

A SAFETY PLAN FOR ESCAPING ABUSE

*How to Leave Safely When
You're Ready*



FREE 2 REST

A MESSAGE FOR YOU

If you're reading this, I want you to know something first:

You are not alone.

You are not to blame.

And you deserve to be safe.

**KEEP THIS PLAN
IN A SAFE PLACE**

Leaving an abusive situation is one of the most dangerous and most courageous things a person can do. The decision to leave is deeply personal, and only you know when the time is right.

This guide isn't here to pressure you. It's here to prepare you.

Because when you're ready, having a plan can mean the difference between escape and entrapment. Between safety and danger. Between surviving and thriving.

Whether you leave today, next month, or next year – this information is yours to keep. Read it. Save it. Share it with someone who needs it.



BEFORE WE BEGIN: IMPORTANT SAFETY NOTES

If You're Reading This on a Shared Device

Your internet activity may be monitored. Abusers often check browsing history, emails, and phone records.

To protect yourself:

- Use a device your abuser doesn't have access to (library computer, trusted friend's phone, work computer)
- Use a private/incognito browser window
- Clear your browsing history after reading
- If you need to leave this page quickly, know where the exit button is
- Consider telling someone you trust that you're making a safety plan

If You're in Immediate Danger

This guide is for planning ahead. If you're in immediate danger right now:

- Call emergency services (911 in North America, 999 in the UK, 000 in Australia)
- If you can't speak, many emergency lines accept text or allow you to stay silent
- Go to the nearest safe place — neighbour, public building, police station
- If possible, take your children with you

Steps to think about when leaving an abusive situation

- Part 1: Understanding the danger of leaving
- Part 2: The planning phase
- Part 3: Leaving day
- Part 4: After leaving and ongoing safety
- Part 5: Special Considerations
- Part 6: Resources



PART 1: UNDERSTANDING THE DANGER OF LEAVING

Why Leaving Is the Most Dangerous Time

This is difficult to say, but important to understand:

The most dangerous time in an abusive relationship is when you leave — or when the abuser believes you're about to leave.

Research consistently shows that the risk of serious harm or death increases significantly during separation. This isn't meant to scare you into staying. It's meant to help you understand why careful planning matters.

Abusers often escalate when they feel they're losing control. This is why a safety plan isn't optional — it's essential.

Signs It May Be Time to Leave

Only you can decide when it's time. But these signs may indicate the danger is escalating:

- The abuse is becoming more frequent or severe
- Threats are becoming more specific ("I'll kill you if you leave")
- Weapons are present or have been used as threats
- Your abuser is becoming more controlling or jealous
- You're increasingly isolated from friends and family
- Your abuser has hurt or threatened your children or pets
- Your abuser has threatened suicide if you leave
- You feel afraid for your life or your children's lives
- Your instincts are telling you it's time

Trust yourself. If something inside you says it's time to go — listen.



PART 2: THE PLANNING PHASE

Creating Your Safety Plan

A safety plan is a personalised, practical guide for protecting yourself before, during, and after leaving. It should be flexible and realistic for your specific situation.

Important: Keep your safety plan hidden. Memorise key details if possible. Store written copies somewhere your abuser won't find them — with a trusted friend, at work, in a locker, or in a secure digital location.

Step 1: Identify Your Support Network

You need people who can help. This might include:

- A trusted friend or family member who believes you
- A domestic violence advocate or counsellor
- A faith leader who understands abuse (not one who will pressure you to stay)
- A coworker or supervisor
- A neighbour
- A domestic violence hotline

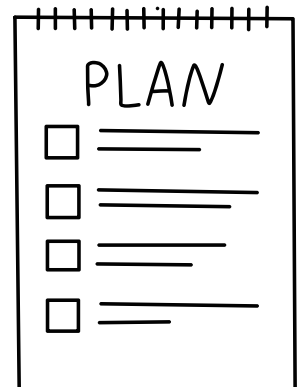
Be strategic about who you tell:

- Not everyone will understand or respond well
- Some people may unintentionally (or intentionally) tell your abuser
- Choose people who have demonstrated trustworthiness
- Consider telling people in different areas of your life

