

A VICTIM’S GUIDE TO CREATING A SAFETY PLAN

If you are currently living with someone who is violent or recently have left a violent situation, then there may be reason for concern for the safety of you and your children. The process of safety planning is similar to preparing for any threat such as bad weather or an intruder—that is why everyone locks their doors at night. The difference for women leaving a violent partner is that the threatening person is knowledgeable about their habits, whereabouts and vulnerabilities. Plan ahead and practice safety skills as a way to reduce harm and increase confidence in your ability to move beyond a bad situation. Domestic violence and sexual assault are serious crimes and many women must take the responsibility for their family’s safety.

In creating a safety plan, you need to consider your current situation—which persons can help, accessible resources, the age and maturity level of your children, access to safe places and people, and level of threat/risk/lethality from the offender.

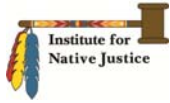
This guide is to help you develop a comprehensive safety plan. You will know what applies to your situation -- this is *your* plan so you can customize your strategy. While you can design a safety plan on your own, the assistance of an advocate or other person with experience serving domestic violence and sexual assault victims can help with developing strategies and access to community resources. The services of a tribal or community based advocate are absolutely confidential with a focus on your safety. Your safety plan should be reviewed periodically and updated; preferably at every contact with the advocate or trained law enforcement personnel. The following list includes areas that need to be addressed when developing a comprehensive safety plan:

ASSESSING THREAT/RISK/LETHALITY

The riskiest time for a victim of domestic violence is when she is leaving or attempting to leave the offender—this includes filing for a protective order or divorce/separation filings. Studies show that threat and lethality are interconnected in domestic violence and sexual assault situations and the offender’s actions are the best indicator of the level of danger. The following checklist will help to determine the level of risk, answering “yes” to three or more indicate a high level of risk/assault/threat/lethality:

YES NO

		THREATS OF SUICIDE (by the offender)
		THREATS TO KILL YOU OR OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS
		THREATS WITH WEAPONS
		THREATS TO KILL OR ACTUALLY KILLING OR HARMING THE FAMILY PET
		USE OF WEAPONS IN PRIOR ABUSIVE INCIDENTS
		SERIOUS INJURY OF PARTNER IN PRIOR ABUSIVE INCIDENTS
		ACCESS OR OWNERSHIP OF GUNS
		DRUG OR ALCOHOL ABUSE
		FORCED SEX OF PARTNER
		OBSESSION WITH PARTNER/ EXTREME JEALOUSY/ EXTREME DOMINANCE



	ACCESS TO THE VICTIM
	DEPRESSION
	PROPERTY DAMAGE OR DESTRUCTION
	ABUSE OF CHILDREN
	MENTAL HEALTH HISTORY
	HISTORY OF OTHER VIOLENT CRIMES
	ACCEPTING ATTITUDE TOWARD USE OF VIOLENCE
	REPORTS OF VIOLENCE FROM PREVIOUS PARTNERS
	OFFENDER'S FAMILY MEMBERS SUPPORTIVE OF HIS VIOLENCE
	OFFENDER'S FAMILY MEMBERS HAVE HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

DOCUMENTS YOU WILL NEED

It is helpful to discuss with an Advocate where to secure documents and photos if you plan to hide them in the home.

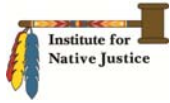
- Identification such as Driver's License, Student ID, etc.
- Birth certificates
- Social security cards
- School and vaccination records
- Money, checks and ATM card
- Credit Cards
- Bank books; pass book savings, insurance papers
- Keys—house, car, storage building, office
- Car titles, mortgage agreements, rental agreements
- TANF identification, work permits, Green Card
- Passports, divorce decrees, separation agreements
- Medical records
- Pet licenses and vet information
- User ID and Passwords to any online or banking accounts
- Photos and small items of sentimental value

HOME AND PERSONAL ENVIRONMENT

If you have left and are in a new place without the offender:

