

Safety & Wellness in Conflictual Relationships

Leaving Safely

Choosing to leave an abusive relationship can be challenging for many reasons.

Some of the key challenges people face when they decide to leave are:

- Not knowing where to go
- Fear of what your partner might do to you or others if you leave
- Lack of financial resources/no way to support yourself and your children
- Lack of social, community, and professional supports

It's important to know that when you choose to leave your partner there is a chance that they may escalate their threats and abuse.

Remember, an abusive relationship is about power and control. At the time that you leave, your partner is losing their power and control of you.

This is the time that is most dangerous for you and your children. It is important that you have knowledge, tools, and resources to help you leave safely.

Even if your partner has not been physically violent before, that may change when you leave. It's important for your safety, and the safety of your children, that you take all the precautions that you can.

Refer to your safety plan for resources to help you to leave safely.

If you have time to plan your exit from the relationship, here are some things that you might want to consider:

Plan for a safe place for you and your children to go. This could be staying with friends or family, a safe house, an Airbnb, a hotel, or some other accommodation that you are able to organize in advance.

- **If you plan to stay with friends or family,** check with them that they will be able to accommodate you and your children safely and that they can take you in at any time. What safety measures do they have in place to protect themselves, you, and your children if your abuser shows up at their home?

- **If you plan to access a safe house**, contact the safe houses in advance, know where they are, and plan how you will get there. What will you do if they are full?
- **If you plan to use an Airbnb or hotel**, make sure that you have easily available funds to pay for that. Know how you will quickly book and get to this accommodation. Try to use cash or a bank account that your abuser does not have access to. If they can see where you are staying, your safety could be at risk.

If you're able to plan and leave when things are calm (not during an abusive incident), when your abuser is not expecting it, there may be less immediate risk to you and your children's safety.

If you do not have time to plan and you must leave immediately:

Go somewhere that you and your children can seek immediate refuge. Try to flee to a safe house or the home of someone you know. If you don't know where to go, go to a:

- Police/ RCMP station
- A school (ideally your child's school)
- A hospital

If you cannot get to a safe place, but you can get out of the house, get yourself and your children into a public place (into the street will do), attract as much attention to yourself as possible, and call 911.

If you cannot get out of the home, get yourself and your children into a safe space in the house (a locked or barricaded room, ideally a room with an outside window, or another exit), and then call 911.

- Consider some safe places in your home that you and your children could seek refuge while the police are called. Try to avoid getting yourself and your children stuck in a space where there is no exit. Also, avoid getting stuck in the kitchen or any other area of the home where there could be weapons.
- If you cannot access a phone, and you're in immediate danger, try smashing a window and yelling loudly, there's a chance that a neighbor will hear you and call 911.

If you have time to prepare:

Get your children out of the house either before you or with you. If your able to leave at a time when they are not in the home, it is safer for them. If you have no choice but to leave when they are with you try to make sure you take them with you. It might be harder to get them back later without a court order.

Plan to take legal documents, your wallet, your phone with you. While the police can escort you back into the home to gather your things later, if your partner destroys them or moves them to another location before you're able to access the home, it may be hard to get these things back.

If your able to, get another person to be with you when you leave. This person can help to keep you safe, help you think of things that you might not think about while you're stressed, and they will also be a witness to anything that is said or done as you are leaving.

Have a codeword that you can text to people who can help you to leave quickly if needed. Make sure that they know the word, and what to do to help you.

If you seek legal advice before you leave, don't pay for the lawyer with the bankcard that your abuser has access to. If possible, pay in cash.

Change your usernames and passwords on accounts that you don't want your abuser to access. This may alert your abuser that you're hiding something from them.

Buy yourself a mobile phone that is not on a plan (a second-hand phone is OK), purchase a pay-as-you-go/ prepaid sim-card. Keep the phone in a secret, safe place (possibly out of the home), keep it charged and ready if you need to leave your old phone.

Search for accommodation on a public computer or ask someone you trust to search for accommodation options for you. Abusive partners often monitor internet searches. Public libraries, business centers and community centers may have internet access that you could use.

As you leave:

If it's a choice between your physical safety and the safety of your children and getting legal documents – leave the documents. It may be hard to get these back later but it's better than you, or your children being harmed.

If you must leave your children because it would be unsafe to try to take them, leave yourself and once you're out call 911 immediately for assistance.

See the module on creating a safety plan for information on safety houses



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You also might choose to:

- Get rid of your mobile phone as your abuser will likely be able to track it. There are smartphone apps your abuser can use to listen in on your calls, read your text messages, monitor your Internet usage, or track your location. Consider turning it off when not in use or leaving it behind when fleeing your abuser.
- Pay for accommodation with cash or from a bank account that your abuser cannot access, so that they do not know where you are.