Establish code words:

Create a code word or phrase with trusted people that signals you need help. For example:

- "Can you pick up milk?" = I need you to call police
- "I'm feeling tired today" = I need to leave now, come get me
- A specific emoji in a text = Call for help



ARRANGING A PLACE TO STAY

Where can I stay to stay safe?	Notes:
I have to leave my home quickly, where can I go immediately?	
If I cannot go to the location above, where else can I go?	
Who can I stay with for a longer period of time?	
Who can lend me some money?	
My local violence helpline number is:	
My local shelter, counselling and immediate support number is:	

Step 2: Gather Important Documents

Start collecting copies of important documents. If you can't get originals, copies are better than nothing.

Identity Documents:

- Passport (yours and children's)
- Birth certificates (yours and children's)
- Social insurance / national insurance / social security cards
- Immigration documents (visa, work permit, permanent residence card, citizenship papers)
- Driver's licence or government ID
- Marriage certificate
- Divorce or custody papers (if applicable)

Financial Documents:

- Bank statements
- Credit card statements
- Tax returns (last 2-3 years)
- Pay stubs or proof of income
- Property deeds or lease agreements
- Vehicle registration and insurance
- Loan documents
- Pension or retirement account statements

Medical Records:

- Health insurance cards
- Prescription information
- Medical records (especially documentation of injuries)
- Children's immunisation records
- Records of any mental health treatment

Legal Documents:

- Existing protection/restraining orders
- Police reports
- Any documentation of abuse (photos, texts, emails, journal entries)
- Names and contact information for lawyers

Other Important Items:

- House keys, car keys, office keys (consider making copies)
- Photos of valuable items for insurance purposes
- Children's school records
- Pet vaccination records

Where to store these documents:

- With a trusted friend or family member
- In a safety deposit box (if you have private access)
- At your workplace (locked drawer or locker)
- Scanned and stored in a secure email account your abuser doesn't know about
- With a domestic violence organization

Step 3: Financial Preparation

Financial abuse often accompanies other forms of abuse. Preparing financially can be challenging but is crucial for independence.

If you have access to money:

- Open a bank account in your name only at a different bank
- Have statements sent to a safe address or go paperless
- Start saving small amounts when you can — even small amounts add up
- Keep cash hidden in a safe place (with a friend, in a tampon box, taped inside a book)
- Get a credit card in your name only if possible

If you have no access to money:

- Know that shelters and organisations can help even if you have nothing
- Look into emergency assistance programs in your area
- Some organisations provide emergency funds for survivors
- Legal aid may be available for divorce and custody proceedings

Document financial abuse:

- Keep records of being denied access to money
- Note any debts your abuser has put in your name
- Document any income or assets your abuser is hiding

Remember: You may be entitled to half of marital assets. Leaving doesn't mean giving up your financial rights.

Step 4: Plan Your Exit

Choose a time to leave:

- When your abuser is away (at work, travelling, out with friends)
- When you have a plausible reason to be out (doctor's appointment, work)
- Avoid leaving during an argument if possible — emotions are high and the abuser is alert
- Have a backup plan in case your first opportunity falls through

Choose where to go:

- A domestic violence shelter (call ahead to confirm availability)
- A trusted friend or family member your abuser doesn't know well
- A hotel or motel (pay with cash if possible)
- A different city or region if you have support there
- Temporary housing through a domestic violence organisation

Plan your transportation:

- If you have a car, keep it fueled and facing outward for quick exit
- Know bus, train, or taxi options
- Ask a trusted person to pick you up at a specific location
- Have a backup transportation plan

Plan for children:

- If possible, take your children with you when you leave
- Leaving children behind can complicate custody later
- Notify schools about the situation and who is authorised for pickup
- Bring comfort items for children (favourite toy, blanket)
- Prepare age-appropriate explanations

Plan for pets:

- Many abusers harm pets to control victims

- Some shelters accept pets; others have partner organisations for temporary pet housing
- Ask a trusted friend or family member to care for your pet
- Contact local animal shelters about safe housing programs

MAKING SAFETY ARRANGEMENTS

Check off items on this list as you make your plans.

