



***Keeping Safe:  
A Workbook for Developing Safety Plans***

**Women In Transition, Inc.**

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### **About the Use of Pronouns in this Workbook**

The greatest single common denominator about those victimized by domestic violence is the fact that the overwhelming majority are women. According to the two most comprehensive national studies by the U.S. Department of Justice on intimate partner violence, between 64 percent and 85 percent of those victimized by domestic violence are women. Men are responsible for the vast majority of these attacks. And women experience more chronic and injurious physical assaults by intimate partners than do men.

That's why feminine pronouns are used in this workbook when referring to those victimized by domestic violence and masculine pronouns are used when referring to perpetrators of domestic violence. This should not detract from the understanding that, in some instances, the perpetrator might be female while the victim is male or of the same gender.

### **The Purpose of this Workbook**

People often think of domestic violence only in terms of the black eyes and bruises that can be seen. In reality, domestic violence is a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors that men use to control their intimate partners. As adaptive and resilient as they are, abused women nevertheless face a daunting number of barriers to escaping the violence. In addition to the very real threat of harm or death to themselves or their children, abused women must contend with the accompanying financial and emotional hardship. They also must weigh cultural and religious values that emphasize keeping families intact. And they must respond to the violence in spite of justice and social service systems that don't always provide adequate safety and support.

People who have never experienced abuse often find it difficult to imagine why women don't leave and how the abuse can continue for years. Relationships almost never start out as abusive. It is important to remember that love and intimacy precede the abuse, which can make it difficult to break away. Abusive relationships are not violent all the time. There are periods when a woman is reminded why she fell in love with this person. Abusers effectively weave together intimacy and abuse to control their partners.

Abused women sometimes express confusion about the recurring nature of the violence they experience in their relationship. It seems to them to be unpredictable and impulsive. However, domestic violence is neither random nor haphazard. It is a complex pattern of increasingly frequent and harmful physical, sexual, psychological and other abusive behaviors used to control the victim. The abuser's tactics are devised and carried out precisely to control her.

Nevertheless, a violent relationship is obviously a dangerous relationship. To survive, abused women have learned to constantly assess and re-assess their risks as they perceive them, which influences their decision-making relative to staying in or leaving their relationship. Therefore, "risk assessments" become a focal point of a abused woman's survival which is incorporated into her safety planning which is essentially an ongoing process of evaluating the risks and benefits of different options and identifying ways to reduce risks.

This workbook is designed to help women focus on behaviors and activities relative to their fundamental safety, helping to highlight the complex network of needs and problems each woman may encounter, her survival skills and strengths, and how she can or has already used them to prioritize the difficult areas of her life.

It must be noted, however, that risk assessments, safety planning, nor court orders of protection from abuse are guarantees of safety. They are only tools to help an abused woman maneuver through a difficult and dangerous time of her life.

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## Defining Domestic Violence

Domestic violence, battering, interpersonal violence, wife-beating, spouse abuse, partner abuse, woman abuse – are all terms used to describe acts of violence committed against women. Violent actions if committed against a non-intimate would be considered severe crimes.

Domestic violence, or battering, is about power, control, and dominance. It is a pattern of coercive behaviors used by one person to control the thoughts, beliefs and/or conduct of an intimate partner or to punish her for refusing to be controlled. Once the abusive and violent behavior has breached the loving bonds of a relationship, it will likely increase and intensify over time - often resulting in frequent and severe injuries, child abuse, stalking, rape, murder and/or suicide.

Abusive, violent behavior is a matter of personal will or self-control, and is a means to elevate the abuser's sense of personal power over the intimate partner without regard for the consequences. At the core of this control is the batterer's goal to be the decision maker, the one who knows best, the one with the power. The abused partner is left with limited freedom to make decisions about her life.

The variations and combinations of abusive behavior are vast and unique to each individual relationship – in terms of each person's personal history. These behaviors may range from the use of threats, coercion, sexual humiliation, force, injury to children or pets, and economic exploitation, to limits on the partner's independence, and/or devaluing the abused partner's thoughts, feelings, opinions & dreams – her very being.

