

New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
2004 Domestic Violence Handbook

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.