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Creating a Safety Plan



This article is adapted from [StrongHearts Native Helpline](#)

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A safety plan is a personalized, practical plan that includes ways to remain safe while in an abusive relationship, planning to leave or after you leave.

Safety plans can be continuously updated, even if you return to a partner that is [abusive](#).

Safety planning involves how to cope with emotions, tell friends and family about the abuse, protect children if involved, take legal action and more.

A good safety plan will be tailored to your unique situation, have all the vital information you need and help walk you through different scenarios.

It's important to remember that in moments of crisis, your brain may not function the same way as when you are calm.

When adrenaline is pumping through your veins, it can be hard to think clearly or make smart decisions about your safety.

Having a safety plan laid out in advance can help you quickly protect yourself in those stressful moments.

Kansas Legal Services staff can help develop a safety plan with victims, friends and family members, anyone who is concerned about their own safety or the safety of someone else.

When safety planning it is important to think about the pros and cons of any action. A strategy may work for some survivors but not others.

Each survivor is an expert on their relationship and it is important to choose what will work for them and keep them safe.

Below are some options to consider when safety planning.

Safety Planning While Living with an Abusive Partner

If you are living with an abusive partner, it is important to think about safety risks and ways you can stay as safe as possible.

Consider your main safety concerns.

Abuse can come in many forms ([Types of Abuse](#)). It is important to understand what tactics your partner may use against you.

- Identify your partner's use of force and its severity so you can judge the risk of physical danger to you and your children.
- Identify where any weapons or potential weapons are in the house. If you can, try to keep them out of reach or locked away.
- Identify safe areas of the house, somewhere away from weapons, and where there is an easy access to escape if needed (such as into another room, by a door to exit the house, or by a low-level window). Keep in mind that staircases, kitchens, and bathrooms can be dangerous areas in a home.
 - If arguments occur, do your best to position yourself in a safe area near an exit.
- Keep in mind long scarves or jewelry could be used to strangle or restrain you.
- Practice how to leave the house safely and quickly. Consider hiding a spare set of car keys and keep your car fueled and ready to pull out.
 - If you live in a rural area, consider what you would need to get to a safe place.
- Safety is not always about physical danger. Consider ways to emotionally safety plan.
- Identifying ways to stay connected to those you trust.
- Participating in self-care in a variety of ways to shift focus – self-pampering, exercise, eating healthy, counseling, journaling, knowing when and how to emotionally check out during times of duress.
- Smudging or praying if that is what helps heal your spirit.
- Reconnecting with hobbies for inspiration and sometimes as distraction.
- Know the abusive partners' triggers, avoid if possible until you are able to leave.

When violence is unavoidable

- Make yourself a small target. Curl up into a ball in a corner. Protect your face with your arms on either side of your head.
- Stay away from the danger areas you identified in your house.
- Keep in mind, while you may need to protect yourself, fighting back is likely to increase the violence.
- Read [Safety During a Violent Encounter article](#) for more safety planning tips.

Connect to others

- Try to keep a phone accessible at all times. Memorize helpful numbers including the local shelter or domestic violence program. If your life is in danger, call the police.
 - If possible, let friends, family, or neighbors know of your situation. If they live nearby you can develop a signal or code word for them to call the police, stop by your house, or offer whatever help you might need.
 - Try to create believable reasons for you to leave the house.
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Safety Planning with Children

If you have children and are in an abusive relationship it is important to include your children in your safety plan, whether or not they are the abusive partner's children and whether or not the abusive partner has ever been violent towards the children.

If children are on a Protective Order, make sure the Protective Order is given to the school or daycare.

During violence or escalating aggression

- Do not run to your children. Your partner may harm them as well.
- Teach your children how and when to call 911.
- Explain to the children they should never get involved in the violence.

Plan with your children

- If age-appropriate, set up a plan with the children to leave the house when violence begins to escalate.
 - Talk through where they can go and who they can call or go to for help. If the children can't safely leave the house, set up a safe space for them in the home. Possibly a closet with comforts of toys and blankets, with a spare phone or device they can use to call for help if old enough. The bathroom, kitchen, and areas where weapons are easily accessible are to be avoided.