Safety arrangements	Name on contact person(s)/Notes:
I will leave money, an extra set of keys and clothes with...	
I will photocopy my important documents, and leave them with...	
I will tell people I trust about the violence and request that they call the police if they hear suspicious noises coming from my house...	
I will sit down and review my safety plan periodically in order to plan the safest way to leave the residence. This person (support worker or friend) has agreed to help me review this plan...	
I will open my own savings account (if I don't already have one).	
I will teach my children how to use the telephone to contact the police in case of an emergency.	
I will establish and use a code word with my children, friends or health care provider so they can call for help (eg. if you call your midwife to report X, the midwife knows and always agrees to assess you in person at the hospital).	
I understand how important it is to be able to communicate by phone and text. I also understand that these communications are not private.	

Step 5: Pack an Emergency Bag

Prepare a bag with essentials that you can grab quickly. Keep it hidden somewhere accessible — at a friend's house, in your car, at work, or in a spot your abuser won't look.

What to include:

Documents:

- All the documents listed in Step 2
- Your safety plan

Money:

- Cash (as much as you can safely save)
- Credit/debit card if you have one in your name
- Chequebook

Keys:

- House, car, work, safety deposit box
- Keys to your new location if applicable

Phone:

- A prepaid phone your abuser doesn't know about (if possible)
- Charger
- Important phone numbers written down (in case phone is lost)

Clothing:

- Change of clothes for you and children
- Comfortable shoes
- Weather-appropriate items

Toiletries:

- Basic hygiene items
- Prescription medications (at least a week's supply)
- Glasses or contact lenses

Children's items:

- Diapers, formula if needed
- Comfort item (stuffed animal, blanket)
- Snacks
- Small toys or books

Other:

- Photos of you and your children
- Small items of sentimental value
- Phone charger
- Snacks and water
- Small amount of jewellery that could be sold if needed

Step 6: Digital Safety

Abusers often use technology to monitor and control. This is one of the most overlooked aspects of safety planning.

Phone safety:

- Your abuser may have access to your phone records or location through a family plan
- Consider getting a prepaid phone they don't know about
- Check your phone for tracking apps or spyware
- Turn off location sharing on social media and apps
- Change passwords only when you're ready to leave (changing too early may alert them)

Computer safety:

- Use a computer your abuser doesn't have access to for sensitive searches
- Use private/incognito browsing mode
- Clear browsing history if you must use a shared computer
- Be aware that keystroke loggers and monitoring software exist
- Check your email for any forwarding rules you didn't set up

Social media safety:

- Review your privacy settings
- Be careful about location tagging in posts
- Be cautious about who can see your friends list
- Be cautious about accepting new friend requests
- After leaving, consider creating new accounts with different names/emails

After leaving:

- Change all passwords (email, banking, social media)
- Enable two-factor authentication where possible
- Consider a new phone and number
- Be cautious about apps that share location (fitness trackers, Find My Phone)
- Check your car for tracking devices (GPS trackers can be hidden)
- Let your workplace know about the situation for security purposes

Step 7: Legal Preparation

Protection/Restraining Orders:

- In most regions, you can apply for an emergency protection order
- These orders can require your abuser to stay away from you, your home, your workplace, and your children's school
- Violating a protection order is a criminal offense
- An advocate can help you navigate this process
- Orders can be obtained before, during, or after leaving

Custody Considerations:

- Document any abuse of children
- Courts generally consider domestic violence in custody decisions
- Try not to leave without your children if possible
- Consult a lawyer before leaving if you can

Documentation:

- Keep a record of all incidents of abuse (dates, times, what happened, any witnesses)
- Photograph injuries (with a timestamp)
- Save threatening messages, emails, voicemails
- Keep copies in a safe location
- This documentation can be crucial for court proceedings

Finding legal help:

- Legal aid services offer free or low-cost help for domestic violence survivors
- Many lawyers offer free consultations
- Domestic violence organisations can refer you to sympathetic lawyers
- Some areas have specialised domestic violence courts

PART 3: LEAVING DAY

When It's Time to Go

You've planned. You're ready. Here's what to do on the day you leave.