### Primary Categories of Domestic Violence

Acts of Domestic Violence Generally Fall into One or More of Three Categories:

1. Psychological Battering: Psychological or mental violence can include constant verbal abuse, name calling, threats, harassment, excessive possessiveness, isolating the woman from friends and family, deprivation of physical and economic resources, destruction of personal property and pets, use of children as a means of control, stalking, and/or using violence in the abused woman's presence, i.e. (punching a fist through a wall).
2. Physical Battering: Physical attacks or aggressive behavior can range from bruising to murder often beginning with acts that are excused as trivial (restraining, pushing, slapping and/or pinching) that escalate into more frequent and serious attacks (punching, kicking, biting, sexual assault, tripping, throwing) and further escalate to life-threatening behaviors (choking, breaking bones, using weapons) resulting in fatal injury to the woman and her children.
3. Sexual Abuse: Attacks are often accompanied by, or culminate in, sexual violence wherein the woman is forced to have sexual intercourse with her abuser, take part in unwanted sexual activity, or experience sexual humiliation.

## Targets of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence occurs in all segments of the community despite race, gender, class, age, economic status, educational achievements, political affiliations, or religious proclivities. In most cases, the person who causes the harm is a man, and the person who is hurt is a woman. However, domestic violence is not limited to intimate relationships between men and women. It also happens in same-sex intimate relationships between lesbians and gay men.

There is NOT a “typical woman who will be abused.” The risk factor is being born female. Over 50 percent of all women will experience physical violence in an intimate relationship and, for 24-30 percent of those women, the battering will be regular and ongoing.

Older women are uniquely vulnerable to domestic violence because they are nearly invisible, yet tragically a sizable population. Estimates of the number of older women who are victims of partner and family violence and other types of elder abuse each year range from one in 25 to one in 14, or between one and two million older women.

Accessibility to local resources is crucial to helping the older abused woman to break away from abusive family members. Without emotional, physical and financial support, older women face an increased risk of injury and premature death because of elder abuse at the hands of loved ones.

### Primary Reasons Older Abused Women are Vulnerable

1. Tradition: Older women are more likely to be bound by traditional and cultural ideology that prevents them from leaving an abusive spouse, or from seeing themselves as victims of domestic violence.
2. Money: Older women are very often financially dependent on their abusive spouse and do not have access to the financial resources they need to leave an abusive marriage.
3. Isolation: Many older women find themselves isolated from their family, friends and community, due to their spouses' neglect and abuse. This is especially true because older women suffer greater rates of chronic illness, which makes them dependent upon their spouses/care givers and thus reluctant or unable to report abuse.

## Understanding Why Battering Happens

As part of a national abused women's advocacy network, we believe that those who are abusive use their behavior to achieve and maintain power over their partners in order to get their own needs and desires met quickly and completely. Abusive individuals hurt their partners because violence is an effective method to gain power. WIT therefore rejects theories that attribute the causes of violence to family dysfunction, inadequate communication skills, women's provocation, stress, chemical dependency, lack of spiritual relationships to a deity, economic hardship, class practices, racial/ethnic intolerance, or other factors. These issues may be associated with abuse of women but do not cause it. Removing these factors will not end violence against women.

We know that about 98% of all domestic violence assaults are committed by men and that at least 60% of the men who are abusive grew up in homes where they were beaten or witnessed parental battering. Abusive individuals, like those they abuse, come from a wide spectrum of life experiences, backgrounds and relationships. As with abused women, there is no specific psychological "profile" of an abusive individual. Generally, such individuals are not violent in any other area of their lives outside the home.

Our priority must therefore be to understand why abuse and violence is directed at women and children, not why each individual person abuses. *While abusive individuals have varied personalities and many issues which influence their behavior and contribute to abuse or heighten the likelihood of its occurrence, they do not explain the consistent target – women.* We must work to discover what social conditions produce this target generation after generation and change those conditions in order to end violence against women and children.

The physical violence abusive individuals use may include assault, disfigurement, sexual abuse, property destruction, violence directed at friends, family, children, or pets, isolation and confinement, or threats to carry these out. Physical violence may involve the use of weapons. It is invariably coupled with non-physical abuse, including verbal attacks on the woman, economic exploitation and psychological abuse.

