



Women's
Legal Service WA

SAFETY PLANNING

A Guide for writing your own Safety Plan*

PURPOSE

This information guide is designed to assist you with preparing your own safety plan.

It is not intended to be legal advice and is provided as general information only.

We strongly recommend you seek legal advice if you have any questions about any legal issues. Further information on how to do this is at the end of this guide.

In preparing this guide, Women's Legal Service WA referred to many resources available online, and wishes to acknowledge the assistance provided by those.

Information in this guide is current as at 20 March 2020.

© Women's Legal Service WA 2020

WHAT THIS GUIDE WILL COVER

This information guide will help you:

- * understand the importance of preparing a safety plan;
- * write a safety plan; and
- * prepare for a safe and effective exit.

SAFETY PLANNING

Your safety plan is key to looking after your safety and the safety of your children. Having a plan in place will give you a process to follow and prepare you for a safe and effective exit.

No safety plan is the same because everyone's circumstances are different. Your plan has to work for you, so take what you need from this guide that will specifically help you and your family.

When violence has occurred in a relationship, it is likely it will happen again. Therefore, it is important to have a safety plan in place. You may not be ready or able to leave your relationship right now, however, you should still have a plan in place.

Developing a safety plan is a good thing to do if you:

- * notice tension building between you and your partner;
- * feel you may be at risk of violence or your partner has already been violent towards you; and/or
- * are considering applying for a Family Violence Restraining order (FVRO) or have already done so.

If and when you are ready to leave the relationship, developing a safety plan can help you to leave the relationship safely.

Remember, staying safe does not mean changing your behaviour so that someone does not get angry. *You are not responsible for the abuse or violence being used against you or your children.*

WRITING YOUR PLAN

Planning ahead is an extremely important step that can help you to leave a violent relationship safely.

This guide goes through the different things you need to consider in making a plan to leave and also lists the important items you should have in a bag ready to go for a planned exit, or in the event you need to leave suddenly, which we will call a "Go Bag".

STEP ONE: *Who can you ask for help?*

During this time, it is important to have people around you that you can trust and lean on.

If appropriate, it is a good idea to speak to supportive friends, family or neighbours that you trust about the violence you are experiencing in your relationship. It can also be helpful if your support people are aware of your safety plan. But remember to tell them it is a secret.

You might want to:

- * arrange for someone to come quickly when you call and help you leave;
- * have a code word that you can send to your friends or loved ones that tells them you feel unsafe and need help; and/or
- * ask the neighbours to call the police if they hear a commotion from the house.

It is also an idea, if safe, to give these people a note that includes information such as your street address and nearest cross-street that will help guide Police if they do need to be called.

Make a list of the people you can speak to here (it might be one or it might be more, whatever works for you):

STEP TWO: *When are you going to leave?*

What time is the safest time to leave? Is it when your partner is asleep? At work? Away? Passed out?

Think about it, and make a decision.

But, if violence erupts, or you feel in danger, you should leave immediately.

What did you decide?

STEP THREE: *Where are you going to go?*

Decide on a safe place where you and your children can go quickly. Your safe place should be close by and easy to get to.

This could be a friend's house, a women's refuge or a nearby police station.

If you have a close (and non-mutual friend of your partner) it can be a good idea to go to their house. If you choose to do that, you should have a conversation with your friend about holding onto some things for you (e.g. your Go Bag or clothing, children's clothing, toiletries, important valuables and documentation etc.). This will mean your Go Bag can be a bit lighter, and easier to grab in a hurry.

If for some reason you can no longer go to your safe place, have a Plan B location in mind.

Inform your kids of the safe place too, so that they are clear on the plan.

Where did you decide?

STEP FOUR: *How are you going to get there?*

How will you and your children get to your safe place? Will it be by taxi? Will you drive? Can a friend collect you?

If you decide to drive, have a spare set of car keys hidden outside or somewhere close by just in case. You should also reverse your car into the driveway for easy access when leaving or leave it where it cannot be blocked in.

Think about how you will leave the house. Will you leave from the front door, or a different exit? Again, inform your kids of the choice of exit.

If your exit door is locked, have keys hanging on the wall near the door so you can easily grab them. Or, have a Plan B exit in mind.

What did you decide?

STEP FIVE: *Pack your Go Bag*

Get your Go Bag together and keep it somewhere safe.

You can leave your go bag with a trusted friend or family member to keep for you, or you can have your Go Bag ready at home. If you want to keep an emergency Go Bag at home it should be light, safely hidden but easy to grab. Then if you need to leave in a hurry it will be all together and ready to go.

Outlined in the next couple of pages is what you might consider including in your Go Bag.

Money

Make sure you have some cash ready for you when you leave. This will help with any transport costs, interim accommodation expenses or unexpected emergencies.

It is a good idea to save a bit of money each week and put it aside, somewhere safe.

Even consider opening a new bank account in a different name to your other accounts and link it to a new email address that no one knows about. Also make sure to tell the bank to only send correspondence electronically. You can then keep the bank card with your other valuables you leave at your friend's house.

If you open a new bank account, consider who you need to tell. Do you need to let Centrelink or your employer know to pay into your new account? Do you need to link your new account with any outgoing direct debits for bills or payments?

Important Documents

You should prepare a collection of important documents. If you do not think you can hide all of the original documents, try to make copies or scan them.