Before leaving the house:

- Stay calm (your abuser may notice changes in your behaviour)
- Grab your emergency bag if you have one
- If you don't have a bag packed, take what you can safely
- Take your children if possible
- If you can't take everything, prioritise: documents, money, medications, children's essentials

If you need to leave during a violent incident:

- Get out however you can, your safety is the priority
- Go to a neighbour, public place, or anywhere safe
- Call emergency services
- Don't go back into the house until police are present
- You can collect belongings later with a police escort

After leaving the house:

- Go directly to your planned safe location
- Don't tell anyone who might inform your abuser where you are
- Call your support person to let them know you're safe
- Call a domestic violence hotline for additional guidance
- Begin implementing your safety plan

If you're leaving while your abuser is present:

- This is risky, only do this if you must
- Have an excuse ready ("I'm going to the store")
- Take only what you would normally take so nothing looks suspicious
- Go directly to safety
- Don't return

SAFETY DURING A VIOLENT INCIDENT

I cannot always avoid violent incidents. To increase my safety, I can use a variety of different strategies.

I can use some or all of the following safety strategies:

Strategies to increase my safety	Be specific
When I expect we are going to argue, I will try to move to a space that is the lowest risk, such as (eg, near a phone I can use to call for help).	
If I decide to leave, I will practice how to get out safely. <ul style="list-style-type: none">● What doors, windows, elevators, stairwells or fire escapes would you use?● Consider your physical stamina and abilities as well as those of anyone who may need to leave with you (eg. young children)	
I will keep my pre-packed bag of identification, money and keys where I can grab it and leave quickly. This place is...	

PART 4: AFTER LEAVING — ONGOING SAFETY

The Danger Isn't Over

Leaving is a huge accomplishment. But the period after leaving requires continued vigilance.

Immediate Steps After Leaving

Secure your location:

- Don't share your address with anyone who might tell your abuser
- Consider staying with people your abuser doesn't know
- If staying with known contacts, discuss safety measures
- If in a shelter, follow their security protocols

Apply for a protection order:

- This creates legal consequences if your abuser contacts you
- Include your workplace, children's schools, and anywhere you frequent
- Carry a copy with you at all times
- Give copies to your employer, children's school, etc.

Notify important people and places:

- Children's school/daycare (provide a photo of the abuser, list of approved pickup persons)
- Your workplace (building security, supervisor)
- Your landlord if applicable
- Your doctor, therapist, etc.
- Trusted neighbours at your new location

Change your routines:

- Vary your routes to work, school, etc.
- Change the times you come and go when possible
- Be aware of your surroundings
- Shop at different stores than you used to

Create a safety plan for your new home:

- Change the locks
- Consider a security system or cameras
- Know your exits
- Have a plan if your abuser shows up (call police immediately, go to a neighbour)
- Keep your phone charged at all times

Handling Contact After Leaving

If your abuser contacts you:

- Don't respond — this gives them attention and keeps the door open
- Save all messages, emails, voicemails (evidence for police/court)
- Report violations of protection orders to police
- Block their number and email if it's safe to do so
- Tell a trusted person about every contact attempt

The "hoovering" phase:

Abusers often try to draw you back with:

- Apologies and promises to change
- Declarations of love
- Threats of self-harm or suicide

- Using children to communicate
- Sending gifts or showing up at your door
- Having friends or family contact you on their behalf

Remember: Abuse is a pattern, not a moment. Promises made after you leave rarely lead to lasting change.