A woman who modifies her behavior because she fears her partner's violence may be hurt even if she has not been physically assaulted. If the abusive individual has threatened her with physical violence or is aware that menacing gestures intimidate her (perhaps because of her own history as a survivor of sexual abuse or as a child witness of violence), the woman is being injured or hurt. She is controlled and lives in fear of her partner because of these threats.

### Beliefs of Abusive Individuals

- Entitled to control their partners who are obliged to obey them.
- Are moral people even though they use violence against their partners.
- Will get what they want through the use of violence.
- The benefit achieved by their violence outweighs any adverse physical, legal, economic or personal consequences for their behavior.

## Controlling Behavior – Techniques & Characteristics

- Abuse While Dating  
Physical abuse while dating is a guarantee of later abuse. The evidence is overwhelming that after one violent incident, there is a tendency for this behavior to increase in frequency and severity.
- Abuse of Pregnant Partner  
Sometimes there is more violence when the partner is pregnant or soon after she gives birth. Abusive individuals seem to want to impregnate the woman, perhaps to keep her dependent, yet they often don't seem to want to parent or nurture the resulting child. It is not unusual for them to tamper with their partner's birth control measures or to assert that they had vasectomies when they have not. A recurring theme is: "If you would have my baby, or have one more baby, then our problems would abate." Yet battering during pregnancy has been called the "poor man's abortion."
- Alcoholism & Drug Addiction  
Drinking is an excuse for the violent behavior, not the cause. However, this behavior often worsens when the abuser is under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Research has demonstrated that between 40 to 90 percent of the incidents of domestic violence involve substance abuse.
- All Emotions are Anger  
Abusive individuals usually cannot handle frustration and turn to violence as a solution to problems. When such individuals are frustrated, they exhibit that as anger. When they are sad, they get drunk and pick a fight (the strong and dominant are not supposed to cry). When happy, abusive individuals want to celebrate, but when they get high, they pick a fight. For some, fighting is exciting and fun – we live in a violent culture that encourages violence. An inability to handle frustration within the intimate relationship is a warning of potential future problems. If relatively minor incidents cause your partner to fly off the handle, it is possible that your partner will not be able to handle many of the normal frustrations of an intimate relationship. A partner who frequently punches walls, breaks objects, or throws things in rage will most likely turn on someone close to them one day.
- Cause of the Violence Is Externalized  
Abusive individuals blame circumstances for their use of violence. "If only I had a job, I wouldn't be so upset." "It was the drink that made me hit you." "If you were a better partner, I wouldn't have to hit you." Such individuals are masters at blaming external events for their own behavior. We should ask: "If her partner is so miserable in this relationship, why doesn't he just leave?" A life-long pattern of avoiding consequences for abusive behavior effectively limits the sense of personal responsibility for destructive behavior as well as suppressing any motivation for change. The abused partner becomes the surrogate punching bag. Therefore when an abused woman says, "he needs me", she is right. In one sense, if abusive individuals can project their faults onto their partner, then they don't have to deal with them themselves, and are then able to perpetuate their own blameless state.
- Child Abuse  
Along with woman abuse, the abusive individual often commits child abuse. Frequently we hear women say "I could put up with him beating me, but when he hit the baby, I left that day." What she will tolerate for herself, she can't stand to happen to her children.
- Close-mindedness  
There is only one way – the way of the abusive individual. They may claim to listen to their partner's opinions, but when the decision is to be made, it is the abuser's decision.
- Cruelty to Animals

This is a red flag – cruelty to animals is a strong indicator of a potential violent behavior towards people. An adult who mistreats or savagely beats animal companions should be considered a potential danger.

- **Extreme Jealousy**

Abusive individuals almost routinely accuse their partners of having other sexual relationships. Slight evidence is sufficient to fire their imaginations. A van parked across the street was proof enough for one woman's partner. Another accused his wife of fellatio with another whenever she suffered flu symptoms. Such intense, irrational jealousy may arise from the abuser's own insecurities and projections, as they may be having outside sexual liaisons themselves.

