

## What you should know about...

### Developing Strategies for Staying Safer

If you are living with an abusive partner, consider making a plan that helps you feel safer. Even if you are feeling safe now, research shows that abuse doesn't just go away. It typically gets worse over time. Your plan could include your personal strategies for managing risk. These strategies will reflect your unique experiences and social identity. Although you can't control your partner's violence and abuse, you do have choices about how you respond and get to safety.

For some women, leaving is the safest action for them. Safe leaving is very important. You will find an "Emergency Leaving Plan" at the end of this guide. Other women make a strategic decision to stay. In some situations, leaving the abuse may seem riskier than staying. Trust your intuition and make choices that you feel are best for your safety. Don't feel pressured to take action. However, do be aware that a violent partner poses a serious risk to your well-being and that of your children.

This safety planning tool will help you identify personal strategies to increase your safety. You don't have to address every potential risky situation all at once. Start with a few that you feel would make a difference in your life. The road to a safer and healthier life is a journey, not necessarily a one-stop destination.

To create your plan, go to **Step 1**. Start thinking about people you trust to tell about the abuse in your relationship. Then go to **Step 2**. Review the checklist of risk factors. Think about the kinds of situations that make you fearful or impact on your sense of safety. Who are the people and agencies that could help you with specific concerns? **Step 3** will help you to build your own personal safety plan based on the strategies (both existing and new) you selected for reducing the risk of harm to yourself, your children, your family, your pets and your property.

#### Remember...

- Making a safety plan can help increase your safety
- Changing your safety plan often will keep it relevant to your needs
- Being aware of resources to help you cope and end your isolation is empowering
- Telling people and service providers you trust about the abuse may help to increase your safety
- Being aware that no safety plan or protection order is an absolute guarantee of safety is important

Keep your plan in a safe place where your partner will not find it.

You can find helpful information in the online resource *Directory of Services for Victims of Abuse*.



### Deciding to Tell About the Abuse in My Life

You can use this safety planning tool alone or with someone else you trust to play a role in your plan. Although you will have to decide for yourself if and when you will tell others about the abuse, consider that friends, family, neighbours and even co-workers can help protect you if they know what is happening.

If your partner has been charged with a crime because he harmed you, Victim Services, Justice and Public Safety, will help you with safety planning. If you are not involved with the police, consider talking to a domestic violence specialist – someone who can help you assess your risk. Trust your intuition and make choices that you feel are best for your safety – don't be pressured into action.

If you are reluctant to reach out for help, consider the following:

#### What I might think about reaching out... Consider this...

*People won't want to help me. What happens in my home is really none of their business.*

◆ It could be a matter of life or death. Violence in the community is everyone's business – so do reach out. When someone is hurting you, your children or even your pets – **it's wrong and it is against the law.**

*I don't know what to say.*

◆ Just say that you are **living in an abusive relationship** and you need someone to talk to who will listen, be supportive and not blame you for the abuse.

*It might make things worse. If he finds out he will be really angry. He has even said that he would kill me.*

◆ Doing nothing could make things worse – **abuse often gets worse over time.** If he threatens you or the people helping you, let the police know. Be sure to say if there are weapons available.

*It's not serious enough to involve the police.*

◆ Police are trained to respond – and even if the behaviour is not criminal, they know about other resources to help families experiencing abuse.

*People won't believe me because I have lived with abuse for so long.*

◆ Maybe some people won't believe you. But some probably suspect that something is wrong. **Tell someone you trust.** Say you were afraid to speak out because you thought people might "take sides" or blame you. Explain your fears and concerns – like not having the support you need such as money, a place to live, a job, a babysitter, or transportation, etc.

# Strategies for Staying Safer

What I might think about reaching out... Consider this...

*How can I tell my friends or neighbours; they are his friends too.*

◆ When they learn you are being abused and living in fear, they will likely be supportive. If not, turn to someone else.

*I should wait until somebody offers to help me.*

◆ Even people who care about you may not reach out because they don't know what to say. They may be afraid to insult you if they are wrong. Don't wait – they may be waiting for you.

*I don't want to start actions in my life that I have no control over.*

◆ It is understandable that you want to be in control and manage your risks how and when you need to. Seek out services and resources and that respond to your specific needs.

*He has threatened to take the kids or harms the pets or property – and he has all the rights.*

◆ Both parents have rights to custody and access so it is important to contact services that offer accurate legal information, advice and/or support.

*I want my marriage to work. He keeps promising he will change.*

◆ You can't change your partner, but if he is willing, encourage him to find appropriate counseling and services that help him to become accountable for his actions and stop abusing you.

*Best that I stay so that the children have a father.*

◆ Children who witness family violence are more likely to grow up and model the behavior that they have witnessed. You can talk to a counsellor about the impact of family violence on your children.

*If I tell people about the abuse, I'm afraid Child Protection will take away my children.*

◆ Child Protection will not blame you for your partner's actions. However, they will discuss with you various options for keeping your children safe.

Getting help as you create your safety plan is a good idea.