

# SAFETY PLANNING

**HAWC**

Houston Area  
Women's Center

Ending domestic and sexual violence for ALL



## SAFETY PLANNING

Domestic abuse, also referred to as “domestic violence”, “intimate partner violence”, or “family violence”, is a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one person to gain or maintain power and control over another person through fear and intimidation, often including the threat or use of violence.

**Abuse can take many forms, including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, economic, and spiritual abuse and/or stalking.**

Leaving an abusive situation can be the most dangerous time for a victim/survivor of domestic violence. Your safety and well-being are paramount. It is advised that you do not share your plan for leaving with your abuser. It is important to note it is not necessary to have documentation when seeking emergency housing through the Houston Area Women's Center. If you are in immediate danger, call, or text 911.

For a personalized safety plan which considers your unique circumstances and needs, contact one of our advocates through our 24-hour Hotline at 713-528-2121, or live chat through [www.hawc.org](http://www.hawc.org).

Current technology has increased abusers' ability to harass and stalk their victims. Location and tracking features on your electronic devices such as your phone, computer, and tablets can give your abuser access to your browser and location history as well as your current location. Electronic devices also store browser history, usage, and activity. If you opt for “Safety Exit” to leave the HAWC website, it will not appear in your search history.

## MAKING A PLAN

Safety planning can help reduce the risk of future harm from an abuser. The following strategies are meant as considerations to help identify protective measures for yourself (and your children) when you are experiencing any type of abuse – and ready to leave. Remember, you are not alone, the abuse is not your fault, and no one deserves to be in an abusive relationship.

## BEFORE ACTS OF ABUSE

Below are safety considerations if you are in fear of your partner, or if acts of abuse have occurred in the past.

## THINK ABOUT:

- What has worked to keep you safe in the past?
- What concerns you the most about your safety (and your child(ren))?
- If you must leave your home, do you have someone you can stay with? If yes, who?

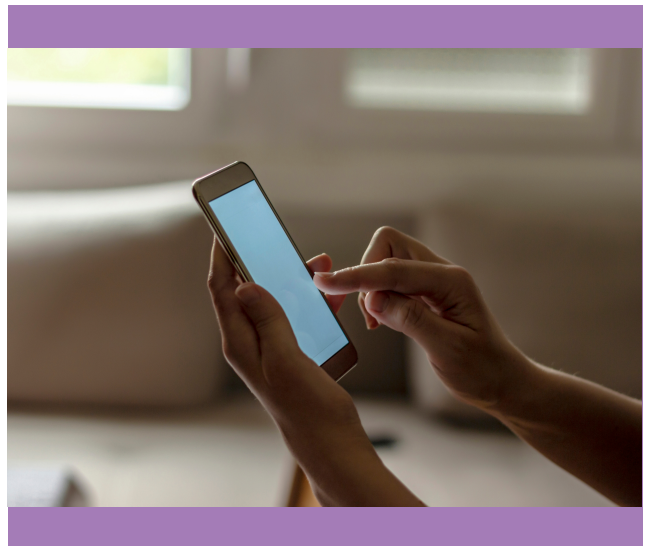
## TAKE ACTION:

- Keep keys and your purse/wallet close to the door you frequently exit from.
- Keep your cell phone charged.
- Apply for a protective order if abuse has occurred in the past and is likely to occur again.
- Make copies of important documents such as protective orders and custody orders and keep them in a safe place.
- Share copies of protection orders with employers, schools, etc.
- Back your vehicle into the driveway when parking and keep the gas tank full.
- Talk to a trusted neighbor and make them aware of the abuse (and protective order if applicable); ask them to call 911 if violence occurs.
- Talk to your employer about the abuse and any legal orders in place they should be aware of.
- If you believe your partner is accessing your computer, locate a computer they do not have access to for privacy.
- Utilize private browsing options on both your computer and mobile devices to hide search history.
- If safe, put away extra income (no matter how small) in a private or hiding place.
- Protect your Social Security Number, and that of your child's, by freezing your credit, to prevent misuse and checking your, and your child's, credit report regularly.

## DURING ACTS OF ABUSE

Your safety is a top priority during acts of abuse. Below are considerations if abuse erupts.

- Call or text 911 if it is safe to do so.
- Move away from weapons or sharp items.
- Trust your instincts and judgment to protect yourself (and your children) until everyone is safe.
- Call the police if your partner violates a protection order.
- Gather important documents and medications, only if you can leave safely and time permits.



