

Plan Your Safety

A guide to getting started



Victim Services of Leeds & Grenville
1-800-939-7682 / 613-341-7700
www.vslg.ca



You are not alone.
Inside you will find information on those who
can help and support you.

How do I get started?

Please keep in mind that these are suggestions only. Use your best judgment in determining what applies to your situation.

It is important for you to know that although you do not have control over your abuser's violence, it is possible to increase the safety of yourself and your children when being subjected to abuse. By creating a safety plan, you may be able to prepare for the possibility of further violence, and protect yourself and your children.

The information in this booklet offers many suggestions and ideas that you might find useful. Do not try and do everything right away. Take it one step at a time, and start with the ideas that you think you can do and that fit your situation.

When planning for your safety, it is important to remember that:

- Although you cannot control your abuser's violence, it may be possible to increase your safety and the safety of your children.
- A safety plan is needed whenever the possibility of abuse is identified.
- This safety plan information is specifically designed for actions that you can take.
- This safety plan information also includes actions you can take to increase the safety of your children.
- It is important to become familiar with, and to review and/or revise your safety plan regularly. Abusive situations and risk factors can change quickly. Remember, there are community agencies available to help you with your safety plan. They are listed at the back of this booklet.

It is very important that you do NOT tell your abuser if you are planning to leave the relationship. While leaving will increase your safety in the long-run, in the short-term you may be at higher risk and safety planning at this time is crucial.

Understanding Your Risk

The presence of any or all of the following factors may indicate that you and your children are at increased risk of serious physical harm. These risk factors may change at any given time, so it is important to be aware of your risk increasing over time (for example, if your abuser becomes unemployed) and to plan accordingly. While your level of fear is the most important indicator, it is important to consider the other risk factors so that you can estimate your level of danger. The risk factors at the top of the list are those that are most often associated with serious danger, but the presence of several risk factors at once could be equally dangerous.

Signs of high risk:

- An actual or pending separation
- A history of domestic violence
- Obsessive behavior displayed by the perpetrator
- Perpetrator depressed in the opinions of professionals and/or non-professionals
- Victim had an intuitive sense of fear
- Prior threats/attempts to commit suicide by the perpetrator
- Prior threats to kill the victim
- Prior attempts to isolate the victim
- Access to or possession of firearms
- Control of most or all of the victim's daily activities
- An actual or perceived new partner in the victim's life
- A history of violence outside of the family by the perpetrator
- Prior threats with a weapon
- Prior assault with a weapon
- Prior hostage-taking and/or forcible confinement
- Prior forced sexual acts and/or assaults during sex
- Child custody or access disputes
- Prior destruction or deprivation of victim's property
- Prior violence against family pets
- Prior assault on victim while pregnant
- Choked/strangled victim in the past
- Perpetrator was abused and/or witnessed domestic violence as a child
- Escalation of violence
- Perpetrator unemployed
- Victim and perpetrator living common-law
- Presence of stepchildren in the home
- Extreme minimization and/or denial of spousal assault history
- Excessive alcohol and/or drug use by perpetrator
- Other mental health or psychiatric problems for the perpetrator
- Failure to comply with authority for the perpetrator
- Perpetrator exposed to/witnessed suicidal behaviour in family of origin
- After risk assessment, perpetrator had access to victim

- Youth of couple
- Sexual jealousy for the perpetrator
- Misogynistic attitudes for the perpetrator
- Age disparity of the couple
- Perpetrator threatened and/or harmed children

Creating An Emergency Escape Plan

The Emergency Escape Plan focuses on the things you can do in advance to be better prepared in case you have to leave an abusive situation very quickly.

The following is a list of items you should try to set aside and hide in a safe place (e.g., at a friend's house, family member's home, at work, with your lawyer, in a safety deposit box).

Take a photocopy of the following items and store in a safe place away from the originals. Put the original copies somewhere else if you can:

- Passports, birth certificates and immigration papers for all family members
- School and vaccination records
- Driver's license and registration
- Medications, prescriptions and medical records for all family members
- Welfare identification
- Work permits
- Divorce papers, custody documentation, court orders, restraining orders, marriage certificate, divorce decree, powers of attorney, wills
- Lease/rental agreement, house deed, mortgage payment book, income tax materials
- Bank books
- Insurance papers
- Address/telephone book
- Picture of spouse or partner
- Health cards for all family members
- All cards you use regularly (e.g. Visa, phone cards, social insurance card, your ATM card)