Physical safety in the home:

- Change the locks
- Be on guard, look through the peep hole before opening the door—train children to do the same
- Check the locks with each entry or exit, including windows
- Trim bushes and plants away from the building and the windows
- Keep outside lights on, both back and front yards
- If you have a garage, bring the car in each time and close the garage door



- If you have a protective order, let law enforcement know your new address
- Ask for “drive by’s” by law enforcement if there is imminent threat

Personal physical safety:

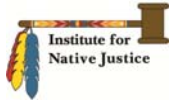
- Never go alone
- Take self-defense classes
- Carry pepper spray or a firearm only if you are trained and certified
- Vary your routine—do not take the same route to work or the store
- Stop hanging out in your usual places
- Shop at different stores
- Get a different vehicle
- Carry a noisemaker, such as a loud whistle
- If you have a newer car with a panic mode on the key, keep that by your bed and with you at all times to use as a personal alarm
- Get a big dog that barks
- Do not use baby monitors or cordless phones to prevent your conversations from being overheard
- Develop an escape plan with your children and practice the plan with them; teach them to use the phone to call for help—practice telling the finding directions to your home

If you are remaining with the offender:

- Remove all guns, ammunition and knives, if possible
- Install a deadbolt lock on one of the bedroom doors
- Hide a cell phone to use to call 911 in that bedroom
- Have a plan for leaving on a moment’s notice, practice leaving through alternate routes
- Hide cash and important documents at another location available only to you
- When hiding things in or around the house, think about where he won’t look
- Tell neighbors (if you trust them) to call police if they hear noise or screams
- Teach your kids to dial 911 and what to say about finding directions
- Learn the signs of imminent harm; know when to leave, if possible
- Do not keep this safety plan where it will be found
- Keep the car fueled at all times; have an extra set of house and car keys made and hide them

LANDLINE, CELL PHONE AND TECHNOLOGY (INCLUDING SOCIAL MEDIA)

It is important to remember that your partner knows everything about you—including those items you may choose for passwords, such as your mother’s maiden name, birthdates, etc. They know where you bank, what credit cards you use and your banking and shopping habits. Preferably, these factors should be considered when you set up accounts; if not, then you need to change the passwords and routine to be unknown and unpredictable just before the time you plan to leave.



If you think your activities are being monitored, then they probably are—there are many ways for even the non-technology person to purchase and use tracking software, tracking devices or recording devices to watch you on your computer. If you are in an abusive situation, it is best to NOT use your home computer for anything.

Most computers, all cell phones and smart devices (and some cars) are equipped with GPS Tracking software. If you own and use one of these devices, you should become familiar with it and know which programs are installed and how to disable them. If you do not have this knowledge, then it is best to disable the device and use a cell phone (donated by a local program) when leaving an abusive situation.

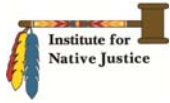
Landlines are safest for communications. Do not list your telephone landline number and do not use a personalized message on your answering machine, let the machine's voice answer. When calling from a land line, you can block your phone number by dialing *67 BEFORE dialing the desired phone number. Instructions for blocking your cell phone number before placing a call varies from phone to phone. Have a friend show you how to block your number or call your carrier's customer service number. If your cell phone is on a family plan with the offender, turn off the phone and remove the battery. An offender can have the tracking system turned on and will know your location at all times. (Turning off the phone is not enough to keep from being tracked!) The offender can also monitor phone usage by checking the account online, as most cell phone carriers give usage details within 15 minutes of use. An inexpensive cell phone can be purchased at any discount store for around \$20. Even if you run out of minutes, you can still dial 911.

