

Safety Plan

When you are in an abusive relationship or you have left, there are ways in which you can ensure your safety and that of your children.

This is a general guideline. It does not fit all women and all circumstances.

You are the only one who knows your partner more than anyone. You are aware of the things that trigger his violence most. Sometimes, you are forced to lie or play along for your own safety. This does not mean that you are submissive. It means you are strategic. You are dealing with your situation in the best way you know how to ensure your safety as you plan an exit.

It is important to remember the following:

- You are not to blame for the violence. There is nothing that you have done or not done to warrant physical or any kind of abuse against you. Violence is a choice that your abuser makes. Men beat up women because they can; because society fails to hold them accountable, because a woman is perceived to be a man's property.
- You are not responsible for your partner's violent behaviour. Very often women blame themselves for the violence e.g. if only I was a good wife etc. There is nothing that you could have done or not done to stop the violence.
- You may not be a perfect mother but you are doing your best. No one is perfect. You are doing your part in taking care of your children under very difficult circumstances.
- If you are addicted to drugs or alcohol to numb the pain, don't blame yourself for it. Rather, seek help to deal with the addiction.
- If you have left and you miss him, that is normal. You shared special moments or time with him. With time, you will get used to your new life. What is important is to find time and space to heal. If you fail to do so, there is a chance that you may either go back to him or attract a man who may abuse you either physically or emotionally.

Things that you can do in advance to prepare for your exit:

- Make a photocopy of all important documents e.g. ID, Passport, birth certificates, health cards, driver's license, marriage certificate, picture of yourself, children and your partner, and any other important documents. Keep that in a file, preferably away from home e.g. at your office or with a friend or relative.
- Pack a suitcase with yours and the children's clothes and toys. If you or your children are on medication, include space pack in the suitcase. Only pack your immediate needs, it may be difficult to run with a big suitcase if and when the need arises. If you have someone you can trust, arrange to leave the packed suitcase at their place.
- Organise spare keys – house, car and any other important areas that you may require access to at a later stage.
- If you have a joint bank account with your partner, it may help to open a separate bank account in which you save money for rainy days.
- Plan your emergency exits carefully, including mode of transport. For instance, you may arrange with someone to pick you up at a particular spot when you need to be on the run.
- When you leave, take children if you can.

- If you have left in a hurry and you need to pick up essentials from home, the police can escort you to collect your belongings.
- Change your passwords; you may also need to create a new email address. Internet safety is as important as safety in a physical environment.
- If you have older children, it may help to speak with them openly. Be careful of how much you reveal to them about your exit plan.
- Before you even leave, do some research about where to go to for counselling. You are going to need support more when you leave. There are times when you will feel like going back to a violent situation because life outside of your home might be difficult.
- If your partner is allowed access to the children and you do not feel comfortable around him, you can arrange for supervised access. A social worker or counsellor will be able to advise on this.
- The most important thing is to be gentle with yourself. There is already a lot of violence you are dealing with. The least you can do is to not be violent towards yourself.