon for the victim to minimize and/or try to reason with the stalker to put an end to the stalking. It may go on for some time before the victim sees the pattern of behaviour as stalking.
- Stalkers are most likely to use violence with those with whom they have had a previous intimate relationship. Those coming from violent relationships are the most dangerous of all stalking cases.
- Left unchecked, obsession tends to get worse with time. As a result, the best intervention includes a plan for violence prevention, and focuses on early intervention as extremely important.
- Being stalked affects all aspects of the victim's life. It is essential to find suitable support services. Seek the help of professionals who are knowledgeable about stalking and its impact as soon as possible.



#### b) If you are being stalked you need to take extra steps to reduce your risk.

- Only once, tell the stalker that you do not want contact, then do not communicate with the stalker or respond to the stalker's attempts to contact you.
- If you receive emails from the stalker, do not open them or respond. Place them directly into a folder and get a trusted friend or a professional to review them.
- If you receive annoying or hang-up calls, use your call display and do not answer those you know are meant to harass you.
- Trace harassing calls by using \*57. Record the date, time and what is said. Provide this information to your phone company and/or the police.

- When one method of contact is cut off, stalkers usually find another way to harass their victims. Keep your original phone numbers and email addresses to collect evidence of harassment. Provide your new contact information only to those you trust and ask them not to pass it on.
- For your emotional well-being, have a trusted individual check the messages on the phone you no longer use and read the emails you put directly into a folder. Ask them to save those that may be needed as evidence of harassment and delete the rest.
- Tell family, friends and co-workers about the stalking and ask for their support. Get them to help watch out for your safety and that of your children.
- Be aware of any unusual packages that arrive at your home or workplace. Do not accept those you did not personally order and/or are not expecting.
- The stalker may go through your garbage. Destroy discarded mail, important documents and other items that may disclose personal information or information about your activities.
- Check often to ensure you are not being followed. If you believe you are being followed, whether you are in your vehicle or on foot, stay on busy streets or areas and call for help, or make your way to a safe place where you can get or call for help.
- Review Section F “After Leaving” in this Guide to learn more about blocking the stalker’s access to information about you and your activities, changing your routines and making your home, vehicle and workplace safer.



Explore various stalking behaviours and compare them to your situation. What additional precautions will you need to take because the abuser is stalking you? What is your plan?

## 2. The legal term for stalking is “criminal harassment” and it is against the law.



a) What do you need to know about the crime of criminal harassment?

- Criminal harassment has been called a “building block crime” because it is made up of many contacts and/or actions. Some are criminal on their own (e.g. slashing tires), while others seem innocent on their own (e.g. sending flowers). All the contacts and behaviours have to be viewed together to show a pattern and “build” a case for criminal harassment.
- To be able to show the pattern and build the case for criminal harassment, the person targeted by the stalker must keep a record of all the stalker’s activities. This record is called a stalking log.

- A stalking log is a list of the stalker’s activities in order of the date that each occurred. The stalking log starts with the first known stalking incident and includes every incident that has happened since.
- If you do not document each event as it happens, you will find it very difficult to remember names, dates, places and the details of what was said or what happened.
- Any format (a notebook, an electronic word document, etc.) may be used to collect information about stalking incidents. As long as the information is collected in one place, and has the details needed, it will work as a stalking log.
- Following is an example of a stalking log:

Stalking Log		Page:
Date: _____ Time: _____ Location: _____ Police: Y N Badge #: _____ File #: _____ Charge(s): _____	Description of Event::	Witness: Plate #: _____ Name: _____ Phone #: _____ Address: _____ _____ Other Evidence; _____
Date: _____ Time: _____ Location: _____ Police: Y N Badge #: _____ File #: _____ Charge(s): _____	Description of Event::	Witness: Plate #: _____ Name: _____ Phone #: _____ Address: _____ _____ Other Evidence; _____



- b) It is important that you record the stalker’s activities because the police will use this information when investigating criminal harassment. Consider the following when completing your stalking log:
- Because the stalking behaviours likely started before you realized it was stalking, you may have to work backwards to begin your stalking log. If you cannot remember exact dates or times, estimate and make a note that it is an estimate.
  - Document how you told the stalker that you wanted no contact and how the stalker responded.
  - Record the date, time, place and a description of each incident as it happens.
  - Your stalking log should include every incident where the stalker made contact, or attempted contact or indirect contact (contact made through another person) with you.
  - You should also include in your stalking log every attempt the stalker made to harass you through making false reports or spreading damaging information about you.
  - Record all sightings of the stalker even when it seems to be a coincidence. Where possible, record who the stalker was with and what the stalker was wearing, driving and/or doing.



- Describe the exact words and gestures used in situations where the stalker threatens you, attempts to communicate with you or harasses you in any other way.
- Get the names, addresses and phone numbers of witnesses to the stalking incidents. Where someone driving by may have witnessed something, make a note of their licence plate number.
- Use \*57 to flag harassing landline phone calls (look in the front of your phone book for instructions). Make a note of the call, and that you flagged it, in your stalking log.
- If you get harassing electronic communications, ask the company providing your service to trace them and make a note of your request in your stalking log.
- Keep all physical evidence of the stalking. This includes phone, text, email and other messages from the stalker, and letters, gifts and other items sent or left by the stalker. Also keep, or take pictures of, damaged and/or destroyed property, and the receipts for repair work done. Get medical documentation and take pictures of injuries resulting from the stalker's actions. Make a note of all evidence collected and pictures taken in your stalking log.
- If possible, video and/or audio record sightings of, and contacts made by, the stalker and note that you have the recorded evidence in your stalking log.
- Include incidents where your loved ones or others close to you are targeted by the stalker.
- Log every single incident of stalking, including those you have reported to the police separately, whether charges were laid or not.



