

STEP 1 – ASSESS THE SITUATION

The line between unhealthy and abusive is a thin one to cross in a relationship.

The first thing you must do is assess your situation– consider the circumstances to determine if you are a victim of domestic violence if you are unsure.

Domestic violence can affect ANYONE of ANY age, race, sexual orientation, religion, or gender. It can happen to any couple, married, living together, or dating. Domestic violence is not limited to physical abuse, such as punching, shoving, tripping, slapping, or biting. Domestic violence and dating violence can take the form of emotional abuse, verbal abuse, financial abuse, sexual abuse, economic abuse, threats and even intimidation.

If your partner is making you feel afraid, often insults or humiliates you, has hit, kicked, or punched you (or threatened to), keeps you from seeing your loved ones or pursuing your interests, blames you excessively or gets angry often, you may be in an abusive relationship. If you are still unsure, please contact us to speak to an advocate who can assess your situation further.

STEP 2 – DEVISE A SAFETY PLAN

We define a Safety Plan as thorough arrangements created in an effort to protect you and your family in the process of leaving the abuser.

To help ensure your safety, and the safety of your children, it is critical that you develop a comprehensive plan prior to leaving an abusive situation. It is similarly crucial to have a plan to increase your safety, and that of your children, for after you leave the abusive situation. The following are steps to consider on both occasions.

Before You Leave

- Make arrangements that, in the event of an emergency, you and your children can stay with someone you trust. Preferably someone that your partner doesn't know.
- Ask neighbors to call 911 if they hear suspicious noises coming from your home.
- Know important telephone numbers (police, friends, hotline, shelter).
- If you sense a violent episode is imminent, and it is safe to do so, disable or hide weapons.
- Teach your children to dial 911 in the event of an emergency.
- Practice getting yourself, and your children, out of your home safely. Pre-identify which doors, windows, elevator or stairwell would work best. Make a plan for what to do if you, and your children, become separated.
- Put together an [Escape Kit](#) and place it somewhere safe and accessible, such as a friend's house. NOT in your home.
- Advise your employer/coworkers to never speak with your abuser without first checking with you, and to never give information about you to anyone.
- Devise a code word to use with your children, family, friends, neighbors, your children's school officials, your employer, etc. when you need the police.
- Open a savings account, in your name only, at a bank different from where your abuser's account(s) is.
- Do not leave behind any notes/doodles with shelter/bus/airline information.

After You Leave

- Get a restraining order against your abuser.
- Inform family, friends, neighbors that you have a restraining order in effect.
- Keep a copy of your restraining order with you at all times. Keep another copy somewhere in your home and put one in your car.
- Give a copy to the local police where you live and where you work.

- Give a copy to your employer and to officials at your children's school, day care facility or with their babysitter.
- If possible, attach a photo of your abuser to the copies you place at work and at your children's day care.
- Inform the people who take care of your children who has permission to pick up your children
- Avoid stores, banks, restaurants, theaters, etc. you used to frequent when you were with your partner.
- If your abuser violates the restraining order, call the police.
- Have a backup plan in the event the police does not respond quickly!
- Change your locks and secure your residence.

STEP 3 - CREATE AN ESCAPE KIT

When leaving the abuser, it is very important to remember to take important papers such as government-issued identification and birth certificates.

It may not be safe for you to return home for some time and these papers will be invaluable as you seek emergency shelter and/or new housing. The abuser may also destroy valuables or other sentimental items once you leave home. The type of items you may want to take include the following:

Daily Necessities

- Medication
- Keys – house, car, office, safe, garage, cabin, boat, motorcycle, etc.
- Money: cash and coins. Enough for transportation, food and lodging for a few days. Your abuser will be able to trace you through credit card activity and may close/empty bank accounts before you can get to them or may be waiting for you at the bank.

- Extra clothing for you and your children for all types of weather
- Infant formula, diapers, etc.
- Food

- Telephone calling cards
- Children's toys, security blankets, stuffed animals
- Current unpaid bills/copies of monthly bills
- Personalized safety plan
- Address books/calendars/appointment books
- Public Assistance ID/Medicaid Cards

Important Documents/Paperwork

(originals or photocopies)

- Government-issued identification for self and children
- Birth/Adoption certificates for self and children
- Social Security cards for self and children
- Passports, green cards, work permits, visas
- Insurance papers (car/health)
- Order of Protection, police reports, restraining order
- Bank books, checkbooks, safety deposit box key
- Marriage, divorce or separation papers

- Income Tax returns, pay stubs
- Professional licenses, certificates, diplomas
- Membership cards (trade unions, professional organizations, etc.)
- Paternity papers, as necessary
- School/vaccination records, dental records, clinic cards
- Lease, rental agreement, or house deed
- Car/mortgage payment book

Valuables/ Items of Sentimental Value

- Sentimental items, photos
- Jewelry
- Small sellable items (TVs, cameras, computers, iPods, iPads, art, etc.)

STEP 4 – KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

It is crucial that you recognize the fact that domestic violence is against the law.

It is a crime in all states, though each state's laws are a little different. Our advocates are dedicated to supplying our clients with the proper legal resources according to the situation. It is extremely important that you know your rights in a domestic violence situation:

- You have the right to be treated with fairness, dignity, sensitivity and respect.
- You have the right to attend and be present at criminal justice proceedings.
- You have the right to be heard in the criminal justice process, including the right to confer with the prosecutor and submit a victim impact statement at sentencing, parole and other similar proceedings.
- You have the right to be informed of proceedings and events in the criminal justice process, including the release or escape of the offender, legal rights and remedies, available benefits and services, access to records, referrals and other information.
- You have the right to protection from intimidation and harassment.
- You have the right to restitution from the offender.

- You have the right to privacy.
- You have the right to apply for crime victim compensation.
- You have the right to the expeditious return of personal property seized as evidence whenever possible.
- You have the right to a speedy trial and other proceedings free from unreasonable delay.
- You have the right to enforcement of these rights and access to other available remedies.

Knowing your rights can secure your safety under dangerous conditions. To speak to an advocate about navigating the justice system, please [contact us](#).

STEP 5 – TAKE ACTION

This is the part where you put your safety plan and your newfound legal knowledge into action.

We urge you to include us in this part of the process, as we can introduce you to resources that will assure your family's safety during and after your departure from the abuser. In particular, we can help you obtain a temporary restraining order, which helps you by ordering the restrained person to:

- Not contact or go near you, your children, other relatives, or others who live with you
- Not have a gun
- Move out of your home
- Follow child custody and visitation orders
- Pay child and spousal/partner support
- Stay away from your pet(s)

STEP 6 – GET SUPPORT

It is important to understand that abuse is NEVER the fault of the victim. Abusers choose their actions, therefore, the victim is never to blame, even if someone else claims so.

We provide safety and support to victims of domestic violence while working to break the cycle of abuse. We primarily offer crisis intervention, counseling, advocacy and activities to support increased economic opportunities for victims. We endeavor to increase community awareness about domestic violence issues and bring about societal change through education and public policy advocacy.

Although victims are at increased risk of injury when trying to leave their batterer, they are safe only if they are able to successfully do so. We are here to help you leave safely and successfully, and we will still be here for you after the fact. Crisis shelters, transitional living and employment programs are important support systems that women and children need to escape the hold of domestic violence. Our Domestic Violence Program provides these support systems and does so in a cost-effective, fiscally sound manner.