Do not use any social media (Facebook, My Space, My Yearbook, Google +, Twitter, etc.)! Social media often gives the date, time, and location of where a post is made, making it easy for the offender to track and locate you. If you do have an account and change the password and/or email address, the offender can easily break into your account by answering some personal questions or identifying photos of friends and family you are linked with. In fact, I suggest closing your social media account so that the offender has one less way of tracking a victim. Another precaution is to "Google" yourself (just enter your name into a search engine in quotation marks, "full name" and hit enter) to see what is out there about you that could inform any person tracking you of your whereabouts or routine. Some government agencies (post office and courts) publish their records to the internet, request that your information be removed and kept private.

MAILING ADDRESS

Get a private mail address or post office box; use it instead of your finding address with all service providers such as doctors, schools, etc. Always check for mail when there are people around and help is available.

Ask a Victim Advocate if your state has a Victim Address Confidentiality program; you may be eligible when you leave or move.



COMMUTING OR TRANSPORTING CHILDREN

Try to have someone accompany you whenever you have the children in the car. Enlist their assistance to remove the children in the event the offender attempts to intercept you or the children. Do not use the same route each time. Alert school officials about the situation so that they are available for drop-off and pick-up of children and do not let the child leave with the father. You will need to share court orders regarding custody with school officials.

Be certain to tell anyone who may be responsible for your children that you are no longer with the offender and show them the custody order (you may even want to give them a copy for their files). People to inform about who has permission to pick up your children include school, day care staff, baby sitter, Sunday school teachers, teachers and the principle. If your children participate in after-school activities, then those people need to be informed also.

Teach your children to use the telephone to call 911 and how to call you in the event they are taken by the offender. If your child has a cell phone, "hide" your number under another name or purpose such as "school bus driver." Then practice what to do with your children.

AT WORK

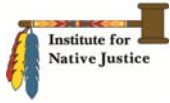
Inform supervisors and co-workers of your situation and ask for their help. A Victim Advocate can assist with the development of a work safety plan; the company may have policies and procedures for responding to domestic violence incidents at work. Do not use the same route to and from work. Always leave with other people or ask security to accompany you to your car. If using public transit, don't get off at the same stop each time. Or wait to exit when there are several others exiting at the same time. Arrange your office furniture to give sight to people entering the building if possible. Plan for escape and practice.

SHOPPING

The offender will be knowledgeable about your shopping habits and favorite stores; he may follow you and appear while you are shopping. Always have a person accompanying you, if possible, and be ready to call for help. In smaller towns, the major discount store is the main place for all to shop for daily living supplies and law enforcement may be hesitant to enforce a protective order violation on the offender; calling for help from law enforcement though will provide you with protection while you leave the business and return to home or other safe place. Major retailers may have emergency response plans in the event an offender assaults while on the premises; ask for help from the staff.

COURT APPEARANCES

Attending court is another situation involving risk to the victim and her children. Work with the Victim Witness Coordinator, court personnel or Victim Advocate to devise a plan and strategy for court appearances. This should be offered through the court or through the local domestic violence intervention program. Using the Court Safety Planning Checklist will help with planning development for court appearances.



USING DRUGS OR ALCOHOL

Using drugs and alcohol puts you and your children at great disadvantage for safety and may affect legal actions if you are caught by law enforcement. Your credibility is under scrutiny when you are attempting to separate from a domestic violence offender and may impact outcomes for you and your children; the offender will use this information against you. If you do choose to use drugs or alcohol, select a safe place and safe people who understand the risk of violence against you and are committed to your safety. Do not use in front of the children; arrange for their care with a competent adult who is knowledgeable about your situation. Do not return to your home until you are fully sober and not compromised.

PROTECTION ORDERS

Acquiring a Protective Order is a serious decision that must be reviewed by someone knowledgeable about the risks and dynamics of domestic violence offenders. If you decide to obtain an order, then follow these guidelines:

- Keep the order with you at all times, have extra copies in the event yours is misplaced
- Keep extra copies in the car, at work and with friends
- File copies with the local police department and the tribal law enforcement if you are in Indian Country
- File copies with neighboring law enforcement if those are jurisdictions where you visit or work
- If the order is violated, contact local law enforcement immediately and file a complaint
- Keep a record of violations and complaints