Try to keep all of the cards you normally use in your wallet:

- Social insurance cards
- Credit cards
- Phone cards
- Bank cards
- Health cards

Try to keep your wallet or purse handy and ensure it has the following in it:

- Car, house, office, safety deposit box, and /or mail keys
- Chequebook, bank book and/or statements
- Driver's license, registration and insurance papers
- Picture of your spouse or partner
- Emergency money (cash) hidden away

Try to keep the following items handy, so you can grab them quickly:

- Cell phone and charger
- Emergency suitcase with immediate needs
- Special toys, or comforts for your children
- Jewelry, special photos/certificates
- Small saleable objects
- Items of special sentimental value
- Pet carrier
- A list of other items you would like to take if you get a chance to come back to your home later

Try to make the following arrangements and plans in case you need to leave home suddenly:

- Open a bank account in your own name and arrange that no bank statements be sent or calls made to you. Or, arrange that mail be sent to a trusted friend or family member.
- Save and set aside as much money as you can from whatever sources you can.

- Set aside, in a place you can get to quickly, \$10 to \$20 for cab fare, and quarters for a payphone.
- Plan your emergency exits.
- Plan and rehearse the steps you will take if you have to leave quickly. Learn them well.
- Hide extra clothing, house keys, car keys, money, or anything else you might need, at a trusted friend's house.
- Back your car into the driveway. Make sure there is always gas in it, and that you keep it locked.
- Consider getting a safety deposit box at a bank that your partner does not go to.
- Consider consulting a lawyer and keeping any evidence of abuse, such as photos and/or a journal of all violent incidents (dates, events, threats, any witnesses, etc).
- Arrange with someone to care for your children and pets temporarily if you have to leave without them.
- Keep an emergency suitcase packed, or ready to be packed quickly.
- Consider going to your local women's shelter. It may be a safer temporary spot than going to a place your partner knows.
- Have a back-up plan if your partner finds out where you are going.
- Consider reporting the abuse to the police. Know that the police may charge the abuser regardless of your wishes if they believe the evidence warrants it.
- Consider applying for a restraining order or peace bond that may help keep your partner away from you and your children.

The police can bring you back to the home later to remove additional personal belongings or they can meet you there. Take the items listed above, as well as anything else that is important to you or your children.

When you leave, take the children if you can. If you try to get them later the police cannot help you remove them from their other parent unless you have a valid court order.

Creating A Safer Environment

There are many things a person can do to increase his/her safety. It may not be possible to do everything at once, but safety measures can be added step by step. Here are a few suggestions.



At Home

If you are living with your abusive partner or spouse:

- Get your emergency escape plan in order and review it often.
- Tell someone you trust about the abuse.
- Create a telephone list with numbers of local police, the nearest shelter(s), assaulted women's help line, crisis help line, family members, counselors and children's friends.
- Know where you're going. Make arrangements with friends or family so that you can stay with them if necessary; or go to the nearest women's shelter, hospital emergency department, or police station.
- Try to predict the next likely violent episode and make plans for the children to be sent to friends or family.
- Teach the children to let you know when someone is at the door, before answering it.
- Teach your children how to use the telephone (including your cellular phone if you have one) to contact the police and the fire department. Talk to them about 911, and when it is appropriate to call 911.
- Ensure your house number ("911 Number") is clearly visible for emergency responders.
- Create a code word or sign (for example, a flower pot in the window) with your children and/or family and friends so they know when to call for help.
- Teach your children how to make a collect call to you and to a special friend if your partner takes the children.
- Plan your emergency exits. Teach your children, and know them well yourself.
- Teach your children their own safety plan(s).
- Make sure all weapons and ammunition are hidden or removed from your home.

If you are not living with your abusive partner:

- Change the locks on the doors, windows and mailbox.
- Install a peep hole in the door.
- Either disconnect the automatic garage door opener, or change the code or frequency.
- Teach your children not to answer the door by themselves, and to tell you when someone is at the door.

