

Safety planning is thinking ahead and acting in a way that can increase your safety and the safety of your loved ones. You can safety plan whether you decide to stay in or leave an abusive relationship.

Safety planning is something you may already be doing. In the past, when you have felt that you were in danger, what did you do to protect yourself from getting hurt? This is called your safety plan.

You have been able to stay alive because you did something to stay safe. You may have gone into another room, done what you were told to do, run out of your home, or called the police or someone you know for help.

You are the expert on your life.

Your own experience is the best tool in planning for your safety. Planning involves anticipating the abuser's behaviors and thinking about your options, reactions, and backup plans.

There are many kinds of dangers or risks when you are being abused.

When planning, consider all of the risks. Think about different places you may not be safe: home, work, school, and other places you often visit that your abuser knows about.

Think about different times you feel unsafe: Do you feel unsafe right after you try to leave the relationship, when drugs or alcohol are around, when you are alone with the abuser, or if your partner gets violent (starts yelling, hitting, threatening)?

It may be easier to safety plan if you have someone help you. Advocates have experience safety planning and can help you think about all your different choices and options:

- Fairfax County 24-hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Hotline: **703-360-7273**
- Domestic Violence Action Center: **703-246-4573**
- Victim Services Section, Fairfax County Police Department: **703-246-2141**

Consider your own and your children's emotional safety as well as physical safety.

When you start to make a safety plan, you may want to think about different kinds of safety:

Emotional: What will you do if you or your children get scared or are very upset? You could:

- Attend group or individual counseling.
- Become involved in community activities to build a support network.

Physical: Can you get away? Are there ways to protect yourself and your children? You could:

- Keep a phone with you in case you need to call 911.
- Remove dangerous weapons (guns, hunting knives, etc.) from the house, if possible.
- Think about a neighbor or a friend you can go to for help if an incident occurs.

Financial: Where do you keep your money, insurance, checking account, credit cards? You could:

- Make sure you have access to important documents like passports and debit cards.
- Save money and leave it with someone you trust.