If you share children:

- Arrange custody exchanges in public places or through a third party
- Consider supervised visitation if there's a safety risk
- Document any concerning behaviour during exchanges
- Use a parenting app (like OurFamilyWizard) to keep communication in writing
- Don't discuss your personal life during exchanges

Taking Care of Yourself After Leaving

Emotional recovery:

- What you experienced was real and serious
- Trauma responses are normal — you're not "crazy"
- Give yourself grace; healing takes time
- Consider counselling with a trauma-informed therapist
- Join a support group for survivors

Practical recovery:

- Focus on stability (housing, income, routines)
- Build your support network
- Access resources available to survivors (housing assistance, legal aid, job training)
- Take things one day at a time

For your children:

- Children are resilient but may need support
- Maintain routines when possible
- Consider counselling for children
- Answer their questions honestly and age-appropriately
- Reassure them it's not their fault

SAFETY IN MY RESIDENCE AFTER LEAVING THE ABUSER

There are many things that I can do to increase safety at home. It may be impossible to do everything at once, especially if cost is a barrier, I live in an apartment, or I can't make any changes to my residence, but safety measures can be added step by step.

Safety measures to increase safety at home	Details
I can change the locks on my doors and windows as soon as possible.	
I can replace wooden doors with steel/metal doors.	
I can install security systems including additional locks, window bars, poles to wedge against doors, an alarm system, etc.	
I can purchase rope ladders to be used for escape from second floor windows if they would enhance our safety.	
I can install smoke detectors and purchase fire extinguishers for each floor in my house/ apartment.	
I can install an outside lighting system that lights up when a person is coming close to my house.	
I can contact this person to help with purchasing these items...	
I can contact this person to help with installing....	
I will teach my children how to use the telephone to make a collect call to me and to call this person (friend/family member/other) in case my partner takes the children....	
I will teach my children how to not disclose our address and phone number to people including (list the people)....	

<p>I will provide a list of people who can pick up my children. I will say that my partner/ex partner is not permitted to pick them up. If I am asked for legal documents to back up my request, I will provide them if necessary.</p> <p>The people I will inform about pick-up permission include (name them):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● School:● Day care:● Babysitter:● Teacher:● Other(s)	
<p>I can inform the following neighbours and friends that my partner no longer lives with me and they should call the police if my partner is seen near my residence.</p>	
<p>If I need to call the police, I will give them the following information about my partner/ex-partner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Name:● Birth date:● Physical description including:● Height:● Weight:● Hair colour:● Facial hair:● Tattoos:● Scars:● The type of vehicle they drive:● Vehicle license plate number:	
<p>I can take steps to ensure the confidentiality of certain documents by using a PO Box or alternate address, or setting up a password with certain institutions to ensure only I can access my personal information.</p> <p>The documents I will change may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Bills:● Utilities:● Car registration:● Taxes:● Bank accounts:	

SAFETY AT WORK AND IN PUBLIC

People who have experienced intimate partner violence must decide if and when to tell others about the violence, and that they may be at continued risk. Trusted friends, family, and co-workers can help. You should consider carefully which people are supportive and helpful.

I might do any or all of the following:

Things I can do to stay safe at work and in public	Names/Notes:
I can choose to inform my boss and other people at work of my situation.	
I can ask this person to help screen my telephone calls at work.	
When leaving work, I can do this:	
When on my way home, I will be ready to call 911 immediately if my abuser appears.	
I can use different grocery stores and shopping malls and shop at hours that are different than those that I used when residing with the abuser.	
I can use a different bank and take care of my banking at hours different from those I used previously.	
I can also do this...	

PART 5: SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Immigration Status

If you're a newcomer or your immigration status is tied to your abuser:

- Know that you have rights regardless of your status
- Many countries have provisions for domestic violence survivors to stay legally
- Leaving your abuser does not automatically mean deportation
- Speak with an immigration lawyer or a domestic violence organisation that serves immigrants

Country-specific information:

- Canada: Victims of family violence may apply for permanent residence under humanitarian and compassionate grounds
- US: The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) allows certain immigrants to self-petition
- UK: The Domestic Violence Rule allows victims on partner visas to apply for indefinite leave

Don't let your abuser's threats about your status keep you trapped. Get proper legal advice about your options.

Faith Communities

For many of us, faith is central to our lives. But faith can sometimes be used to keep us in abusive situations.