- c) In addition to your stalking log, you will need to provide a statement to the police. Consider what needs to be included in your statement.
- Include as much of the stalker's identifying information as you have including a full name, nicknames and aliases, date of birth, gender, ethnicity, height, weight, hair and eye color, tattoos, scars, piercings, address, phone numbers, vehicle description, workplace, workplace address and phone number, weapons, etc.
  - Provide a description of your past and current relationship with the stalker (e.g. married, dating, separated).
  - If you have children together, indicate who has custody and how transfers always or usually take place.
  - Detail what you know about your stalker's history of violence, use of weapons, suicidal threats or behaviour, mental illness, addictions, tendency toward excessive jealousy, etc.
  - Describe your fear. Are you afraid of physical harm? Are you afraid of emotional or psychological harm? Are you afraid for the physical well-being of your children or someone else close to you? Explain why.
  - It is very important to put your fear into context. If you are a survivor of domestic violence, your fear will be greater because of the physical and/or sexual violence you experienced in the relationship. As a result, any contact, whether pleasant or threatening, may cause a strong reaction. This may seem excessive to an uninformed outsider. It is up to you to explain it by providing the background.
  - Describe what you have done to reduce your risk and/or deal with your fear (e.g. moved, changed your locks, installed an alarm system, commenced therapy, bought a dog).

- Describe any contacts you initiated with the stalker since the stalking began. Explain why you made those contacts.
- Describe a typical day before the stalking began and a typical day since the stalking began.
- Request that when neighbours, family, friends or co-workers see the stalker or the stalker's vehicle near you, or see or hear a stalking incident, they also provide a statement for the police.
- It is important to report every incident that is criminal on its own separately (e.g. protection order violations, uttering threats, mischief). Include both reported and non-reported incidents in your stalking log.
- Notify the police as soon as possible after you have established a pattern of criminal harassment. Report each new stalking incident as soon as possible after it happens. Make a note of the officer's name and/or badge number for each incident you report.



How will you document each stalking incident and get others to do the same? Talk to your victim services provider about when you should report the harassment to the police and ask for help if you need it. What is your plan?



In a manner that is appropriate for their age, talk to your children about what stalking is. Ask them to let you know if they see the stalker or the stalker's vehicle around your home or anywhere they are. Caution them about having contact with, or providing certain information to, the stalker.



Think about how you will talk to your children about stalking and what you expect them to do because the abuser is stalking you. What is your plan?



## H. Your Well-being

### 1. One of the most crucial, yet frequently overlooked, aspects of safety planning is taking care of your physical health and emotional well-being.



a) Think of the various ways you can enhance your physical and emotional well-being.

- Spend time with people who make you feel good and are helpful. Decide who you can talk with freely and call on to give you support when you need it.
- Get connected to community agencies that can provide the services and supports you need to meet your practical and emotional needs and make your healing journey easier.
- If you are thinking of returning to or staying in a violent relationship, talk about it with someone you trust who is compassionate.
- If you are feeling down for any reason, call a friend, a family member, a 24-hour crisis centre or a shelter.
- Get involved in community activities to reduce feelings of isolation.
- Take care of your sleep, nutritional and physical activity needs.
- Keep a personal journal to write about your feelings, especially when you are feeling down or vulnerable.
- Remind yourself of your great value by writing something positive about yourself in your journal every day.
- Do not try to escape your feelings or find comfort in excessive use of alcohol or mood-altering drugs. They will only increase your feelings of anxiety and depression.
- Find a counsellor you feel comfortable with and attend as many counselling sessions as you can. Check with your employer about covering the cost of counselling. Check with your victim services provider to see if you qualify for Victims Compensation to cover the cost of seeing a counsellor or an Elder. Find out where you can get free or subsidized counselling services.
- Plan to attend a victims' support group to gain insight into your own situation and support from others who have had experiences that are similar to yours. You may come to know yourself better.
- ✎ If the support group you want to attend is physically inaccessible, ask for accommodations to be made so that you can attend. Or you may be able to join in via the internet.
- ✎ Find out if the support group you want to attend can be presented in sign language.
- L** If English is not your first language, find out if the support group you want to attend can provide interpretation services in your language.

- Set goals for your future. Where would you like to be six months, one year and five years from now? What dreams do you have for yourself and your children? What do you have to do to meet your goals and make your dreams a reality?



How can you optimize your physical and emotional health? Who can you call when you need support? Where can you get counselling that you feel comfortable with and can afford? Which agencies will you connect with and what community activities will you become involved in? List your goals and the steps you will take to accomplish them. What is your plan?



Children and youth exposed to domestic violence typically experience emotional, physical, mental and social harm that can affect their development. They may experience poor sleeping habits and eating problems. Younger children will have difficulty feeling safe and often blame themselves for the violence. Some children will feel socially isolated and have difficulty making friends. Many will develop an attitude that violence is the way to resolve conflict and will be more likely to use violence against others. Children exposed to violence are at greater risk of suffering from anxiety and depression. They also tend to be more disobedient, do poorly in school, develop substance abuse problems, and experience conflict with the law.