- **Extreme Possessiveness**

Abusive individuals will go to extreme lengths to isolate and control their partners. One woman was not permitted to go into her backyard because her husband called every hour or two. If she did not answer on the first ring, she might have been beaten. Nor could she talk with anyone else by phone, because her husband might hear a busy signal. This woman was not permitted to go anywhere alone. Although abusive individuals may tend to be loners, a double standard applies as they enjoy the company of their own family and friends, but prohibit their partner from exercising the same pleasure.

- **“Jekyll and Hyde” Personality**

Between episodes of violence, the abusive individual is pleasant and charming, and to outsiders, is a super nice person, with a very charismatic personality. An abusive individual exhibits drastic personality changes – much of the time being a gentle and loving partner, husband, and father. This is the personality with which the woman fell in love originally and continues to love. Periodically, sometimes in rather predictable cycles, her partner seems to metamorphose into an ogre. Some abusive individuals display their “Dr. Jekyll” side to the public consistently, while the “Mr. Hyde” only emerges at home. This is doubly treacherous to the partner because others do not believe her when she speaks of her partner’s monstrous behavior.

- **Low Self-Esteem**

Abusive individuals generally feel powerless and ineffective in the world, and have a poor self-image. This may not always be apparent, since many who appear to be successful may still feel inadequate. Abusive individuals often attack their partners when they feel their masculinity or their sense of entitlement has been threatened.

- **Minimizes the Violence**

Abusive individuals frequently minimize and deny the use of violence, both to others and to themselves. In the strictest sense, they are not lying, but deluding themselves. “I didn't hit her” or “I just pushed her a little bit” are the most universally uttered denials. Sometimes awareness of their own behavior is so totally repressed that they will notice the injury they have inflicted on their partner the previous evening, and ask, “What happened to you?” Indeed, one of the most crucial aspects of treatment for abusive individuals is to help them get in touch with their violence. When they acknowledge the truth of their past behavior, they may encounter within themselves a backlog of guilt and revulsion for themselves.

- **Money Miser**

Another way for an abusive individual to control his partner is to keep a tight control over their finances. An abused partner may have to request every penny she gets, and it is tougher for her to leave if she has nothing in her pocket.

- **Objectifies Women**

Abusive individuals don’t see women as people, nor do they respect women as a group. They see women as “lesser than”, as property or sex objects or whatever, but not as people.

- Remorse  
The abusive individual always wants another chance: "I'll change, I won't do it again".
- Unpredictable Behavior  
Abused women frequently cannot predict what will bring on a violent incident. One day her partner is tolerant of anything, and the next day her partner puts her in the hospital for not putting enough catsup on his hamburger.
- Verbal Abuse  
Abusive individuals use an enormous amount of verbal abuse which often precedes and/or accompanies physical abuse. A barrage of derogatory and demeaning labels are heaped upon the abused partner. Mind games are rampant. Some verbal abuse is less obvious to the abused partner, as it can be so subtle and hard to identify the intent of the words. Abused partners often grow to accept the judgement their abusive partners – they are sloppy housekeepers, their childcare is lax, and that they are hopelessly unappealing drudges. Her self-esteem slips ever lower.
- Violent Family of Origin  
The "cycle of abuse" has theorized that one could predict that the abused would develop into abusers, and that those who witnessed domestic violence would make subconscious decisions to choose abusive partners. However, while we should not dismiss the impact of childhood abuse on adult violent behavior, we must also give thought to the fact that a traumatic childhood does not instantly create a destructive or self-destructive adult. Understanding the impact of childhood abuse can give us insight into an adult's abusive behavior, but is hardly a justification for such behavior. Repeating abusive behavior learned in an abusive childhood family does not grant permission for any adult to abdicate responsibility for their actions. Likewise for the victimized – they are not doomed to a future never free of violence and/or exploitation.