Misused messages:

- "Marriage is forever"
- "God hates divorce"
- "Submit to your husband"
- "Forgive and reconcile"
- "What God has joined, let no one separate"

The truth:

- God does not condone abuse
- Your safety and your children's safety matter
- Many scriptures speak against oppression and cruelty
- Leaving an abuser is not the same as abandoning a marriage — abuse breaks the covenant
- You can maintain your faith while protecting yourself

Finding supportive faith communities:

- Look for faith leaders who have training in domestic violence
- Some organisations specialise in helping survivors within faith communities
- You don't have to choose between God and safety — you can have both

Disabled Survivors

Survivors with disabilities may face additional barriers:

- Dependence on the abuser for physical care
- Isolation and limited access to help
- Lack of accessible shelters or services
- Being told "no one else would take care of you"
- Having disability benefits controlled by the abuser

Know this:

- You have the right to independence and safety
- Advocates can help arrange alternative care
- Accessible shelters exist or can make accommodations
- Your disability does not mean you must tolerate abuse

Older Survivors

For those who have been in abusive relationships for decades:

- It's never too late to leave
- Your age doesn't diminish your right to safety
- Services exist specifically for older survivors
- Starting over is possible at any age
- You deserve peace in this chapter of your life

SAFETY AND MY EMOTIONAL HEALTH

The experience of intimate partner violence is exhausting and emotionally draining. The process of moving forward takes much courage and energy.

To conserve my emotional energy and resources, I can do some of the following:

Things I can do to support my emotional health	Notes:
If I feel down and want to return to a potentially abusive situation, I can do these things instead:	
When I have to communicate with my (ex) partner in person or by telephone, I can do this:	
I can call these people for support:	
Other things I can do to help me feel stronger are:	
To gain support and strengthen my relationships with other people, I can attend workshops and support groups or do these things:	

PART 6: RESOURCES

Emergency Helplines

- HotPeachPages.net — Global directory of domestic violence agencies
- Visit our [Resource Hub - Free 2 Rest](#) for our directory on how to find support.

Additional Resources

For immigrants:

- Contact local immigrant services organizations
- Speak with immigration lawyers who specialize in domestic violence cases

In the case of an emergency, I will immediately call 911 or the police.

This is a free call from all phones (landlines, cell phones and pay phones)

- *Landline – even if you can't speak, leave it off the hook and the police can locate you*
- *Cell phone – say your location first*

Whether day or night, I will contact my local, provincial or territorial crisis line if I need immediate crisis

support or a referral to a program or service.

I can fill out the table below with service providers in my community that can help me.

Service Provider	Contact Person	Phone Number and/or Email Address

QUICK REFERENCE: EMERGENCY EXIT CHECKLIST

Documents

- Passport (yours and children's)
- Birth certificates
- Immigration documents
- Social insurance/security cards
- Driver's licence
- Marriage certificate
- Custody papers
- Bank statements
- Tax returns
- Medical records
- Evidence of abuse

Money

- Cash
- Debit/credit card in your name
- Chequebook

Keys

- House keys
- Car keys
- Work keys
- New location keys

Essentials

- Phone and charger
- Prepaid phone (if possible)
- Important phone numbers written down
- Change of clothes
- Toiletries
- Prescription medications
- Glasses/contacts

Children's Items

- Comfort item
- Diapers/formula
- Snacks
- Favourite toy

Other

- Photos of you and children
- Small valuables
- Safety plan

A FINAL WORD

If you've read this far, I'm proud of you.

It takes courage to even think about leaving. It takes strength to plan. And it takes bravery to take that final step.

You are not responsible for the abuse.

You cannot fix your abuser.

You deserve safety.

You deserve peace.

You deserve a life free from fear.

Whether you leave today, next month, or next year — know that this information will be here when you need it. And know that you are worthy of the life that's waiting for you on the other side.

You are not alone.

You are stronger than you know.

And when you're ready, there is a way out.

Together, we are Free to Rest.

free2rest.com

If you have any questions or comments, contact us at free2restproject@gmail.com



*Because leaving isn't just about walking
out the door.
It's about walking toward safety.*



FREE 2 REST