You can keep copies of them with you, give copies to a friend to hold onto, or send copies to your family and friends. You can also use a USB memory stick and put that in your Go Bag instead or email them to yourself at the new email address you set up.

The documents you should collect are:

(tick the boxes when you have packed the items in your Go Bag)

Identification

- Drivers Licence
- Pension / health care card
- Medicare cards

- Birth certificates for you and your children
- Passports
- Immigration papers
- Centrelink and child support documents

Legal

- Copy of FVRO / Police orders
- Lease / Rental / Mortgage agreement
- Car Registration papers
- Insurance papers
- Family Court orders

Financial

- Bank account details – print copies of recent bank statements, or write down your account number and BSB number

Other Suggested Go Bag Items

- Spare house keys
- Medication / list of medications / spare scripts / medical and immunisation records
- Safe mobile phone (with prepaid SIM that can't be traced to you) and charger. Store emergency contacts including 000 for police in the phone
- List of important numbers – family, friends, insurance, work, landlord, school, doctor, and lawyer (consider giving a copy of this list to someone you trust)
- Change of clothes/ nappies
- Baby formula / bottles / baby food / pacifier
- Recent photo of your partner to assist others to identify them
- Special personal items (e.g. photos or family jewellery)
- A favourite toy or comfort item for each child

It is also worth considering whether there are any items around the house that are of significant or financial value. If you removed these items from the house will they be missed? If your partner will not notice these items missing, consider removing them from the house and putting them in a safe place (like at a friend's house).

STEP SIX: *Is your technology safe?*

It is also important that you ensure you are using technology safely. It is very common for perpetrators of family violence to use technology to harass, stalk and track their partners. It is important that you are tech safe so as to limit this risk.

Does your partner have access to your phone or computer? If you think that your partner knows too much information, it is likely that he does. Remember to trust your gut instincts and act on how you feel.

Think about the online accounts you may have, such as Facebook and online banking. You should change the passwords, PIN numbers and security questions to all of the online accounts you have. This could also be something that you start doing frequently. Also think about what might be syncing to the "cloud" or other devices that your partner might have access to.

Other ways of being tech safe can be found at this link: <https://techsafety.org.au/resources/resources-women/technology-safety-plan/>

You should also consider setting up a new email address that cannot be associated with you in any way and picking something your partner would not be able to recognise.

SAFETY PLANNING FOR CHILDREN

If you have children in your care and they are being exposed to or are part of the violence relationship, it can be helpful safety planning with them too.

If you feel comfortable, telling your children's school or child care centre about your current situation can be helpful. You should also give them the

names of people that have the authority to pick up the children up from school. This could include family members or close friends.

It may also help if you provide the school or centre with any copies of any Family Court Orders or your FVRO.

Safety planning with your children could include:

- * helping your children recognise the signs of danger (shouting, breaking objects, etc.);
- * warning children to stay out of conflict; teach them that it is not their responsibility to stop your partner when they are angry or violent;
- * coming up with a code word or signal which means they should all leave the house. This could be the same as the one you have with your friends;
- * coming up with a safe place where they can go when they feel unsafe and practice escape routes with them;
- * teaching your children how to call 000 and how to give their address. You could also have your children practice what they should say if they have to report violence, for example: *“My name is ... and my mum is being hurt. My address is...”*

HELPFUL SUPPORT CONTACTS & RESOURCES

Keep your phone charged and have a list of emergency contacts handy or stored in your Go Bag or somewhere safe. This is so you can still make necessary calls in a time of emergency.

Below is a list of contact numbers and resources that you might find useful. If you don't think you can safely save them in your phone, keep a copy of these somewhere else, or give them to a friend:

- * **1800RESPECT** (1800 737 732) – 24-hour national sexual assault, family and domestic violence counselling line.
- * **Lifeline** (13 11 14) – Lifeline has a national number which can help put you in contact with a crisis service in your State. Anyone across

Australia experiencing a personal crisis or thinking about suicide can call.

- * **Relationships Australia** (1300 364 277) – Support groups and counselling on relationships, and for abusive and abused partners.
- * **Aboriginal Family Domestic Violence Hotline** (1800 019 123) – Victims Services has a dedicated contact line for Aboriginal victims of crime who would like information on victims’ rights, how to access counselling and financial assistance.
- * **Kids Help Line** (1800 551 800) – Free, private and confidential, telephone and online counselling service specifically for young people aged between 5 and 25 in Australia.
- * **Australian Childhood Foundation** (1800 176 453 / 03 9874 3922) – Counselling for children and young people affected by abuse.
- * **Daisy** – a mobile phone app that connects women to family violence services in Australia. Download Daisy from: www.1800respect.org.au/daisy.
- * Other safety apps that you can download can be found here – <https://www.1800respect.org.au/help-and-support/safety-apps-for-mobile-phones>.
- * **RSPCA “Pets in Crisis”** (if you have pets) – <https://www.rspcawa.asn.au/pets-in-crisis.php>

OTHER GOOD TIPS

If you are not ready to leave the relationship just yet that is ok, but you should have a plan in place anyway. Depending on your circumstances, it might be a while before you leave, so you should sit down and review your safety plan every now and then to ensure it is still the safest way to leave.

You should rehearse your safety plan, and if it is appropriate you should practice it with your children.

