

New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
2004 Domestic Violence Handbook

Safety Planning

Whatever else you may decide to do, one thing that many victims of domestic violence find helpful is making a **safety plan**. You can make one yourself or you can call your local domestic violence program and ask them to help you develop a plan. If you decide to write out a safety plan, be sure to keep it in a place where your partner can't find it. Safety plans can be made for a variety of different situations - for dealing with an emergency such as when a physical assault occurs, for continuing to live with a partner who has been abusive, or for protecting yourself after you have ended a relationship with an abusive partner.

Whether you are with your partner or have ended the relationship and regardless of whether you have used the court system or called the police, there are certain things that are helpful to consider in planning for your future safety.

- Where can you keep important phone numbers (police, hotline, friends, shelter) for yourself and your children?
- Is there anyone you can ask to call the police if they hear suspicious noises coming from your house or apartment?
- If you need to get out of your house or apartment in a hurry, what door, window, elevator or stairwell will you be able to use in order to get out safely?
- If you need a place to stay for a while, where can you go? Can you arrange to stay with family or friends in a crisis? Do you know how to contact the local domestic violence program in order to arrange for emergency shelter?
- Where can you keep your purse, an extra set of car keys or money for public transportation, and some change to make a phone call so that you can grab them quickly?
- Do your children know how to use the telephone to contact the police?
- Is there a code word you can use with friends, family and/or your children to alert them to call for help?

- Can you keep some money, some changes of clothes and important papers hidden somewhere your partner doesn't know about, but that you can get to quickly? Can you keep the "escape bag" with a neighbor or in the trunk of your car?
- If you think you and your partner are about to have an argument, how can you get to a room where there are fewer things that can be used as weapons? How can you avoid getting trapped in the kitchen, bathroom, basement or garage?

## Telephone Privacy & Safety

Telephone technologies, such as *Caller ID*, mean you should think about steps you can take to prevent your abuser from knowing who you call or who calls you. In addition, it can help to know how to use these same technologies to help you plan for your safety.

If you live with your abuser, and your telephone has a *Caller ID* box, your abuser can track who has called you. If you live separately from your abuser, you can use *Caller ID* to make sure the caller is someone you want to speak to, before answering the telephone. If you have *Caller ID*, you can also get *Anonymous Call Rejection Service*. This service prevents an incoming call from ringing at your home if the caller has used *Per-Call* or *All-Call Blocking* to stop display of their number on your *Caller ID* box. The caller will reach a recorded message saying that the call will not be accepted unless the block is removed.

*Call Return Service* (\*69) allows you to call back the last number that *called you*, whether or not you answered the call. In some areas, a recording will give you the number you are attempting to call back, even long distance numbers. However, if the last call you received was from someone you don't want your abuser to know about, you can press \*89 after you end the call. This will prevent *Call Return* from working.

The *re-dial* button on your telephone also allows your abuser to call the *last number* you dialed, without knowing the number. Since most domestic violence programs answer their telephone by saying the name of their program, your abuser could learn that you are reaching out for help. Therefore, *after* hanging up from such a call, you may want to dial the telephone number for weather or some other "safe" number.

*Call Trace Service* traces the number of an annoying, obscene or harassing call by dialing \*57. If your trace is successful, your telephone company will provide the number to the police. You must file a complaint with the police and call your telephone company to request an investigation.

There is a fee for purchasing the *Caller ID* service and a fee for using the *Call Return* and *Call Trace*. More complete information about these and other services is available in the front of your telephone book or by calling your *local* telephone company.

An answering machine is another good way to make sure the caller is someone you want to speak to, before answering the telephone. If your abuser leaves a threatening message on the answering machine, be sure to remove the tape and save it (do not record over it). Such recordings can be used as evidence of threats and stalking.

If you use a cell phone, be aware there are numerous ways an abuser can use cell phone technology to overhear your calls or locate you. Use a cell phone only if you do not have access to a regular phone, and make sure that you do not give any identifying details on a cell phone. If your abuser works for a phone company or law enforcement agency, use extreme precaution, and discuss cell phone safety with a domestic violence advocate.

A cellular phone in "silent mode" or "auto answer" can serve as a tracking device. Some recent models of cellular phones have GPS (Global Positioning System), which is a location-finding feature. You can check with your phone company to learn if your cell phone has this feature. If you are fleeing from your abuser, either turn off your cell phone or leave it behind.

### **Computer and E-mail Safety**

It is important to remember that computer technology can put your privacy and safety at risk. Computer hard drives are capable of recording every action taken on the computer and Internet, and it is virtually impossible to completely erase these "foot prints". Even if your abuser is not an expert at computers, he may be able to trace what you have done on the computer or can easily find someone who can. If you think you may be monitored on your home computer, it may be safer for you to stop using that computer.

Computers that are located in a public library, community technology center, Internet cafe or at a trusted friend's house may be safer options if you wish to use e-mail or browse the Internet.

Other precautions you can take include the following:

- Never share your e-mail password(s). However, if you believe your abuser knows your password, before changing it, consider whether that may cause more danger by arousing suspicion.
- Passwords should be difficult to figure out. Never use birth dates, street addresses, names etc.
- Consider having more than one e-mail account so that you have an alternative if your abuser forces you to close an account.
- Ask friends and family to not share your new e-mail addresses.
- Never register your personal information such as your real address or phone number when you sign up for web e-mail accounts such as Yahoo or Hotmail.

Computers can also be a useful tool in accessing information about what you are going through and what you can do to seek help. However, keep in mind that some domestic violence websites are not legitimate and may give you misleading information. Your local domestic violence advocate can help sort out any information that may be confusing. Finally, e-mails from your abuser can provide excellent evidence in a court case. You might want to consider saving his e-mails even if you don't have a case pending, so they are available if you ever need them.