## Long-Term Effects of Domestic Violence

The long-term effects of domestic violence have not been fully documented. We know that boys who witness their fathers assaulting their mothers are much more likely to abuse their wives/female partners when they are adults. Those boys who witness their father's abuse of their mothers are more likely to inflict severe violence as adults. (Hotelling and Sugarman, 1986) Data suggests that girls who witness maternal abuse may tolerate abuse as adults more than girls who do not. (Hotelling and Sugarman, 1986) These negative effects may be diminished if children benefit from intervention by the law and domestic violence programs. (Giltis-Sis, 1985)

The long-term effects of abuse on children include "depression and self-destructive behavior, anger and hostility, poor self esteem, feelings of isolation and stigma, difficulty in trusting others (especially men), marital and relationship problems, and a tendency toward re-victimization". (Finkelhor and Browne, 1988) Other effects identified include runaway behavior, hysterical seizures, compulsive rituals, and drug and alcohol abuse problems. (Conte, 1988)

Abused women suffer physical and mental health problems. In fact, the emotional and psychological abuse inflicted by abusive individuals may be more costly to treat in the long-run than physical injuries. (Straus, 1987) Many of the physical injuries sustained by women from abuse seem to be causing medical difficulties as women grow older. Arthritis, hypertension, and heart disease have been identified by abused women as directly caused or aggravated by domestic violence earlier in their lives. (Corrao, 1985)

Abused women lose their jobs because of absenteeism due to illness as a result of the violence. Absences occasioned by court appearances also jeopardize women's livelihoods. Abused women are often deemed unstable by their bosses and passed up for promotion. Abused women may have to move many times to avoid violence. Moving is costly and can interfere with continuity of employment.

Abused women have lost their religious communities when separating from abusers because religious doctrine prohibits separation or divorce whatever the severity of abuse.

Many abused women have had to forgo financial security during divorce proceedings to avoid further abuse. As a result they are impoverished as they grow older.

## Staying or Leaving a Violent Relationship: Assessing Risks

Intimate relationships are generally very complicated, and when violence is an added ingredient, they become even more complex. Changing the dynamics of a relationship or marriage is not simple – change is a process that takes time, careful thought, and incremental action. When it comes to domestic violence, the general public tends to discount the complexity of intimate relationships. All too often, the abused women is held accountable for ending the violence in her relationship, rather than holding the actual abuser accountable for the violence. These attitudes only serve to reinforce in abused women a sense hopelessness and worthlessness.

A violent relationship is obviously a dangerous relationship. To survive, abused women have learned to constantly assess and re-assess their risks as they perceive them, which influences their decision-making relative to staying in or leaving their relationship. Therefore, risk assessments are the focal point of abused women's safety as they highlight the complex network of needs and problems each woman faces, her survival skills and strengths, and how she has used them so far in prioritizing the difficult areas of her life.

A abused woman's risk assessment begins with an evaluation of her situation from all possible angles. In the past, what has worked for or against her? How do those past experiences affect her view of the current situation? What could have been done differently? What are her personal and social barriers? What are the dangers that she faces from the battering? What dangers do other forces pose? What would help her to overcome these risks? Such an assessment will enable each woman to examine all factors in her life and their impact on her choices and decisions.

Assessing risks from the abused woman's perspective is the key to developing a "safety plan" which is a written tool designed to help women focus on behaviors and activities relative to her and her children's fundamental safety. *However, abused women's safety planning most likely begins with their first response to abuser-generated and life-generated risks.* Once the written plan is developed, it is routinely reviewed and revised based upon ongoing assessments of potential life-threatening violence and risks to the woman and her children.

