

SAFETY PLANNING FOR ABORIGINAL WOMEN



FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION
IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

WHAT IS A SAFETY PLAN?

Women living with family violence sometimes need to leave abusive situations. For example, if your partner's controlling and disrespectful behavior is combined with violence, threats, weapons, mental health problems and addictions, you could be at greater risk of serious harm. Having a safety plan may help you get away quickly with the personal items you need in a crisis.

A safety plan sets out some things you can do to increase your safety and the safety of your children. There are many different aspects of safety planning. The information in this pamphlet might help you prepare your own plan. Consider asking someone to help you create a plan, such as a trusted friend, or staff at a transition house, victim services, a health centre or social service agency.

SAFETY IF YOU ARE LIVING WITH ABUSE

Even if you are not planning to leave, it is important to have a safety plan in case the violence gets worse and you do have to leave quickly.

- Store some emergency cash, an extra set of house keys, car keys and a few clothes with a trusted friend or some place you can get them.
- Open your own savings account and tell the bank not to send any mail to your home address.
- Get legal advice from a lawyer about your rights – be sure to explain that you are in a violent relationship.
- Make a list of telephone numbers you need to know (police, transition house, lawyer, people who can help you with childcare, transportation, bank, etc.) and keep them hidden or memorized.

- Call the local transition house and find out how you can get there in an emergency.
- Keep the telephone calls you make confidential by using a pay phone, a friend's phone, or a friend's calling card.
- If you have "call display" on your telephone at home, be sure to tell anyone who is helping you to use Call Block (*67) when they call you (**Note: see the front pages of telephone book for more information on Call Block**).
- Keep some money hidden for emergencies and keep change for phone calls on you at all times.
- Make copies of important documents for you and your children. Keep them together and ready to take if you leave quickly or put them in a safe place outside the house. Things that you should take if you leave include:

- * identification for yourself and your children
- * birth certificates for yourself and your children
- * status cards for yourself and your children
- * protection order papers/documents
- * social insurance cards
- * money
- * chequebook, bank book/cards
- * keys - house/car/office
- * driver's license and registration
- * medications
- * passports
- * health cards
- * medical records
- * divorce/separation papers
- * address book
- * items of special sentimental value

SAFETY DURING A VIOLENT INCIDENT

To prepare for a violent incident, here are a few things you can do:

- Identify escape route(s) from your home - doors, windows, elevators, stairwells, or fire escapes that you use.
- Practice how to get out safely and know the rooms to avoid where you could be trapped or weapons are on hand such as the bathroom or kitchen.
- Teach your children their own safety plan and have a code word to use with them or other family members that means "call for help".
- Keep your purse/wallet and keys handy (Always put them in the same place, so that you can find them when you need to leave quickly. Have a second set of keys in case you need them).
- Have some safe place that you can go if you have to leave quickly.
- Call the police. And if you have to return home to get personal belongings, call the police and ask them to go with you and stand by and keep the peace.



SAFETY AFTER YOU LEAVE A VIOLENT RELATIONSHIP

Leaving an abusive partner does not mean that the abuse or harassment will always stop. Separation is often a time when you have to be extra cautious. Here are some things to consider to increase your safety in your own home.

- Change the locks on doors and windows.
- Install a peep hole in the door.
- Replace wooden doors with steel/metal doors.
- Install window bars, poles to wedge against doors, an electronic alarm system.
- Purchase rope ladders to be used for escape from second floor windows.
- Install a motion sensitive lighting system outside that lights up when a person is coming close to your home.
- Leave the lights on.
- Get an unlisted phone number.
- Keep emergency telephone numbers nearby.
- Have an escape route mapped out in case you need it.
- Keep copies of protection orders handy (peace bonds, restraining orders, bail or parole orders, etc). Know the conditions in these orders and be sure to call the police immediately if your partner violates the order.
- If you and your partner are fighting over children, be sure to have copies of any family court orders such as custody orders. Give a copy to anyone who has contact with the children (school, daycare or babysitters, coaches, neighbours, band office, friends, landlord, etc) and make sure they know who has permission to pick up the children and who does not.