Do not ignore the fact that experiencing and/or witnessing violence and abuse will have a negative impact on their emotional and physical well-being. It is not uncommon for problems to flare up or increase in the weeks and months after separation from the abuser. In a way that is age appropriate, explain the situation to your children. It is important to reinforce with them often that the abuse is not their fault and it is not your fault. They did not cause the violence and neither did you. Violence in the home can turn a child's world upside down. It is important for children to continue routines such as going to school and participating in recreational activities, as they are important for their well-being.

Tell your children that abuse is never right, even when someone they love is being abusive. Encourage them to develop a reliable support network that includes people they trust, so they always have someone to talk to about what is happening. Dependable relationships can help reduce the stress children experience from living in a violent home. They need to know that there are adults who will listen, believe and be there for them. It would be good for them to see other role models in order to grow up with a positive idea of the future. They need to learn that domestic violence is wrong and learn non-violent ways to resolve conflicts.

Children need support services that meet their needs. In Saskatchewan there are Children Who Have Witnessed Violence programs available through a number of community agencies. The Children Who Have Witnessed Violence programs are specifically focused on helping children and youth who have experienced or

witnessed domestic violence. The program provides a safe place for your children and youth to get help with sorting out which behaviours are abusive. They will learn that they are not alone and about healthy ways to deal with conflict and emotions. Your victim services provider can help connect you with a Children Exposed to Violence program near you. Transportation will be provided, and any special needs your children have will be accommodated, to the extent possible. Child Protection Services is also an excellent resource to help you connect with valuable services in your community available to your children.

Every child has the right to grow up safe from harm and should feel that those they love are also safe. Children need adults to break the silence and speak out against violence and abuse. Children who are exposed to violence in the home need to know that change is possible and the violence can end. They need hope for the future. Ultimately, children need a safe and secure environment in which to thrive and grow to meet their full potential.



How can you lessen the impact that experiencing and/or witnessing violence in their home has had on your children? What services can you contact to help with this? What is your plan?



# I. Additional Information

## 1. Risk Factors

In Canada, the domestic abusers most likely to reoffend are generally young and unmarried, and have an unstable lifestyle, substance abuse issues, low verbal skills, a history of criminal behaviour and negative attitudes about spousal assault and interpersonal relationships.<sup>1</sup> Having a history of domestic violence has consistently been a leading factor in whether an abuser reoffends.<sup>2,3,4</sup> Thus, it appears that once abusers have begun to inflict violence on their partner or partners, the behaviour becomes difficult to change. Victim-focused risk factors, such as the victim's concern about future violence, biological children from a different partner and assault while pregnant, are also key components to consider when assessing risk and planning for safety.<sup>5</sup>

A cursory review of the risk factors included in the various risk assessment tools and checklists used across the country indicates that a criminal history of domestic and other violence on the part of the abuser is the factor most often regarded as important. A pending or actual separation is consistently seen as significant. Other common indicators include the victim's vulnerabilities and barriers to support, and the abuser's history of non-compliance with court orders, excessive jealousy, stalking and/or controlling behaviour and problems with substance abuse. A recent escalation in either the severity or the frequency of the violence, threats made to kill or harm and mental illness, also regularly appeared on the assessments used throughout Canada. Threatened or attempted suicide on the part of the abuser, and the abuser's under-employment or unemployment, are commonly considered as indicators of risk. Also worth mentioning are the abuser's history of strangulation (choking), threats made with a weapon and/or access to weapons, an attitude that supports domestic violence, forced sex and threats to the children or violence perpetrated in front of the children.

In Saskatchewan, the Ontario Domestic Violence Risk Assessment (ODARA) has been adopted by victim services programs for use in gauging the likelihood of recidivism and informing the safety planning process with victims. Judges often refer to ODARA scores to assist them in making decisions when requests are made to remove or change the conditions on protection orders in cases of domestic violence. The ODARA is an actuarial risk assessment validated to predict domestic violence reoffending by male offenders against female victims who are their wives, common-law wives, ex-wives and ex-common-law wives.<sup>6</sup> Much of it can be

<sup>1</sup> Kropp, P. Randall, Stephen D. Hart and Henrik Belfrage. "Structuring Judgments about Spousal Violence Risk and Lethality: A Decision Support Tool for Criminal Justice Professionals", *JustResearch*, Issue No. 13, 2005. Ottawa, ON: Research and Statistics Division, Department of Justice Canada.

<sup>2</sup> Breckenridge, Jan, and Kerrie James. *Thinking about homicide risk: a practice framework for counselling*. Sydney, Australia: Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Family Violence Death Review Committee (2014). *Fourth Annual Report: January 2013 to December 2013*. Wellington, New Zealand: Health, Quality and Safety Commission, June 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee. *2011 Annual Report: Domestic Violence Death Review Committee*. ON: Office of the Chief Coroner, Province of Ontario, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Kropp, P.R. "Intimate partner violence risk assessment and management," *Violence and Victims*, Issue 23, Number 2, 2008. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company.