- Plan a code word with them so they know when to get help and/or when to leave the house. Make sure they know to keep the code word secret.

Communication with your children

- Explain that violence is never their fault.
- Make time to talk to the children about what they witnessed and felt.
- Make a list of people they are comfortable talking to and sharing their feelings with.
- Tell them violence is never okay no matter what and that it should not be happening, and that the violence is not yours or their fault.
- Remind them it is important for them to stay safe during the violence.
- Make sure they know **not** to tell the abuser about your safety plans. Encourage them to say they are practicing for what happens “in an emergency” instead of “when mom/dad gets angry”.

Safety planning with children after you have left

- Consider yours and the children’s safety for custody exchanges.
 - Plan custody exchanges in public places, possibly police stations or hospitals.
 - Consider having a family member or friend come with you for pickups and drop-offs.
 - Or plan your exchanges around school, one parent drop off and another pickup, so you and your ex do not see each other.
- Plan for unsupervised visits with the abusive partner.
 - Make age-appropriate safety plans with your children, using the same methods and ideas you used for yourself.
 - If you can do so safely, teach the children how to use a phone and send a phone with them to be used in case of an emergency.
- Continue to emotionally safety plan.
 - Talk to your children about how they are feeling, plan fun activities for them to unwind and debrief with you after a stressful situation.

Safety Planning When Leaving an Abusive Partner

Leaving an abusive partner is the most dangerous time in an abusive relationship. It is important to safety plan before, during, and after you leave your abusive partner.

Before you leave

- Do not tell or threaten your abusive partner you are planning to leave. Leaving is the most dangerous time in an abusive relationship, it is important they do not know you are planning to leave.
- Collect and keep safe and hide any evidence of abuse such as pictures, logs, medical or police reports.
 - Consider setting up an email account and emailing yourself the evidence and any other important documents.
 - Keeping a journal of the abuse incidents even when there is no physical evidence.
 - If you go to the doctor for injuries related to the abuse, ask that they document the incident and injuries. Ask for a copy.
- Think about the important documents and items you will need to take. You may have to leave in a hurry.
 - Originals or copies of birth certificates, social security cards, prescriptions, and any legal documents (see below) are important to have when you leave.
- If you can find a way to make or set aside money, do so and keep it somewhere safe.
- Consider having a bag ready to go with the essentials you would need to leave. Be sure to keep this bag hidden.

When you leave

- Make a plan of how you can leave safely and quickly. If possible, know where you are going to stay and how you are going to get there.
- Be sure to gather all legal documents
 - Protective order
 - Copies of any lease agreements, rental paperwork, or deed to your home
 - Car registration and insurance papers
 - Health and life insurance papers
 - Medical records for you and your children
 - School records
 - Work permits/green card/visa

- Passport
- Divorce and custody papers
- Marriage license
- Be sure to gather all identification information
 - Driver's license and/or children's school IDs
 - Birth certificate and children's birth certificates
 - Social security cards
 - Financial information
 - Money and/or credit cards (in your name)
 - Checking and/or savings account books
- Be sure to prepare any contact information you might need.
 - Doctors office number
 - Local domestic violence program or shelter
 - Friends and family's numbers
 - Local police station
- If you can plan as if you will not be able to come back for anything, gather any needed medications, sentimental items, money, jewelry, etc.

After you leave

- Taking care of your emotional and physical safety is important, even after you leave your abusive partner.
- Change your locks.
- Change your phone number and talk with your phone provider about ways to keep your number private.
- Change your daily routine including work hours and common routes to work.
- If you have a protective or restraining order, keep a copy of it with you at all times.
- If you are comfortable doing so, alert your children's school and your workplace of the situation.
- Tell people who take care of your children clearly who is and isn't allowed to pick them up and explain your situation with them if possible.
- If needed, look into an [address confidentiality program](#).

Some of this information is adapted from the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#).

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