### Primarily Risks Assessed by Abused Women

1. Abuser Generated: Risks which are those dangers that result from the abusive partner's abusive behavior and control of his partner. Examples are: escalating physical and sexual assaults against the woman, children, or others when she tries to leave; escalating tactics of intimidation such as stalking and job harassment; visitation or custody fights, snatching of children, filing false reports of child abuse.
2. Life Generated: Risks which are aspects of a woman's life which present risks or circumstances over which the woman has limited control, such as physical and mental health, financial limitation, and forms of discrimination such as racism, classism and homophobia. Examples are:
  - Economic Generated Risks  
Lack of safe and affordable housing; loss of income and ability to provide for the children; loss of health insurance benefits for self and children; fear of being charged with desertion or failure to protect, and losing custody of children and joint assets.
  - Personal/Social Generated Risks  
Effects of trauma from violence, i.e. physical injuries, depression, substance abuse, suicide attempts that may immobilize her; believe that divorce is wrong for the children; belief in her partner's promises to change or hope that the violence will stop if she can please her partner; belief that the violence is her fault; socialized to believe that she is responsible for making the relationship or marriage work (failure to maintain the relationship or marriage equals failure as a woman); isolation and shame which contribute to a sense that there is nowhere to turn.
  - Institutional Generated Risks  
Clergy and secular counselors are often trained to see only the goal of "saving" the marriage at all costs, rather than the goal of stopping the violence; police officers often do not provide support to women, and they treat violence as a "domestic dispute" instead of a crime where one person is physically attacking another person; police may try to dissuade a woman from filing charges; despite greater public awareness and the increased availability of housing for women fleeing violent partners, there are not enough shelters to keep women safe.

**Risk Assessment Questionnaire:  
Safety for Abused Women**

What does safety look like from a abused woman's point of view? This Risk Assessment Questionnaire will help to provide a profile of the dangers that abused women face from their abusers. Although many women cannot immediately acknowledge the danger they face, no one is better positioned to assess the threat abusers pose to them, as no one knows the abusers so well. Each question always leads to other and equally important questions, so simply answering yes or no to the questions (e.g., has he ever threatened to kill you?), does not provide enough information to help interpret the danger posed by the abuser. The follow-up questions address not only details (e.g., how did he threaten you?), but the meaning the abused women assigns to that threat. Each abused woman is a key player in interpreting the meaning of an abuser's actions.

---

1. Has the abuser become increasingly more violent, brutal, and/or dangerous?  
If yes, can you describe the incident?

What do you think that change in behavior means?

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2. Has the abuser ever injured you so badly you needed medical attention?  
If yes, can you describe the injuries?

Have they become increasingly more severe?

Are you concerned about what will happen next?

---

3. Has the abuser ever choked you?  
If yes, can you describe the incident?

Did you lose consciousness?

---

4. Has the abuser ever injured or threatened to injure your children?  
If yes, can you describe the incident/s?

Do you think he did it to threaten you?

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- 
5. Has the abuser ever injured or killed pets?  
If yes, can you describe the incident?

Do you think he did it to threaten you?

- 
6. Has the abuser ever threatened to kill you?  
If yes, can you describe the incident?

Do you believe he is willing and capable of carrying out that threat?

- 
7. Has the abuser been sexually abusive to you?  
If yes, can you describe the incident?

- 
8. Has the abuser used or threatened to use a weapon against you?  
If yes, can you describe the incident/s?

Do you think he may use a weapon against you?

- 
9. Has the abuser seemed preoccupied or obsessed with you (e.g., following, monitoring whereabouts, stalking, very jealous)?  
If yes, can you describe the behavior?

- 
10. Has the abuser increased the frequency of assaults?  
If yes, can you describe the pattern?

- 
11. Has the abuser ever threatened or attempted to commit suicide?  
If yes, can you describe the incident?

How did that affect you?

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12. Have you separated or tried to separate from the abuser in the past twelve months?  
If yes, can you describe how that went?

---

13. Have you sought outside help (e.g., Order of Protection, policy, shelter, counseling) during the past twelve months?  
If yes, can you describe how he responded to that?

---

14. Do you think you have been isolated from sources of help(car, phone, family, friends, etc.)?  
If yes, can you describe how he responds to your efforts to reach out for help?

---

15. Has the abuser experienced any unusual high stress in the past twelve months (e.g., loss of job, death, financial crisis)?  
If yes, do you think that has made him any more dangerous to you?

---

16. Does the abuser drink excessively/have an alcohol or drug problem?  
If yes, what is the relationship to his substance abuse to his violence?

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17. Has the abuser ever been treated for substance abuse?  
If yes, how do you think that affects his use of violence?

---

18. Does the abuser own, carry, or have ready access to any fire arms?  
If yes, describe the type of fire arms:

If yes, are they kept in a secure area inaccessible to the children?