<sup>6</sup> Mental Health Centre Penetanguishene Research Department in collaboration with Ontario Provincial Police Behavioural Science Section, *Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (2005 Revised Edition)*.

completed through a simple review of police or criminal justice records. It is partly based on historical information, such as whether the offender has a history of domestic assault or other violence, and current offence information, such as whether the offender threatened to kill the victim during the offence. Victim related information, such as whether the victim is able to obtain support, make up the remainder of the 13 questions on the ODARA.”<sup>7</sup>

Assessing for the likelihood of repeated violence alone too often results in little knowledge about, and inadequate responses and safety planning for, the possibility of fatal violence. Domestic violence related deaths, or domestic homicides, have been called the most predictable and preventable of all homicides. The Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee has identified the following common risk factors and considers a case predictable as high risk for lethality, and potentially preventable, if there are seven or more of these present:

- History of violence outside of the family by the abuser;
- History of domestic violence by the abuser;
- Prior threats to kill the victim;
- Prior threats with a weapon;
- Prior assault with a weapon;
- Prior threats to commit suicide by the abuser and/or prior suicide attempts by perpetrator;
- Prior attempts to isolate the victim;
- Controlled most or all of victim’s daily activities;
- Prior hostage-taking and/or forcible confinement;
- Prior forced sexual acts and/or assaults during sex;
- Child custody or access disputes;
- Prior destruction or deprivation of victim’s property;
- Prior violence against family pets;
- Prior assault on the victim while pregnant;
- Choked/strangled the victim in the past;
- Abuser was abused and/or witnessed domestic violence as a child;
- An escalation of violence;
- Obsessive behaviour displayed by abuser;
- Abuser unemployed;
- The victim and the abuser living common-law;
- Presence of stepchildren in the home;
- Extreme minimization and/or denial of spousal assault history;
- Actual or pending separation;
- Excessive alcohol and/or drug use by the abuser;
- Abuser depression in the opinion of family/friend/acquaintance and/or professionally diagnosed;

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<sup>7</sup> “Intimate Partner Violence Risk Assessment Tools: A Review”, (modified 2013). Department of Justice Canada website at [justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/ci-  
jp/fv-vf/rr12\\_8/a.html](http://justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/ci-<br/>jp/fv-vf/rr12_8/a.html), retrieved December 2014.

- Abuser has other mental health or psychiatric problems;
- Abuser has access to, or possession of, firearms;
- New partner in victim's life;
- Abuser failure to comply with authority;
- Abuser exposed to/witnessed suicidal behaviour in family of origin;
- After risk assessment, abuser had access to victim;
- Young age of the couple;
- Abuser sexual jealousy;
- Abuser misogynistic attitudes;
- Age disparity of the couple;
- Victim's intuitive sense of fear of perpetrator;
- Abuser threatened and/or harmed children; and
- Other identified factors that increased risk.<sup>8</sup>

Certain events or times have been identified as triggering an increase in danger. These commonly include situations where others are made aware of the abuse and violence or when the victim is planning to leave, or has recently left, the relationship.<sup>9</sup> Following are the most dangerous times for victims and their children. These are the times when risk must be assessed or re-assessed, and safety planning must take place or be updated:

- Following disclosure of the abuse to someone outside the family;
- After the abuser is told that the victim is going to leave;
- Immediately after the victim has left the relationship;
- When the police become involved (whether charges are laid or not);
- Upon the victim's application for a peace bond or other protection order;
- Upon application to vary the protection order conditions;
- When charges are laid against the abuser;
- At the time of plea discussion;
- When the abuser is released on interim conditions;
- When a stay of proceedings is entered;
- When the victim initiates legal actions such as divorce, matters related to the children, property settlement, etc.;
- When papers are served on the abuser such as protection orders, notification of divorce or separation proceedings, application to vary visitation, child support, etc.; and
- When the victim enters into another relationship.<sup>7,10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee. *2012 Annual Report: Domestic Violence Death Review Committee*. ON: Office of the Chief Coroner, Province of Ontario, February 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Light, Linda, Joanne Baker, Morgen Baldwin, Terran Bell, Gail Edinger, Amy FitzGerald, Tracy Porteous and Gisela Ruebsaat (editors). *Safety Planning Across Culture and Community: A Guide for Front Line Violence Against Women Responders*. BC: Community Coordination for Women's Safety and Ending Violence BC, undated.

<sup>10</sup> Light, Linda. *Police-reported Spousal Violence Incidents in B.C. in which Both Partners are Suspects/Accused: An Exploratory Study*. BC: British Columbia Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, July 2009.



## 2. Technology and Safety<sup>11</sup>

a) Spyware/Computer and Phone Monitoring Software enables a person to secretly monitor someone else's entire computer activity. It can be installed remotely by sending an email, photo or instant message. It runs hidden on a computer, is very difficult to detect and almost impossible to remove. Some secretly reinstall if removed. It can record and send screenshots (pictures of what's on the screen), all keystrokes typed, websites visited, emails sent, instant messages, accounts accessed, passwords typed and more. The following is recommended to avoid having spyware or monitoring software installed on your computer or phone:

- Trust your instincts. If someone knows too much about your activity, your device(s) may be monitored.
- When you first get a new computer or phone, increase security by enabling firewalls for your computer network or phone (see settings) and install or run anti-spyware and anti-virus software.
- Set your computer or device to automatically install updates.
- Do not open any attachments if you do not know the sender or you suspect the abuser sent them. Instead delete the attachment or have your IT staff look at it.
- Use a "safe" computer (one the abuser cannot access) for private communications and web browsing.
- Consider changing your passwords and creating new accounts on another computer. Do not use those passwords on the monitored computer.

b) Keystroke Logging Hardware provides a record of all keystrokes typed on a keyboard. Someone needs physical access to the computer to install and later retrieve the device with the data log of all your keystrokes. An abuser may use it to see the passwords you type and then be able to get into your email, credit card or bank accounts, etc. Has someone fiddled with, fixed or given you a new part for your computer recently? If you suspect keystroke hardware has been added, following is what you should do:

- Look for a small piece that connects the keyboard cord to the computer; it can also be part of an external keyboard or something installed inside a laptop.
- Change your passwords on accounts from another computer and do not access those accounts from the compromised computer.
- With some services, you can ask to get an alert (e.g. fraud alert) if your password gets changed or your account gets changed.

c) GPS (Global Positioning Systems) are small, easily hidden and affordable devices that provide the ability to monitor someone's location. Many cell phones have GPS devices. They might be used to track your location real-time (as you move) and/or to map your location history. Depending on the service or application used to access GPS data, the abuser may be able to secretly monitor your location via websites or sometimes via their phone. Some devices must be physically retrieved for the abuser to review your location data. If you suspect a GPS device is being used to track your movement, consider the following:

- Trust your instincts. If someone seems to know too much or show up in random places, check for hidden GPS devices or other location tracking services. Consider notifying the police.

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<sup>11</sup> National Network to End Domestic Violence, Safety Net Project, 2009 (revised 2011) at [nedv.org/safetynet](http://nedv.org/safetynet), retrieved October 2015.

- A device can be hidden in your belongings or vehicle. Check the trunk, under the hood, inside the bumper and seats. A mechanic or the police can also do a search.
  - Safety plan around/before removal of any location tracking device, as it may alert the abuser and increase the risk you face.
- d) Cell and Mobile Phones can be a lifeline for victims. Phones can also be hidden inside vehicles as listening devices by using the “silent mode” and “auto answer” features. Most phones have GPS chips and location tracking abilities, which can be used to determine someone’s location. Some abusers install additional applications on a cell phone to track their victim’s cell phone applications. Logs showing phone usage may be monitored on the actual phone or over the internet via the phone company’s online billing record. Joint phone plans with an abuser may give the abuser access to phone features and calling log information. If your phone has a Bluetooth device, the abuser might try to connect with your phone company using the Bluetooth or access information on your phone or intercept your communications. The following will help protect you from having your phone used to put you at risk:
- For additional privacy and safety, consider getting a separate donated phone from a shelter or purchasing a new phone (e.g. a pay-as-you-go phone).
  - Mechanics or the police can check your vehicle to see if a phone has been hidden somewhere.
  - Contact your phone company to add a password or code to your account to protect you from wrongful access to your phone.
  - You can change the phone’s location setting to “E911 only” or “911 only” so that the phone company can access your GPS only if you dial 911.
  - Check to see if your phone has any applications installed that separately ask to access and use your real-time location, such as for mapping directions. Settings such as “show all/hidden applications” might unveil some hidden applications. Consider turning off or uninstalling these applications.
  - Use phone settings to change your default Bluetooth password, set Bluetooth to hidden or turn it off.
  - Always give your location information to 911 in an emergency.
- e) Caller ID and Spoofing create potential risks to your safety. Reverse directories can provide a location based on a phone number. Services like Trapcall can unblock a blocked number without notice. Caller ID can be spoofed to falsify the number displayed when you get a call. If you call a person using an internet phone, your blocked number may be displayed. Here are some technology safety tips to consider:
- Contact the phone company and ask that your phone number be blocked to protect privacy. Blocking is supposed to prevent your caller ID from displaying. However, even with a blocked number, sometimes your caller ID will still display.
  - Consider using another phone or another outgoing phone number.
  - Regularly test the line by calling other phones to ensure it is blocked.
  - Use an internet phone (e.g. Skype) or a pay-as-you-go phone purchased with cash if you are worried about your number and/or location being revealed.
- f) Fax headers include the sender’s fax number which can be used to determine location through reverse look-up. Fax machines often have hard drives and extensive memory. Consider privacy, confidentiality and privilege issues when deciding what fax machine to use. Electronic faxes (e-fax) are sent through the

internet as email attachments and, like all email, can be intercepted. Also, because e-faxes are temporarily stored on a third party internet server, there are different confidentiality and security risks.

- Cover sheet can request that the header be removed before forwarding.
- If it is legal and does not contravene your workplace's policy, consider changing the outgoing fax number to a different number on a case-by-case basis for safety and privacy reasons.
- Never send personally identifying or sensitive information in an e-fax.
- Make sure you know who will receive the fax. Call ahead. Some fax machines require the receiver to type in a password to see the fax.

g) Cordless Phones transmit your conversation wirelessly between the base unit and phones. As a result, they can more easily be intercepted by scanners, baby monitors and other cordless phones. If you do not unplug the base unit, the phone may continue to broadcast for the duration of a call, even after you switch to a corded phone, allowing for the possibility of continued interception. To protect yourself from these risks, think about the following:

- Switch to a corded phone before exchanging sensitive information.
- Unplug a cordless phone from the power source, even after the corded phone has been turned off or hung up, to ensure the current call's conversation won't still be broadcast and overheard.
- Best practice is to limit information discussed or not use cordless phones for confidential communication.

h) TTY (Teletypewriter) is a communication tool for people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. It connects to a landline and enables them to receive and send typed messages. TTYS can be misused to impersonate someone. All TTYS provide some history of the entire conversation. The history and transcripts of TTY calls might be recorded on paper or electronically. The abuser might monitor this information or misuse it. In some cases, a victim might be able to introduce a transcript of a threatening TTY conversation as evidence. When using a TTY to communicate, consider the following for your safety:

- Create a code word or phrase to confirm the identity of the other person and to avoid impersonation.
- Make sure those who call you wait for a code word or phrase from you as well.
- Regularly clear your TTY history unless a cleared history would increase your risk.
- Ask agencies to clear their TTY memory, avoid printing transcripts and shred all printed transcripts of TTY calls unless you explicitly request that a transcript be kept for safety or evidence reasons.

i) Relay Services are free services where an operator facilitates a conversation for someone who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, has a speech disability or does not speak English. Users may use relay services via a video phone, web cam, computer, TTY or other device. They might use a phone line, internet or cable connection. Relay services can be used to impersonate someone and the conversations and/or devices may be monitored. The following are intended to add to your safety when using a relay service:

- Establish secret code words or phrases to ensure your identity when calling someone.
- Be aware that relay conversations might be secretly recorded by the abuser using spyware or video recording.
- If possible, use a "safer" TTY device or computer to use relay services (one the abuser cannot get into).
- Whenever possible, meet in person to discuss sensitive information.

- j) Email is like a postcard and is not a private form of communication. Email can be monitored and intercepted in a variety of ways, many times without your knowledge. Abusers can intercept and monitor using spyware or by getting your password; they might change your email settings so they are secretly forwarded or secretly copied (designated as bcc) on every email you send from that account. To protect yourself:
- Avoid using email for sensitive or personal information.
  - If you think your email is being monitored, consider creating an additional new email account on a safer computer. Never access the new accounts on a monitored computer (see above).
  - When setting up a new email account, do not use any identifying information.
  - Avoid passwords that others can guess.
  - If you receive threats by email, save the electronic copies. Keep the emails in the system, but also consider forwarding a copy to another email account. You can also print copies of the email; but be sure the print version can display the full email header.
  - Consider reporting email threats or hacked accounts to the police. These are crimes and the police can use email header information to help trace emails to the original sender.
- k) Hidden Cameras are affordable, accessible and easy to install. They come hidden in various items (clocks, plants, etc.) and can be difficult to detect. They can be wired into your house or transmit wirelessly. Hidden cameras can create image files that include time, date and location data. The abuser can install camera surveillance and monitor your activity remotely over the internet. The following will help keep you safe:
- Trust your instincts. If the abuser knows something that can only be seen, he/she may be using a camera.
  - Camera detectors can help to find wireless cameras that give off a signal, but will not detect a wired camera.
  - The police may help search for hidden cameras.
- l) Personal Information on the Internet can increase your risk. All kinds of public and private organizations, agencies and businesses collect and share information about people. These can include government and non-government organizations, community groups, schools and online sites such as social networking, gaming or job sites. Search engines index the web and create virtual card catalogs. Some search deep into online databases and compile extensive profiles on people. Identifying information may be online without your knowledge. The abuser may use the internet to find information about you including your location and means of contact. The abuser may also use online spaces to damage your reputation. To protect yourself, it is important that you:
- Do searches on yourself to see what information is available.
  - Be cautious and creative when providing personal information; provide information that you feel is critical and safe for things like store discount cards only.
  - Ask schools, employers, courts, government services and community agencies about their internet publications. Request that your information and photos not be posted in public directories or online.
  - In the court systems, ask how your court records can be sealed and not posted online for safety reasons. If you have a protection order, providing it can expedite these requests.

### 3. Safety Planning with Children<sup>12</sup>

It is important for you to tell your children that you want them to be safe, and for them to hear this message from you often. When developing a safety plan with children, keep the discussion simple and use repetition. Regardless of their ages and levels of development, include the following six points in their safety plan:

- Go to a safe place
- Don't get in the middle
- Call for help
- You are not alone
- You are not to blame
- Domestic violence is dangerous and against the law

a) Go To a Safe Place. Talk to your children about finding a safe place to go while the fighting is happening.<sup>13</sup> For younger children this could be anywhere in your home where the fighting is not going on. Consider the following points.

- Who do your children have in their support network and how do they reach them? Depending on developmental level, have your children:
  - Identify people in their lives with whom they feel safe. With younger children, draw pictures or use photos of different people.
  - Brainstorm where they can go and what they can do if they don't feel safe when the fighting happens. For example, what about neighbours? Do your children know them? Are they safe? Would they help?
  - Ask them to list on a piece of paper one person they can go to at home, school or in the community if they need help. On the back of the page make a list of emergency numbers.
  - If they are old enough, teach them how to call the Kids Help Phone at 1-800-668-6868 so they have someone to talk to when it is safe to do so.
- Help your children identify what a safe place looks like, both inside and outside your home. Walk through your home with your children and point out the safe places.
  - Use a picture drawn of your home, yard and/or neighbourhood, or a photograph, to help locate a safe place to go to inside or outside your home. Use a book, puppet, doll or art and film resources, as appropriate, to illustrate getting to a safe place.
  - Explain that a safe place in your home is anywhere where the fighting, loud noises and arguing are not happening. If there is a lock on the door of the room, it may be a good choice.
  - If you live far from town or other people, brainstorm how children might get to a safe place outside your house. Pick some safe places they can go to so you will know where they are and can meet them after the fighting.
  - Tell your children to stay in their safe place until the fighting stops.

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<sup>12</sup> Safety Planning with Children and Youth: A Toolkit for Working with Children and Youth Exposed to Domestic Violence. BC: BC Ministry of Justice, 2011 (revised March 2013).

<sup>13</sup> "Fighting" is how children and youth often describe domestic violence.