- Keep your restraining order and any other court orders with you at all times. Ensure you have the most current orders. Consider adding your workplace/school to your restraining order and supplying a copy to your employer.
- Make sure the school, daycare and police have a copy of all court orders, including restraining orders, custody and access orders, as well as a picture of the abusive (ex)partner.
- If you have call display on your phone, be careful about who can get access to the stored numbers (eg., the last number dialed). Be careful who you call as well, or block your number so that your new number does not appear on someone else's call display if you do not want the abuser to obtain your new phone number.
- Have your telephone number unlisted, as it is harder to track when it is unlisted. Again, block your number when calling out.
- Consider getting a cell phone and preprogramming numbers of people to call. Keep your cell phone charged at all times.
- Consider rearranging your furniture, as this is something your (ex)partner may not anticipate, and cause him/her to bump into it and give you warning that he/she is in the house. Also, put your kitchen utensils and knife block in the cupboards so that they are not as accessible.
- If you live in an apartment, check the floor clearly when getting off the elevator. Look in mirrors and be aware of doorways in hallways. Always be aware of your surroundings.
- If you arrive home and something looks out of the ordinary, do not enter your residence; call the police for assistance.
- Consider purchasing rope ladders to be used for escape from upper floors.
- If you have a balcony, consider putting wire around it.
- Replace wooden doors with steel/metal doors if possible, and keep doors and windows locked.
- Consider the advantages of getting a guard dog.
- Install an outside lighting system that lights up when a person is coming close to your house, and ensure it is high enough so that it would be difficult to disable it. Consider installing security systems, including additional locks, window bars, poles to wedge against doors and old hockey sticks in windows/doors that are sliders.
- Document all contact, or attempted contacts from your (ex)partner. Keep all e-mails, voice mail messages, Facebook messages, etc. in case the police need them for evidence.



IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

- Tell your neighbours that you would like them to call the police if they hear a fight or screaming in your home.
- Tell people who take care of your children who has permission to pick up your children.
- Tell people in your neighbourhood that your (ex)partner no longer lives with you and they should call the police if he/she is seen near your home. You may want to give them a photo and description of him/her and their car.
- Ask your neighbours to look after your children if an emergency presents itself.
- Hide clothing and your emergency escape plan items at a neighbour's house.
- Use different grocery stores and shopping malls, and shop at hours that are different from when you were living with your abusive (ex)partner.
- Do your banking at different bank/branch, and not during your normal banking hours.
- Change your doctor, dentist and other professional services you would normally use, or advise them of the situation and tell them not to release any information at all.
- Do not put your name in your apartment building directory.
- Always arrive and leave with someone when out socializing.
- Know where you are when traveling; take note of landmarks.



AT WORK

Each person must decide for her/himself if and when to tell others that their (ex)partner is abusive, and that they may be at risk. Friends, family and co-workers may be able to help protect the victim. However, each person should consider carefully which people to ask for help. If you are comfortable, you may choose to do any or all of the following.

- Tell your boss, the security supervisor, and other key people or friends at work of your situation.
- Consider having your workplace added to your restraining order or peace bond, and supplying a copy of these to your employer.

- Supply your employer, security, and reception with a photo and/or description of your abuser and his/her vehicle.
- Ask to have your calls screened at work. It would also help to have these calls documented.
- Discuss the possibility of having your employer call the police if you are in danger from your (ex)partner.
- Consider asking for your employer's help in making yourself less visible at work by changing your email address, phone extension, and office location, varying your hours of work, and taking time off if necessary.
- When there is a clear threat to your physical safety or the physical safety of others in your workplace, you must report this to your employer. Call the police if there is an immediate threat.

WHEN ARRIVING OR LEAVING WORK

- Let someone know when you will be home.
- Carry your keys in your hands.
- Get a remote or keyless entry car door opener.
- Walk with someone to your car. Consider asking for a parking spot near the building and in a well-lit area.
- Scan the parking lot.
- Walk around your car, look under it and check the backseats to ensure no one is hiding there. Once you get in your car, lock your doors.
- If your partner is following you, drive to a place where there are people to support you, like a friend's house; or, drive to a police station.
- If you have underground parking, consider parking across the street.
- Keep a sign in your car saying "CALL POLICE" and use if needed.
- If you are walking, take a route that is populated.
- Change the patterns of when you arrive and leave work and the routes you take home.
- If you see your partner on the street, try to get to a public place like a store or a coffee shop.
- If you see your partner on the street, call attention to yourself and request help.

AN EMOTIONAL SAFETY PLAN

The experience of being abused and verbally degraded by partners is usually exhausting and emotionally draining. The process of surviving and building a new life requires much courage, and incredible energy. To conserve your emotional energy, and to support yourself in hard emotional times, there are a number of things you can do.