---

19. Do you believe the abuser could seriously injure or kill you?  
If yes, describe.

---

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20. Have you felt a need to be protective of the abuser (e.g., tried to change or withdraw statement to police, reduce bail or charges)?  
If yes, describe.

---

21. To the best of your knowledge, was the abuser abused as a child by a family member?  
If yes, can you provide more information about that?

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22. To the best of your knowledge, did the abuser witness the physical or psychological abuse of his mother?  
If yes, do you think that's connected to his use of violence now?

---

23. Does the abuser show remorse or sadness about the incident/s?  
If yes, describe:

---

24. Does the abuser have a history of violence to others (i.e., persons outside the family)?  
If yes, can you describe this?

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## Safety Planning: Informal

- **Use What You Already Know**

As a abused woman, you already know more about safety planning and risk assessment than you might even realize. Being in a relationship with an abusive partner – and surviving – requires considerable skill and resourcefulness. Any time you do or say something as a way to protect yourself and/or your children, you are assessing risk and enacting a safety plan. You do it all the time. It's just not always a conscious process.

- **Think it Through**

It can be a really helpful safety strategy to evaluate risks and make safety plans in a more intentional way. Whether you are currently with your partner or have ended the relationship, and whether or not you choose to use the available service system or to involve the police, there are certain things that are helpful to consider in planning for your future safety.

- **Safety Planning for Every Situation**

Safety plans can be made for a variety of different situations – for dealing with an emergency, such as when you are threatened with a physical assault or an assault has occurred; for continuing to live with or to date a partner who has been abusive; or for protecting yourself after you have ended a relationship with an abusive partner.

If you are planning to leave your partner or have already left, be aware that abusive individuals often escalate their violence during times of separation, increasing your risk for harm, including serious and life-threatening injury. Making a separation safety plan can help reduce the risks to you and your children.

- **Identify Your Options**

The value of any safety plan depends on identifying options that are meaningful and workable for you. The next section will provide you with information about how to prepare a Formal Safety Plan, but informally, you can research resources that may be available to you from local domestic violence programs, the police and the courts, and other services that are designed to help abused women and their children. Equally important is the help and information you may get through other systems, including your own system of family and social supports. You may find people you can trust in a variety of places:

- ▶ Employee Assistance, supervisor, union, co-worker
- ▶ Counselor, social worker, therapist
- ▶ Doctor, Ob/Gyn, dentist, nurse
- ▶ Friends, family, neighbors
- ▶ Religious congregation member, minister, rabbi, priest
- ▶ Women's centers, welfare-to-work or senior centers
- ▶ Teachers, school counselors, PTA
- ▶ Department of Social Services caseworker

- **Evaluate Your Options**

Only you can judge who it's safe to tell about your situation and who to ask for help. Sometimes people who don't have good information about domestic violence respond to abused women in ways that aren't helpful, even when they mean well. On the other hand, you may feel more comfortable asking for help from someone you know. It's your call. The important thing is for you to identify all the possible people who might be willing and able to help you. Make a list with their phone numbers and attach it to your safety plan for easy reference.

- **Plan Ahead**

You don't need to wait for an emergency to ask for help. In fact, it's a good idea to talk to people who can help before there's a crisis and find out what they're willing and able to do for you. That way, you'll know in advance if you have a place to stay, a source of financial assistance, or a safe person to keep copies of important papers with.

- **Get Support**

It can sometimes be hard to ask for help. But you deserve help, and you may need it. And most people really do want to help. The more specific you can be with them about what you need, the more likely it is that you'll get the help you're looking for.

Both short and long-term measures must be considered. Short-term measures consist of assistance programs that protect the individual woman who has been or is being abused. They often focus on the critical period just after a woman leaves her home, providing her with food, shelter, and guidance. This is the period when a woman is most at risk from the perpetrator seeking retribution, or when she might return to the home out of a sense of hopelessness. Long-term measures seek to educate the public and empower the woman to re-establish her life without violence.

Any response should involve an interrelationship among the health, legal and social sectors, so that the woman is not continually referred to another agency. Some models of such programs include the use of "family crisis centers" or "victim advocates" to act as the woman's link to the various sectors.