- If your children have cell phones, their phones should be included in the safety plan. They should keep their phones with them when in and outside of your home.
  - It is very important that you safety plan around technologies your children are using. Make sure they know that they can be monitored and tracked by the abuser through social networks, spyware devices and cell phones.
- b) Do Not Get in the Middle. Tell your children that getting in the middle of the fighting could be dangerous for them. Affirm that they may want to stop the fighting, but it is safer for them, and you, if they do not get involved.
- If they need or want to stay close by, tell your children to stay out of sight, and if possible, to have a phone nearby.
  - Talk to them about what they need to do before, during and after the fighting so that they do not get in the middle. Remind them that the best way for them to help is for them to be safe.
  - When children are distressed it is hard for them to feel comforted by the idea of doing nothing. This is particularly true for older children. They may benefit from having positive actions to perform, rather than a list of “don’ts.” Emphasize that there are helpful active things that they can do, such as going to a safe place, calling 911, helping younger siblings follow the safety plan and/or getting someone to help.
- c) Call for Help from Emergency Services. Stress that it is not your children’s responsibility to keep you safe, but they may be able to get help. Discuss with your children the times when they should try to get help and how to go about doing that.
- Have a code word or phrase that you can use to indicate to your children that, if it is safe to do so, they should call 911.
  - You should also have a signal if the fighting starts when your children are not at home, but are due home shortly. For example, if the porch light is on or a certain curtain is closed, your children will know that they are to go somewhere safe and to get help.
  - Tell your children to try to use a phone that is not in the room where the fighting is happening, and not where the abuser can see them making a call, as this could put them in danger.
  - Let your children know that, even if the minutes are used up on their cell phone, they can still call 911 if the phone’s battery is charged.
  - Review the specific steps to follow when making a call for emergency services. Check with your local emergency call centre to find out exactly how they answer 911 calls. For younger children, use a real (unconnected) phone so they can role-play phoning for help from emergency services.
    - Dial 9-1-1.
    - An operator will answer: “Police, Fire or Ambulance?” or “What is your emergency?”
    - Your child says: “We need the police.”
    - Then your child says: “My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am \_\_\_\_ years old. Send the police. Someone is hurting my \_\_\_\_\_. The address is (or I live at) \_\_\_\_\_.”
    - If you live in a rural area, teach your children how to describe exactly where your home is.
    - Tell your children to stay on the phone or to leave the phone off the hook. If they hang up, the 911 operator will likely call back and that could put them in danger.

- Tape notes with your address and/or specific landmarks to the phone(s) in your home. If that is not possible, put them somewhere that your children will know they can find them in case of an emergency. Provide an additional list of emergency numbers for your children to have with them.
- If your children are not comfortable calling the police, let them know that the Kids Help Phone can do a three-way call so they do not have to be alone when talking to the police.
- If it is safe to do so, discuss with your children going to a neighbour's house to use the phone there, or to another safe place, such as a local business or service centre.
- Sometimes, depending on their previous experiences, your children may be reluctant to call the police. For example, some children see the police as the people who have broken up their family in the past. Discuss the role the police play in protecting the public and encourage them to call 911 for help in emergency situations.

d) You Are Not Alone. Children learn to hide and disguise what is happening at home and as they get older this often involves lying to those they care about and then disliking themselves for doing so. The fear of friends and others finding out silences many children and makes them discount the fact that others often know more than they admit. This conspiracy of silence traps children in a form of isolation, which they make worse by limiting social contact that could provide much needed understanding and help. Help your children to understand that they are not as alone as they may feel.

- Your children need to know that the violence happening in your home is not a reflection on them or their worth and, in talking about it, they are not being disloyal to their family. They need to be assured that they can talk about issues outside their family and in confidence.
- Get your children to make a list of people they trust and can talk to about the violence happening in your home and their feelings.
  - Your children could choose someone who could help in an emergency, someone they could seek support from over time, or a children's service, like The Kids Help Phone, specifically equipped to deal with crisis situations.
  - Help them think of people for the list by giving them some ideas: another person in your family like an elder, aunt, uncle, grandparent, foster parent; a friend or a friend's parent; a neighbour; a teacher, principal, counsellor or support person at their school or day care; a babysitter; a group leader, coach or mentor; a spiritual leader; or a help or crisis line.
  - List the people and places your children have identified as potential supports. Give them the list to carry, and program numbers of safe people and places into their cell phones.
- Provide your children with community resources and get referrals to appropriate support services.

e) You Are Not to Blame for the Fighting. It is Not Your Fault. Reaffirm to your children that they are not to blame for the fighting.

- Let them know that no matter what, even if they may hear their names in the fight or the fight is about something they did, the domestic violence is not their fault.
  - Explain to your children that adults have many ways they can solve problems or disagreement and using violence should not be one of them.
  - Make sure your children understand that they cannot make a person behave violently or be abusive; how people behave are their choices, and children are not to blame for the choices adults make.

- If your children feel guilty for calling the police, or for getting the abuser in trouble, reaffirm with them that they did the right thing.
- f) Domestic Violence is Dangerous and Against the Law. Discuss with your children that domestic abuse and violence can take many forms and, while not all are against the law, they are all hurtful and some are very dangerous.
- For younger children explain that domestic violence is dangerous and people can get hurt. Let them know that physical violence (hitting, kicking, pushing, etc.) is against the law.
  - Explain to your older children that physical and sexual violence is both dangerous and against the law, and that verbal abuse is always hurtful and is also against the law if it includes threats.
  - Let your children know that it is okay for them to love their abusive parent, while hating the violent and abusive behaviour.