- Attend as many crisis counselling sessions as you can.
- Become involved in community activities to reduce feeling isolated.
- Take a part-time job to reduce isolation and to improve your finances.
- Enroll in school to increase your skills.
- Join support groups of other women to gain support and strengthen your relationships with other people.
- Take time for yourself to read, meditate, play music, exercise, or do what you enjoy.
- Spend time with people who make you feel good and provide positive support.
- Take part in social activities.
- Take care of your sleep and nutritional needs.
- Keep a personal journal to write about your feelings, especially when you are feeling low or vulnerable. Keep it in a safe place.
- Take time to prepare yourself emotionally before entering stressful situations like talking with your (ex)partner, meeting with lawyers or attending court.
- Try not to overbook yourself. Limit yourself to one appointment per day, if you can, to reduce stress.
- Be creative and do whatever makes you feel good.
- Write something positive about yourself every day— your own personal affirmations.
- Do not find your comfort in excessive use of alcohol, prescription drugs, abuse of street drugs, or food. They will only increase your depression.
- Avoid excessive shopping and impulse buying, including excessive purchases for your children out of concern for their situation.
- Join a health club or start an exercise program. It will increase your energy level, and increase your sense of well-being.
- It is okay to feel angry, but find positive and constructive ways to express your anger.
- Remember that you are the most important person to take care of right now. Your children need you to be healthy so you can meet their needs.

CHILD'S SAFETY PLAN

This plan was developed to help parents teach their children some basic safety planning. It is based on the belief that the most important thing that children can do for their abused parent and their families is to get away from the area of violence. They cannot stop the abuse, although they often try by distracting the abuser or directly interfering in the abusive episode. It is important to tell the child that the best and most important thing for them to do is keep themselves safe. Children who experience their parent's abuse can be profoundly affected. It is traumatic for them to be faced with violence directed at them or at someone they love. Personal safety and safety planning are extremely important and necessary for children whose families experience violence. Children should learn ways to protect themselves. There are several ways to help you develop a safety plan with your children.

- Have your child pick a safe room/place in the house, preferably with a lock on the door and a phone. The first step of any plan is for the children to get out of the room where the abuse is occurring.
- Stress the importance of being safe, and that it is not the child's responsibility to make sure that his/her parent is safe.
- Teach your children how to call for help. It is important that children know they should not use a phone that is in view of the abuser. This puts them at risk. Talk to your children about using a neighbour's phone or a payphone if they are unable to use a phone at home. If you have a cell phone, teach your children how to use it.
- Teach them how to contact police at the emergency number.
- Ensure that the children know their full name and address. (Rural children need to know their house number, or "911 Number.")
- Rehearse what your children will say when they call for help.

For example: Dial 911

An operator will answer "Which service: police, fire or ambulance?"

Your child says "Police."

They may say "City, Military or OPP?"

Ensure your child knows which police service will respond to the area where you live.

The child will then say either "City," "Military," or "OPP."

They will then say "Hold the line and I will transfer your call."

Your child should then say "My name is _____. I am _____ years old. I need help. Send the police. Someone is hurting my mom/dad. The address is _____. The phone number is _____."

- The dispatcher will ask these questions, so be sure your child knows the answers. If they can't answer the questions, the police will still come to your home when 911 is called from a landline. Police dispatch centres have call display, so a name, address and phone number will show up.
- If your child is calling from a cellular phone, the dispatch centre has no call display. So, it is important for your children to know how to tell the dispatcher where they live, or where the event is taking place.
- It is important for children to leave the phone off the hook or remain on the line with the dispatcher. If they hang up, the dispatcher may call the number back and this might create a dangerous situation for yourself and your children. By staying on the line, the dispatcher may also be able to hear what is going on in the background and can alert the responding police officers of any other information that they may need to know for their safety, as well as for the safety of you and your children.
- Pick a safe place out of the home to meet your children (e.g., a trusted neighbour), where you can easily find one another after the situation is safe.
- Teach your children the safest route to their safe place.

DURING A VIOLENT INCIDENT

You cannot always avoid violent incidents. However, here are some things you can do to increase your safety.

- Remind yourself that you have an emergency escape plan and go over it in your mind.
- Start to position yourself to get out quickly, or move near a phone so you can call 911 if necessary.
- Try to move to a space where the risk is the lowest. Try to avoid placing yourself in the bathroom, garage, kitchen near potential weapons, or in rooms where there is no access to an outside door.
- Make yourself a small target. Curl up in a ball with your face protected and arms around each side of your head, fingers entwined. Try not to wear scarves or long jewelry.
- Don't run to a place where the children are, as your partner may hurt them as well.
- Use your code word with your children, family or friends so they can get help for you.
- Use your judgement and intuition. If the situation is very serious, you can agree with your (ex)partner, or give them what they want, to calm them down. You have to protect yourself until you are out of danger.

