

CREATING YOUR OWN SAFE HAVEN: Exercise Your Domestic Violence Safety Plan

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The format of a Domestic Violence Safety Plan may vary; however the goals remain the same; Have a plan, and follow your plan. For Domestic Violence Survivors your safety plan becomes your bible, to live by! YOUR SAFETY PLAN JUST MAY SAVE YOUR LIFE!

- 1) Domestic Violence can be extremely traumatic and have a long impact. For every victim there is at least one co-victim (child, parent, sibling, neighbor, co-worker, etc.). The Domestic Violence Safety Plan should also take into consideration the co-victim. Strive to become a survivor of your situation, think and act positive. Carrying the abuse close to your vest will only keep you connected to negative forces. Most abusers are successful because they isolate their victims. Therefore, you should share your experiences with your close friends, sister(s), mother, counselor, doctor, and/or spiritual advisor, anyone with whom you feel close to and has earned your trust. If your trusted circle has not heard from within a specific period of time, they should know to either call 911, come to your home or, send the Police to your home. If you are not able to get to a phone, we suggest you turn the front porch light on or leave the blinds opened. Make sure there is a signal that can alert someone to your emergency situation. If leaving the location of the abuse is not possible, go to the safest area inside of your location and as far away from the abuser as possible; make yourself physically smaller and refrain from engaging in verbal challenges.
- 2) Children should know how or when they should call 911. Have you created a safety plan for your child, using language they can understand? Children become the co-victim in violent relationships and may either become emotionally or physically trapped in the middle of the violence. In a situation that becomes escalated, it is often the child who gets fatally injured. Victims frequently will stay in the relationship for the sake of their child but it is not in the child's best interest to be captured in the middle of an abusive and dramatic relationship. It is not the breakup which causes conflict for the child, it is the degree of violence within the breakup which may have a negative and lasting impact.
- 3) At some point you may need to leave your home in a hurry to avoid injury to yourself, co-victim or the abuser. What is your exit plan? Will you use the back door, the garage door, an upstairs window, or balcony? We suggest you to have extra set of car-keys in a place only known to you, make it a habit to back your car into your parking spot, and keep your car filled with at least a half of tank of gas. Pack a to-go bag for yourself and your children. Have your important documents (birth certificates, social security cards, passports, shot records, school records, bank records, court orders, etc.); copies work but the originals are always better. Keep your important documents in a safe place such as a bank or post office lock box. Have you rehearsed an exit drill? If you need to live with someone temporarily, determine if this person is known by the abuser, and can you trust this person not to share your safety plan. The safest place to go is a place/person not known to the abuser; this person should avoid having regular contact with you and absolutely no contact with the abuser. You should

form an action plan with your contact and rehearse it for the day that you will need to put your plan into action.

4) You should have a checking or savings account with only your name on the account and do not have the statements sent to the family address or computer. Statements should go to a post office box that hopefully by now you have rented. As often as possible, put as much money as you can into your savings account. Choose an amount that will not draw attention that money being taken from the family. This account will be of value if and when you have to exercise your emergency plan.

5) If you need to file a Civil Protection Order (CPO), please follow through with the order. The major mistake so many domestic violence victims make is not to following through with the protection order. At times the parties involved will go back and forth so often that it leads to a toxic relationship, and it takes away from the credibility of the CPO. Each time the abuser is allowed to return to the relationship the abusive behavior intensifies and so does the control and manipulation.

The victim may fail to realize it is the timeframe of exiting the relationship which is the most dangerous and sometimes even deadly. In some cases, it has taken up to 7 incidents of abuse before deciding to make a final exit. In case of an emergency, you should have copies of your CPO with you at all times. Keep copies at your workplace, in your purse or backpack, in your car, and at your child's school in their student files. It should be noted, that during domestic disputes, that the other party involved is not permitted to take the children in common from school. Making the school or schools aware of the situation and the CPO is most ideal. Frequently victims who have filed a CPO continue to have contact with the abuser. Due to the victim having had a trusting relationship they share confidential information (that may have been changed for their safety) with the abuser; while jeopardizing themselves and others.

6) While going through such a life altering event such as leaving an abusive relationship, finding an advocate for domestic violence may be a safe outlet for seeking emotional and community support. Domestic Violence advocates can offer assistance through the judicial process, and contact organizations such as social services to access quicker assistance. Advocates can also help you find shelter if you begin to feel like your emergency contact person is no longer an option. It may be difficult for you to reach out for help, but you may find that your victim's advocate can offer information, support, and access to helpful services not known to you.

7) Getting well again after the trauma of domestic abuse may be difficult but you will make it through. Often people ask, how long will recovery take? There is no definite answer or timeframe. We are all individuals and we have different needs. Everyone responds to situations differently; there is not one script designed for healing. It is important that you go through the process, pay attention to your emotions, and seek professional support. You must also surround yourself with nurturing and loving family and friends who will motivate your effort and respect your desire to seek change. Remember you have gone through an extremely difficult period and there is a survivor in you. First, you should work to regain feelings of safety and mental stability. Secondly, in this phase you have to

work through painful memories such as what the relationship was prior to the abuse while taking pride in the person you have become. Thirdly, you have to release the trauma of the past and feel good about the life you created for yourself or any co-victims. This is the time for you to embrace the fact that you escaped this event and that you have started a new beginning.