## AFTER ACTS OF ABUSE

Leaving a violent and abusive situation does not always equate to safety. If you have successfully left, consider the following to remain as safe as possible. Remember you can always reach out to one of our advocates for a personalized safety plan:

- Seek medical attention if physical and/or sexual violence occurred. For example, certain medicines to prevent HIV infection are only effective for 72 hours (3 days).
- Reach out to a friend or loved one for emotional support and/or if you have the urge to return to a potentially dangerous situation.
- Apply for a protective order if abuse has occurred in the past and is likely to occur again.
- Protect your address by utilizing a P.O. Box and the [Texas Address Confidentiality Program](#).
- Keep your information private by not sharing your full name, phone number, and address with retailers when creating accounts.
- Document all incidents of violence, abuse, and stalking.

## AFTER ACTS OF ABUSE CONTINUED...

- Collect evidence when possible (i.e., photos of physical abuse, screenshots, phone records, texts, and forensic exams).
- Maintain clear documentation of funds spent if you have left a relationship, as you may be asked to account for the expenditures at a later date.
- Open new financial accounts, including a checking account and credit cards only you sign on.
- Change all your direct deposits and account Personal Identification Numbers (PINs).
- Sign up for VINE to track the progress of your abuser if they have been arrested.
- Keep your victim advocate updated on any changes to your contact information.

## PROTECTING YOUR TECHNOLOGY:

- Utilize lock screen passwords on your phone and computer to keep others from accessing your devices.
- Cover built-in webcams when not in use to keep someone from accessing them.
- Turn off location on mobile devices (including children's) to prevent someone from tracking your location.
- Look for tracking devices that may have been placed in your belongings or vehicle.
- Set your electronic devices and account settings to "private" to prevent unauthorized usage.
- Disable auto share and auto links (i.e., cloud, google...) on your cell phone and computers to increase privacy.
- Change your password regularly.
- Periodically search your name online to see if any identifying information appears.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR CHILDREN:

Additional safety measures should be considered for children. Adjust the following to your child's level of understanding.

- Create a safe word or statement with your child(ren).
- Teach your child(ren) where to go and/or who to call when you use the safe word or statement.
- Practice an escape plan with your child(ren).
- Hide extra clothes and necessities for your child(ren).
- Pack a sentimental item for your child(ren) if you seek refuge.
- Meet your abuser at a neutral and safe location (i.e., police station or fire station) during custody drop-offs and pick-ups.
- Talk to your child's school, daycare, and/or babysitters about any legal restrictions and safety matters concerning your child and the abuser.



## ELECTRONIC CONSIDERATIONS

Current technology, including spyware, has increased abusers' ability to harass and stalk their victims. Misuse and criminal actions can lead to the unwanted and unsafe discovery of your location, browser history, usage, etc., for example, the use of tracking devices. Below are electronic safety considerations. Adjust according to your level of safety from a potential abuser. For example, if you are currently residing with your abuser, be mindful of any changes that could cause alarm or lead to harm.

- Set your electronic devices and account settings to "private" to prevent unauthorized usage.
- Utilize lock screen passwords on your phone and computer to keep others from accessing your devices.
- Cover built-in webcams when not in use to keep someone from accessing them.
- Turn off location on mobile devices (including children's) to prevent someone from tracking your location.
- Check your phone settings regularly and be aware they can reset during regular updates without your knowledge.
- Check your child's phone and other electronic devices' security settings regularly, especially if they traveled with or visited with your abuser.



## IMPORTANT ITEMS TO REMEMBER

If you find yourself needing to leave your home and it is safe for you to do so, consider packing the following:

- Spare keys
- Money
- Phone numbers
- Medications
- Collected evidence (anything that shows you have been abused)
- A sentimental item for your child(ren)
- Documentation:
  - Driver's license
  - Birth certificates
  - Social security cards
  - School records
  - Marriage certificates
  - Passport
  - Medical records
  - Court orders
  - Wills
  - Financial documentation

### *Electronic Considerations continued...*

- Look for tracking devices that may have been placed in your and/or your child(ren)'s belongings or vehicle.
- Disable auto share and auto links (i.e., cloud, google...) on your cell phone, tablet, and computers to increase privacy.
- Change your passwords regularly on your electronic devices, accounts, and social media.
- Periodically search your name online to see if any identifying information appears.
- Keep your information private, avoid sharing your full name, phone numbers, and addresses with retailers and when creating accounts.
- Obtain a new cell phone with a different phone number.
- Look for hidden cameras if you suspect you are being watched and/or recorded.
- Be cautious when posting pictures on social media that could identify your location.
- Avoid tagging your location on social media.

Speak with a HAWC advocate in English and Spanish 24 hours a day, 365 days a week by calling 713-528-2121, or live chat with an advocate at [www.hawc.org](http://www.hawc.org)