#### 4. Parenting When There is Violence<sup>14,15</sup>

The dynamics of coercive control permeate every aspect of daily life at home. Family members change how they think, act and feel as they react to abuse or try to prevent its recurrence. Inevitably, this dynamic affects how victims parent their children. They may come to believe they are inadequate parents. They may change their parenting style in response to the abuser's parenting style. This can result in victims being too harsh to try to keep their children from annoying the abuser, or too permissive in response to the abuser's harsh treatment of the children.

Watching a parent being abused, children may come to see the victim as vulnerable, emotionally unavailable to them, not a person with legitimate parental authority or as someone who cannot protect them. They may become the victim's protector, confidant or caretaker. They may grow to devalue or be ashamed of the victim. Victim parents may lose the respect of some or all of their children. Some children may come to see the victim parent as a legitimate target of abuse. Over time children may see the abuser as frightening and unpredictable or as powerful and the only legitimate parental authority.

While it is true that children are better off if not living with abuse, their support for a separation is not guaranteed. It is a paradox, but children can love a parent who abuses the other parent and/or them. Children can blame the victim parent more for the abuse than they blame the abuser. Abusers can be seen by the children as good parents (at least some of the time). Some children desperately pray for a separation and some live in fear of it. Two children in the same family may fall into different camps.

The "everyday essentials" for parenting are important for children who live, or have lived, with violence. The victim parent should try to practice the following:

- Be a good role model. Children do as you do. You can model respect and self-respect, politeness, honesty, good choices, compassion, healthy expression of emotions, non-sexist points of view and any behaviour or attitude you want to see in them.

<sup>14</sup> Baker, Linda and Alison Cunningham. *helping an abused women: 101 things to KNOW, SAY and DO*. London, ON: Centre for children and families in the justice system, 2008

<sup>15</sup> Baker, Linda and Alison Cunningham. *Helping Children Thrive: Supporting Women Abuse Survivors as Mothers*. London, ON: Centre for children and families in the justice system, 2004.



- Be clear on what you want them to do. Life with young children can be an endless string of “no” and “don’t” and “stop that”. It is important to teach children what not to do, but also show them which behaviours are valued. Instead of “Don’t hit the kitty!” try “Pat the kitty nicely.” In other words, when you ask them to stop one behaviour, say what behaviour should replace it. This doesn’t work in every situation. For example, “Don’t play with matches” is still good advice.
- Praise good behaviour. Misbehaviour sometimes gets more of our attention than good behaviour. Praising good behaviour encourages more good behaviour. “Good job putting your toys away!” “Thanks for calling to say you’re going to Tina’s house after school. Now I won’t worry.” Parenting experts say to use five “praise statements” for every one time you correct misbehaviour.
- Control your volume. Children ignore yelling if it is all they hear. Living with arguing and yelling, they tune it out. When yelling is used only in emergency situations, such as when they chase a ball into traffic, they will take notice.
- Give them chances to choose, but not wide-open choices. Instead of “Do you want to go to bed?” try “Time for bed. Should we read this book or that book?” It is a given that they are going to bed. There is no choice so do not give a choice. Getting a child to bed may be easier when they know it is not negotiable and is a predictable part of the day. Giving a choice between two options (e.g. red or blue pajamas) may distract them from the impulse to resist.
- Expect what is reasonable. Take a young child shopping during nap time and you should expect that he or she will be cranky. It may not be realistic to expect a teenager to obey an 8 p.m. curfew. Set your expectations at a level consistent with the age and maturity of the child.
- Keep adult matters among adults. Children too young to understand adult issues can be upset to hear about them. Keep a clear line between what you tell children and what you might tell a family member or a friend. Likewise, it is not fair to expect a child to be your friend or someone you confide in. They need you to be in charge.
- Make time for playing or talking. Children may act out to get your attention. If misbehaviour is the only way to get your attention, expect it to continue. Life is busy with many demands, so you need to make time to play, talk or just hang out. If you have more than one child, try to find some one-on-one time with each on them.
- Focus on the behaviour. You love your children but you do not always love their behaviour. When you praise them (or correct misbehaviour) focus on the behaviour rather than the qualities of the child. Instead of “You’re a messy boy!” try “I don’t like this mess in the den.”
- When there has been violence in the family, don’t assume boys will grow up to be abusers and girls will become victims. If you catch yourself wanting to say “You are just like your father!” or “You are just like your mother!” STOP.
- Give the reason behind your request. Instead of “Turn that TV down!” try “Mommy has a headache. If the TV is not so loud, I can take a nap.” Knowing the reason, they may comply more quickly or maybe not. But over time they will learn to see the viewpoints of other people.
- Keep emotion out of discipline. All parents get tired, frustrated and irritable sometimes. When children misbehave at the same time, it can be a bad combination. Before you react, count to three, take a deep breath and think out your next words. Discipline should be a well thought-out strategy to teach children, not an emotional reaction.

## 5. Victims Services

Saskatchewan Victims Services helps victims by providing programs and services. If you need information about your rights as a victim of crime, or help with your victim impact statement, statement on restitution or safety plan, contact the victim services program nearest you or your local police service or RCMP detachment.

For more information about, and/or a list of, the police-based and specialized victim services programs in Saskatchewan go to [saskatchewan.ca/victimsservices](http://saskatchewan.ca/victimsservices) or contact:

Toll free: 1-888-286-6664

In Regina: 306-787-3500

TTY: 1-866-445-8857

Email: [victimsservices@gov.sk.ca](mailto:victimsservices@gov.sk.ca)