

Safety Planning

Who this is for

This fact sheet is for you if:

- You are afraid for your safety because your partner is mistreating you.
- You need help with planning for your safety, whether you want to stay in the relationship or leave.

In this fact sheet, the word **partner** means husband, wife, common-law partner, or ex-partner.

A safety plan

You can do things to make yourself and your children safer, such as getting help from the police and the court. Having a safety plan is also very important and helpful.

A safety plan is made up of steps you can take to protect yourself and your children. Planning for safety means you know how to get help if you are being abused. Your children will also feel safer when you help them make a safety plan.

It is a good idea to ask a friend, advocate, or victim service worker to help you make a safety plan. You can find a sample worksheet for making a safety plan on the **Shelternet** website at www.shelternet.ca (click "Make a Safety Plan").

To start your safety plan

- Get information about emergency services in your area.
- Talk over your plan with people who can help you.
- Talk to your children about how they can keep themselves safe.

To protect yourself at home

- Screen calls on your home phone.
- Tell your neighbours or friends to call the police if they hear frightening or loud noises, or if they see anything suspicious.
- Think about where you can go if you decide to leave (a place that is safe and where your partner will not know to look for you, such as a safe house).
- Find out about services such as emergency shelters or transition houses in your area, and memorize their phone numbers.
- Find out where you can get a translator or disability support if you need these services.
- Find out where you can take your pet for safety, or how to make sure your farm animals will be safe, if you need to do this.
- Save and set aside some money in a safe place, a little at a time, and cancel joint credit cards you may have with your partner.
- Set aside money and change for taxis and phone calls.
- Put a set of your house and car keys in a safe place.

- Pack a suitcase with extra clothes, toiletries, medicines, and prescriptions for you and your children, and leave the suitcase with a friend.
- Find a safe place and store your and your children's personal papers, such as birth certificates and identity cards, passports and immigration papers, CareCards, status cards, driver's licence, marriage certificate and divorce papers, custody papers, court orders, restraining orders, address book, financial information (such as lease/rental agreement, house deed, bank books, and insurance papers), and other important papers.
- Make photocopies of information about income and assets that are in your partner's name alone, such as pay stubs, tax returns, company records and ledgers, bank accounts, investments, and RRSPs. Also write down his or her Social Insurance Number, CareCard number, and birthdate.
- Plan your emergency exits (where you will leave your home in an emergency).
- Get legal advice about how to protect your children's safety and what to do about your family home and shared property.

To protect yourself outside the home

- Keep a copy of your protection order with you at all times and give a copy to your older children.
- Screen calls on your cell phone and work phone.
- Tell your boss, security supervisor, and other key people or friends at work about your situation and discuss having your employer call the police if you are in danger from your partner.
- Make sure your phone number, email address, and other personal information are not on any publicly available lists (such as an employee phone list).

To protect your children

- Make safety plans for when your partner picks up and returns your children on access visits (for example, have another adult with you or meet your partner in a safe public place).
- Let your children's school or daycare know if you have a protection order and give them a copy. Keep the school informed about your situation and make sure your children's school bus driver also knows about it.
- Teach your children to call 911 or to phone the police and fire department for help.
- Practise with your children what they will say when they call for help.
- Tell your children that their job is to stay safe and protect themselves, not to look after you.
- Choose a code word with your children and/or friends, so they know when you or your children are in danger and can call for help.
- Teach your children where your planned emergency exits are.

After you leave the relationship

- Make sure your name is not on your mailbox or your apartment building's directory.
- Get counselling for yourself and your children.
- Tell all your creditors in writing that you are not with your partner. Get your bank to remove your name from any joint credit cards or accounts and freeze any overdrafts and lines of credit so that your partner cannot use them up to their limits. (This could be complicated, so it is a good idea to get legal help.)
- Open a bank account in your own name and arrange with your bank not to mail you bank statements.
- Arrange for your mail to be sent to friends or family.
- Use grocery stores, shopping malls, and a bank or branch that are different from when you were living with your abusive partner, and do your shopping and banking at different hours.
- Change your doctor, dentist, and other professional services you would normally use.

Help from the police

You and your children have the right to be safe. If you are being assaulted or criminally harassed, call 911 or the emergency police or RCMP number listed inside the front cover of your phone book. If you do not speak English, you can ask 911 for an interpreter. Police can help when abuse is happening or after it has happened.

Other help

Because you are in an abusive relationship, you may feel ashamed, afraid, and alone. Abuse in relationships is *not* a private family matter. You can get help for yourself and your children, whether you want to stay in the relationship or leave. Support services and trained people throughout BC can help you wherever you live.

- **Emergency shelters**, or safe houses, are where you and your children can go for immediate safety. **Transition houses**, also called second-stage housing, are where you and your children can stay when you leave an abusive relationship. To find the nearest safe house or transition house, call **VictimLink BC** at 1-800-563-0808 (no charge, 24 hours a day, seven days a week).

- **Advocates, settlement workers, and victim service workers** provide free legal information and emotional support. To find an advocate, see the PovNet website at www.povnet.org (click "Find an Advocate"). To find a victim service worker, call **VictimLink BC** or see the website at www.victimlinkbc.ca.
- **Income assistance** (welfare) can provide you with emergency money if you have no money. For information, call the Ministry of Social Development at 1-866-866-0800 (no charge, 24 hours a day, seven days a week).
- **Community services** provide support, counselling, and information. Some offer services specifically to newcomers; people with disabilities; or lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered partners. Check your local phone book for contact information.

Legal help

- If you cannot pay for a lawyer, the **Legal Services Society (legal aid)** may provide a free lawyer. Call the Provincial Call Centre at 604-408-2172 (in Greater Vancouver) or 1-866-577-2525 (no charge, elsewhere in BC). Legal aid also offers free, brief legal advice through its Family LawLINE (same phone numbers) and family duty counsel (lawyers) at courts. See the legal aid website at www.legalaid.bc.ca or, for family law information, see www.familylaw.lss.bc.ca.
- If you can pay for a lawyer, call the **Lawyer Referral Service** at 604-687-3221 (in Greater Vancouver) or 1-800-663-1919 (no charge, elsewhere in BC) to get the name of a lawyer you can meet with to discuss your legal problem for \$25 plus taxes for the first half hour.
- If you are Aboriginal, you may be able to get legal help from your local friendship centre, your band's social development office, and/or your nation's child and family services office. Call **VictimLink BC** for the name of a Native courtworker near where you live to help you.

More information

For more information about getting legal and other help, see the Legal Services Society booklet *Surviving Relationship Violence and Abuse* at www.legalaid.bc.ca/publications (click "Family violence").

This fact sheet explains the law in general. It is not intended to give you legal advice on your particular problem. This fact sheet is one of a series produced by the Legal Services Society, BC. Other fact sheets in this series:

What Is Abuse?

If Your Sponsor Abuses You

Men Abused by Their Partners

Getting Help from the Police or RCMP

The Criminal Court Process

Protection Orders

Custody, Guardianship, and Access

What to Do About Money

Staying in the Family Home on Reserve



Legal
Services
Society

British Columbia
www.legalaid.bc.ca