NATIONAL NETWORK TO END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

NNEDV

SAFETY PLANNING: If You Are Being Abused

First and foremost, know that you are not alone and that the abuse is not your fault. If you are in an abusive relationship or think that you are, safety and support are critical.

Support

If you are in an abusive relationship, it is important to get support. Someone who batters is usually very good at getting their partner isolated away from their family and friends. As a result, victims often begin to feel ashamed and alone and believe that no one would understand. Many survivors have even described feeling as if they didn't even know who they were anymore. This makes it even more difficult to survive the abuse, to sort through the feelings and to make decisions that will be best for you and your children.

If you find that you don't have anyone to talk to, consider calling the National Domestic Violence Hotline or a domestic violence program in your area. Hotline operators are specially trained in domestic violence and are available 24 hours a day to provide resources, help with options to stay safe or just to listen.

Support groups are another option to consider. Beside offering shelter, many domestic violence programs also offer support groups. These groups offer a safe place to talk about your feelings and experiences in an atmosphere free of judgment. It's also an opportunity to meet and talk with other people who have had similar experiences.

Planning for Safety

If you think you are in an abusive relationship, it is important to make a plan to keep yourself and your children safe. Think of a safety plan like keeping an emergency kit in your car. Hopefully you won't need it but if you do, it could save your life. Here are some things to consider:

In an abusive relationship:

- Plan how you could get out of the house quickly if your partner becomes violent. Try to position yourself near a door where you can escape quickly.
- Put together a suitcase and keep it at a friend or family member's house. Put in it clothes for you and the children, needed medicines, important papers, car keys, photographs, money, and emergency phone numbers. Add anything else you might need if you have to leave suddenly.
- Tell neighbors about the abuse and have them call the police if they hear noises coming from your house.
- Talk to your children about how they can keep themselves safe as well.

If you are thinking about leaving a battering relationship:

- Identify things that have worked in the past to keep you safe.

- Think about what has happened in the past and how the abuser has acted. Identify clues that indicate when things might become violent (i.e. behavioral -- body language, drug/alcohol use, etc. -- and event driven -- paydays, holidays, etc.).
- Identify what you will do if the violence starts again. Can you call the police? Is there a phone in the house? Can you work out a signal with the children or neighbors to call the police or get help?
- Explore ways to have dangerous weapons (i.e. guns, hunting knives, etc.) removed from the house.
- Plan an escape route and practice it. Know where you can go and who you can call for help. Keep a list of addresses and phone numbers where you can go in crisis and keep them in a safe place.
- If possible, open a bank account or hide money to establish or increase independence (more financial tips).
- Gather together the following items and hide them with a trusted individual or somewhere accessible outside the home:
  - Money/cab fare
  - Check book
  - Credit card/ATM card
  - Order of Protection
  - Passport
  - Immigration documents
  - Work permit
  - Public Assistance ID
  - Driver's license and registration
  - Social Security card
  - Your partner's Social Security number
  - Medical records
  - Insurance policies
  - Police records
  - Record of violence
  - Children's school and immunization records
  - Lease
  - Birth certificates
  - Baby's things (diapers, formula, medication)
  - Medications
  - Clothing
  - Eye glasses
  - Family pictures
  - Address book
  - Important telephone numbers
  - Mobile phone/coins to use a pay phone

After leaving:

- Change the locks on doors and windows (if the abuser has a key or access to a key).
- Increase the police's ability to find your house by having a large visible street address outside the house.
- Obtain a P.O. Box and forward all your mail to it.
- Ensure that utility companies will not give out your information to your abuser (more information about confidentiality for victims of domestic violence).
- Determine the safest way to communicate with the abuser if they must have contact. If you agree to meet, always do it in a public place (preferably a place with a security guard or police officer), and it's best to bring someone else. Make sure you are not followed home.

- If your partner follows you in the car, drive to a hospital or fire station and keep honking the horn.
- Create a safety plan for leaving work. Talk with your supervisor and building security at work and provide a picture of the abuser, if possible. If you have an Order of Protection, give the security guard or receptionist a copy.
- Teach your children a safety plan, including calling the police or family and friends if they are taken and where to go during an emergency.
- Talk to your schools and childcare provider about who has permission to pick up the children and develop other special provisions to protect the children.
- Keep a journal of harassing phone calls and times you may see your abuser around the work place or neighborhood. Save and/or print any threatening emails. Keep a journal of anything that happens between you, the abuser, and the children regarding visitation.