

PLANNING AHEAD

While the information that follows may be helpful to you, please know it is not meant to be used as the only information you need to get and stay safe, nor is it inclusive of all the information you may need. It is critical that you connect with someone knowledgeable about domestic violence that can help you create a safety plan specifically for you, your family, and your specific needs.

IF YOU ARE IN THE RELATIONSHIP

Plan ahead where you can go if the abuser shows signs of escalating. Make a list of safe people to contact (DV program, friends, relatives, attorney, and important persons/services). Have numbers for local domestic violence programs. Pack and have ready a bag or suitcase of essentials, including medications.

Obtain and secure personal documents and information for you, and if you have children, for them as well: birth certificates, driver's license, social security cards, immunization records, passports, licenses, bank accounts, debit and credit cards, checkbooks, W-2s, paystubs, insurance cards and policies, school records, clothing, and keys. Any documentation that you might have about the abuse, including pictures, recordings, medical records, and police reports are also very important to have. Include cash if you can and any other valuable that you don't want to leave behind. Keep in mind that large items like furniture might not be possible to hide.

Find a safe place to hide these — with a friend, relative, and/or another place the abuser cannot access.

IF YOU ARE IN THE HOME DURING AN INCIDENT:

- Avoid rooms with no exits, like bathrooms and closets. Also, avoid rooms with weapons, like the kitchen.

- Get to a room with a door or a window to escape.
- If it is possible, lock the abuser outside. Call 911.
- Get medical attention if you are hurt.
- If you have contact with the police, get the name and badge number of the officer(s).
- Contact a domestic violence program, the National Domestic Violence Hotline (800-799-7233), or go to a safehouse.

IF YOU HAVE CHILDREN:

- Create a safety plan appropriate for their age. If children are old enough, have them get out of the house and alert a neighbor (that you have already contacted, is safe, knows about your situation, and is willing to help), and call 911.
- Practice the safety plan with your children.
- Instruct them not to get physically involved in the incident and instead “go” to their safe place (already established).
- If going to a safe place or neighbor’s house is not possible, teach them to call 911.
- Have older children take younger children to a safer room in the house, already established.

IF YOU HAVE PETS:

If you are planning to stay with the abuser:

- Keep emergency provisions for your pet in case your abuser withholds money. Keep the phone number of the nearest 24-hour emergency veterinary clinic.
- Establish ownership of your pet by creating a paper trail (i.e., obtain a license, have veterinarian records put in your name).

If you are planning to leave the abuser:

- Obtain safe emergency shelter for pet, somewhere that won't be disclosed to your abuser (e.g. veterinarian, friend, family, or a safe haven for pets program)

- Pack a bag for your pet that includes: food, medicine, documents of ownership (receipts from adoption or purchase of pet, license to establish ownership, receipts for animal purchases), health documents (veterinary and vaccination records), a leash, an ID and rabies tag if you have a dog or cat (these will also help establish ownership), pet carrier, toys and/or bedding.
- If you must leave without your pet, remember to leave enough food, fresh bedding, litter, etc. for them.

If you have left the abuser:

- Keep pets indoors (if possible). Do not let the pet outside alone.
- Pick a safe route and time to walk your pet. Do not exercise/walk your pet alone.
- Change your veterinarian.

Sources: The People's Law of Maryland, Ahimsa House

IF YOU ARE NOT IN THE RELATIONSHIP

- Change your phone number and other contact information.
- Consider getting a restraining/protective order. Speak to an advocate and find out if that is a good option for you—every situation is different.
- Screen your calls.
- Save and document all contact, messages, injuries, or other incidents involving the abuser.
- Change your locks.
- Avoid being alone.
- Plan how to get away if confronted by the abuser.
- If you have to meet the abuser do it in a public place.
- Vary your routine.

- If you have a restraining or protective order, always have a copy with you. Leave a copy at work. If you have children, leave a copy at your children's school and every place your children might spend time (childcare center, grandparents, friends, etc.).
- Find out if there is a domestic violence response policy at your work place and ask questions if you don't understand how it works.
- Consider joining a support group at a local domestic violence program.

When leaving an abusive relationship, it is important to take with you the documents that you will need to get the resources and help you will require. You will need your driver's license, passport, and birth certificate to verify your identity. Other important documents you will need include: social security cards (for yourself and any children), leases and deeds (that have your name attached), credit and debit cards, pay stubs, w-2s, insurance policies, bank statements, and check books. Also, take any documentation that you might have about the abuse including pictures, recordings, medical records, and police reports. Never take the risk of being alone with the abuser when retrieving your things; ask for a police escort or bring friends with you.