- When, or after you have been assaulted, call the police or 911 if you can. Tell them you have been assaulted by your (ex)partner and leave the phone off the hook.
- Make as much noise as possible so that if you can't get to the phone, your neighbours may hear something and call the police for you.
- Ensure that your house number is clearly visible for emergency responders.
- If you are injured, you can go to a doctor or an emergency room and report what happened. You can ask them to document it.

SAFETY

There are some important things to know about privacy and safety when you use the telephone. Check with Bell Canada or your phone service provider for up-to-date information regarding the following services.

USE CALL BLOCKING

The person you call can find out your name and phone number even if you did not give this information. They can find out this information through phone services such as call display and call return. Even if you have an unlisted phone number and you call out without blocking your call, your number will appear on someone else's call display.

Call blocking keeps the person you call from getting your name and number. This is free.

Occasional call blocking:

Press *67 on your touch tone phone or dial 1167 on your rotary phone. When you hear three beeps, you will know that your name and number have been blocked and you can dial the number you want to call. You have to do this procedure before each call you want to block.

Permanent call blocking:

If you are a victim or potential victim of violence, call Bell or your service provider to permanently block your name and number. Then every call you make from that number will be blocked without you having to press *67 or dial 1167.

LAST CALL RETURN

A person can find out the telephone number of the last caller (even if the person was unable to take the call) by pressing *69. This service will not work if you have your phone number blocked, call from certain pay phones, or call from certain cellular phones. If you are living with your partner and do not wish them to know the last number called to your home, hang up after completing your call. Pick up the phone again, press a few numbers then hang up again. This will prevent your

partner from having access to the last call information. Request that family members, coworkers, friends, etc. keep your contact information private.

HARASSING TELEPHONE CALLS

If you are receiving harassing calls, you may want to use CALL SCREEN to screen out specific phone numbers. Press *60 or dial 1160 (on rotary phones) and follow the voice instructions.

If you are receiving threatening or persistent phone calls, you may wish to use call trace. This service will trace the caller's telephone number even if the call is blocked. However, Bell Canada or your service provider will only release the traced number to the police, if the police present them proper legal authorization. They will not release this information to you. To use call trace, hang up after answering the call. Pick up the receiver again and listen for the dial tone. Press *57 or dial 1157 (on rotary phones). A voice message will indicate whether the call has been traced successfully. There is a charge for this service.

COMPUTER SAFETY

Here are some things to consider to enhance your safety while using the Internet.

- Consider changing your e-mail address.
- If you are on a social networking site (e.g., Facebook), consider blocking, changing or deactivating your profile and be careful about connecting with any of your (ex)partner's family members or friends.
- If you remain active on social networking sites, be very cautious about listing any identifying personal information such as you address, phone numbers and e-mails.
- Be careful which photos you post and what information you make public so you avoid revealing where you and/or your children might be going, what events you will be attending, etc.
- Talk to your children, family members and friends about your need to maintain your safety and privacy on social networking sites and other online places so that they do not inadvertently place you at risk.
- Never meet anyone whom you've only interacted with online, in a private place. Always arrange to meet in a public, populated area.

These community agencies can assist you with creating a safety plan. They can also help you by providing counseling, information, support groups, children's services and assistance with other community services.

You are not alone.

***These are the people who will listen.
Call them, they can help.***

Emergency 911

Mental Health Crisis Line of Lanark, Leeds & Grenville can be contacted by email at mhcrisis@rohcg.on.ca, or by phone at 613-345-4600 or 1-866-281-2911.

Assault Response & Care Centre 1-800-567-7415 or go to the emergency room at the Brockville General Hospital and ask to speak with an Assault Response & Care Centre nurse.

Distress Line (5pm-midnight)	1-800-465-4442
Family & Children Services Crisis Line	1-800-481-7834
Interval House	1-800-267-4409 – 24/7
Kid's Help Phone	1-800-668-6868 – 24/7

Created by:
Victim Services of Leeds & Grenville
1-800-939-7682 / (613) 341-7700

In partnership with police, fire and EMS services, Victim Services is a community response program that provides immediate, short-term crisis intervention services to persons affected by crime, tragedy and disaster.