SAFETY ON THE JOB AND IN PUBLIC

Each abused woman must decide if, and/or when she will tell others that her partner has abused her and that she may be at continued risk. Friends, family and co-workers may be able to help. Each woman should consider carefully which people to recruit to help secure her safety. Consider any or all of the following, if you feel comfortable and safe doing so:

- * Tell your boss or supervisor at work about the situation.
- * Ask someone to screen your telephone calls at work and keep a record of them.
- * Save any threatening emails or voicemail messages.
- * Discuss the possibility of having your employer call the police if you are in danger from your (ex)partner.
- * Use different grocery stores/shopping malls and shop at different times than you did before to reduce the risk of contact with your (ex)partner.
- * Use the following safety suggestions for arriving or leaving work:

- Park close to the entrance of your building, and talk with security, the police or a manager if you fear an assault at work.
- Let someone know when you will be home.
- Walk with someone to your car.
- Look around the parking lot.
- If your partner is following you, drive to a place where there are supportive people, such as a friend's home or the police station.



- If you are walking, take a route where there are lots of people.
- Take different routes home.
- If you see your partner on the street, go to a public place, e.g. store.
- Buy a whistle or a personal alarm to call attention to yourself and ask for help if you are being harassed.

SAFETY ON THE INTERNET

The Internet, including MSN Messenger, chat rooms and email, can put you at increased risk for harm if your abusive partner is monitoring your activities. Be careful to change your passwords and never leave your email open and unattended. When you surf for information on the web, Internet browsers record a history of recently visited web sites for fast reloading on your next visit. Your safety could be jeopardized if your abuser were to check this history.

There are some things you can do to hide your Internet use:

- access the Internet from a friend's house, your workplace, a library or Internet cafe. **(After using a community computer, be sure to delete your "history" or the addresses of the sites you visited).**
- take extra care to clear the computer's memory of the most recent pages you have accessed on the Internet. This will empty your computer's cache of the sites you recently visited. **(Note: If you do not know how to clear your memory check the Help menu for terms like "cache" "history" or "cookies").**
- after you have cleared the cache, access some sites on "safe" subjects so that it will have some items in it. Check out the sites of newspapers or entertainment.

SAFETY FOR YOUR CHILDREN

It is important to help children and youth learn ways to protect themselves. You can use the pamphlet, *Someone is Hurting my Mom: My Safety Plan*, to help you talk to your children and create safety measures for your children. Some of the safety measures you may reinforce include:

- * Have your child identify a safe room/place in the house, preferably with a lock on the door, and a phone.
- * Teach the child how to call for help. In a crisis, teach them to contact police or band constables and their emergency numbers, or to call 911.
- * Have a code word that means "get to safety and get help".
- * Tell your children that they must leave the phone off the hook after they call 911 or the police. The police will call the number back if the child hangs up. This could create a dangerous situation for you and the child.
- * Help your child learn the street address and his or her full name.
- * Rehearse what they will say.
- * Teach the child about safe places to go such as a neighbour's or a relative's home.

MAKE SURE YOUR CHILDREN KNOW:

- * They are NOT responsible for the abuse. It is not their fault.
- * They should get to safety. They should never try to stop the abuse. The best way they can help you is to get out of the way!

- * You love them and want them to keep themselves safe.
- * There are people they can call in a crisis. Make sure they know the telephone numbers of these people and where to go in the house or if they leave the house.

TAKING CARE OF YOU

Being abused is exhausting and emotionally draining. The process of surviving requires courage and incredible energy. Reach out for help for yourself and your children. Consider contacting agencies and services such as the Health/Wellness Centre, Mental Health Centre, the Band Office, family services, family resource centres, a transition house in your area or local family violence prevention organizations.



MORE INFORMATION ON SAFETY PLANS

You can gather more information on safety plans by searching the internet.

- * For information on safety planning see the Healing Journey website at www.thehealingjourney.ca
- * Check out information about safety planning on Public Legal Education and Information Service of NB's website – www.legal-info-legale.nb.ca
- * Check out Shelter Net's Internet and Email Safety Tips at www.shelternet.ca/en/women/internet-safety/

TO ORDER FREE COPIES OF THIS PAMPHLET:



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