

Neighbours, Friends and Families

Safety Planning for Women Who are Abused

Are you experiencing abuse by your partner, but aren't sure how to protect yourself or how to leave?

The person who gave you this brochure is concerned about your safety and may have noticed some possible warning signs of abuse. They want you to know they support you and that, although you cannot control your partner's violence, you may be able to increase your own safety and that of your children.

This brochure describes the actions you can take to protect your safety and the safety of your children, and describes how you can develop a plan to leave.

Neighbours, Friends and Families is a campaign to raise awareness of the signs of woman abuse so that people who are at risk have access to the support they need.

Everyone in the community has a role to play in helping to prevent woman abuse. You can reach out to organizations in your community to support you.

This campaign is a partnership between the Ontario government, Ontario Women's Directorate and the Expert Panel on Neighbours, Friends and Families, through the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children.



Developing a Safety Plan

Safety planning is a top priority, whether you choose to remain in the home or leave. Making a safety plan involves identifying actions to increase your safety and that of your children.

Below are some suggestions that might be helpful to you. Take one action at a time and start with the one that is easiest and safest for you.

Protecting yourself while living with an abuser:

- Tell someone you trust about the abuse.
- Think about your partner's past use and level of force. This will help you predict what type of danger you and your children are facing and when to leave.
- Tell your children that abuse is never right, even when someone they love is being abusive. Tell them the abuse isn't your fault or their fault; they did not cause it, and neither did you. Teach them it is important to keep safe when there is abuse.
- Plan where to go in an emergency. Teach your children how to get help. Tell them not to get between you and your partner if there is violence. Plan a code word to signal they should get help or leave.
- Don't run to a place where the children are, as your partner may hurt them as well.
- Create a plan to get out of your home safely and practise it with your children.
- Ask your neighbours, friends and family to call the police if they hear sounds of abuse and to look after your children in an emergency.
- If an argument is developing, move to a space where you can get outside easily. Don't go to a room where there is access to potential weapons (e.g. kitchen, workshop, bathroom).
- If you are being hurt, protect your face with your arms around each side of your head, with your fingers locked together. Don't wear scarves or long jewellery.
- Park your car by backing it into the driveway and keep it fuelled.
- Hide your keys, cell phone and some money near your escape route.
- Have a list of phone numbers to call for help. Call the police if it is an emergency. Your local shelter or police may be able to equip you with a panic button/cell phone.
- Make sure all weapons and ammunition are hidden or removed from your home.

Getting Ready to Leave

When you are planning to leave, here are some suggestions:

- Contact the police or a local women's shelter. Let the staff know that you intend to leave an abusive situation and ask for support in safety planning. Ask for an officer who specializes in woman abuse cases (information shared with the police may result in charges being laid against the abuser).
- If you are injured, go to a doctor or an emergency room and report what happened to you. Ask them to document your visit.
- Gather important documents: identification, bank cards, financial papers related to family assets, last Canada Income Tax Return, keys, medication, pictures of the abuser and your children, passports, health cards, personal address/telephone book, cell phone, and legal documents (e.g. immigration papers, house deed/lease, restraining orders/peace bonds).

Getting Ready to Leave

- If you can't keep these things stored in your home for fear your partner will find them, consider making copies and leave them with someone you trust. Your local women's shelter will also keep them for you.
- Consult a lawyer. Keep any evidence of physical abuse (such as photos). Keep a journal of all violent incidents, noting dates, events, threats and any witnesses.
- Put together pictures, jewellery and objects of sentimental value, as well as toys and comforts for your children.
- Arrange with someone to care for your pets temporarily, until you get settled. A shelter may help with this.
- Remember to clear your phone of the last number you called to avoid his utilizing redial.

Leaving the Abuser

Here are some suggestions for your personal safety when you leave:

- Request a police escort or ask a friend, neighbour or family member to accompany you when you leave.
- Contact your local women's shelter. It may be a safer temporary spot than going to a place your partner knows.
- Do not tell your partner you are leaving. Leave quickly.
- Have a back-up plan if your partner finds out where you are going.

After Leaving

Here are some actions you should take after you or your partner has left the relationship:

- Visit the closest police station and ask to speak to an officer who specializes in woman abuse cases.
- Consider applying for a restraining order or peace bond that may help keep your partner away from you and your children. Keep it with you at all times.
- Provide police with a copy of any legal orders you have.
- Consult a lawyer or legal aid clinic about actions to protect yourself or your children. Let your lawyer know if there are any Criminal Court proceedings.
- Consider changing any service provider that you share with your ex-partner.
- Obtain an unlisted telephone number, get caller ID and block your number when calling out.
- Make sure your children's school or day care centre is aware of the situation and has copies of all relevant documents.

- Carry a photo of the abuser and your children with you.
- Ask your neighbours to look after your children in an emergency and to call the police if they see the abuser.
- Take extra precautions at work, at home and in the community. Consider telling your supervisor at work about your situation.
- Think about places and patterns that your ex-partner will know about and try to change them. For example, consider using a different grocery store or place of worship.
- If you feel unsafe walking alone, ask a neighbour, friend or family member to accompany you.
- Do not return to your home unless accompanied by the police. Never confront the abuser.

The Assaulted Women's Helpline at **1-866-863-0511** offers a 24-hour telephone and TTY **1-866-863-7868** crisis line for abused women in Ontario. The service is anonymous and confidential and the toll-free number won't show up on your phone bill. Services can be provided in up to 154 languages.

Helpline staff can support you in doing additional safety planning, finding space for you in a local women's shelter, or connecting you with other services in your community.

For more information about the services of the Assaulted Women's Helpline visit: **www.awhl.org** If you are concerned about your immediate safety, call the police.

*Most Ontarians feel a personal responsibility for reducing woman abuse...and recognizing it is the first step. Take the warning signs seriously. For further information visit: **www.neighboursfriendsandfamilies.on.ca***