#### Various Forms of Support

1. Crisis Intervention

Crisis intervention services such as crisis hot lines, shelters or other emergency residential facilities, medical services, transportation networks, laws that allow perpetrators to be removed from the home.

2. Emotional Support

Self-help support groups, assertiveness training, self-esteem and confidence-building sessions, parenting skills courses.

3. Advocacy and Legal Assistance

Access to and custody of children, property matters, financial support, restraining orders, public assistance benefits, help with immigration status.

4. Other Supportive Services

Housing and safe accommodations, child care, access to community services.

**Safety Planning: Formal  
Personalize Safety Plan**

Remember, there are many obstacles to achieving safety or to ending a relationship with a violent or abusive partner, and the choices women confront are not risk-free.

Decisions that are beneficial in the long-run, such as leaving the abuser or obtaining a protective order, can actually increase immediate danger for the woman and her children.

*Safety planning is the process of evaluating the risks and benefits of different options and identifying ways to reduce risks.*

Name:

Date Prepared:

Dates Updated:

**BEING READY FOR A CRISIS – SAFELY PLANNING TO LEAVE**  
Leaving must be done with a careful plan to increase your safety. Abusive individuals often strike back when they believe or sense that the woman is leaving the relationship.

1. In the event that I decide to leave, I will know how to get out safely.
  - I have identified what doors, windows, elevators, stairwells, or fire escapes I would use, just as I would in case of a fire. (Use this space to make notes.)
  
  - This is how I would evacuate my family, and the route we would take to get out:
  
  - I will rehearse this escape plan, and as appropriate, practice it with my children at least one time. (Note the dates that you rehearse the plan.)
  
2. In the event that I need to leave quickly, I will have important items ready and accessible.
  - Items I have readied for the Emergency Escape Bags
    - Clothing and personal items
    - Emergency money (cab fare, quarters for the phone, food, hotel room, etc.)
    - Keys (car, house, office, etc.) and Cell Phone
    - Credit, debit or check cards, phone cards
    - Copies of important documents
    - Special toys and/or blankets for children
    - Valuable jewelry
    - Items of sentimental value
    - Pet carrier and supplies, and telephone number of temporary care giver
  
  - Location where I will keep Emergency Escape Bags (self, children, pets):

3. In the event that I need to leave quickly and it is not safe to talk openly, I will have a code word or signal to alert my children that we are going to go, or alert my family or friends that we are coming.

Code Word or Signal I will use:

4. In the event that I need to leave quickly, I will know where to go.

My first choice for emergency refuge is:

Location:

Telephone Number:

My alternate choice is:

Location:

Telephone Number:

5. In the event that I need to leave quickly, I will have the telephone numbers of *area shelters* for abused women:

Philadelphia Domestic Violence Hotline  
1-866-723-3014  
(Philadelphia)

Laurel House Shelter  
1-800-642-3150  
(Montgomery County)

A Woman's Place  
1-800-220-8116  
(Bucks County)

Domestic Abuse Project  
610-565-4590  
(Delaware County)

Domestic Violence Center  
888-711-6270  
(Chester County)

National Domestic Violence Hotline  
800-799-7233

Notes:

## SAFETY DURING AN ABUSIVE OR VIOLENT INCIDENT

It is not always possible to avoid abusive or violent incidents, but you can do a number of things to increase your safety, and the safety of your children during these incidents.

6. I will use my best judgment to recognize when my partner is getting to be argumentative so that I can prepare myself.
  - List the signs you are likely to recognize that indicate your partner is priming up for an argument or incident of violence:
7. I will make every effort to move to a space that is lowest risk, and try to avoid arguments in the bathroom, garage, kitchen, near weapons, or in rooms without an outside exit.

Put your kitchen utensils and knife block in the cupboards so they are not easily accessible.

  - List the safest places in your home:
  
  - List any weapons that are kept in your home, including the location where they are stored and who has access to the key?
8. I will use my judgment and intuition to gauge the seriousness of each incident, and recognize that I can give my partner what he/she wants to try and calm him/her down.
  - List ideas based on past experiences:
9. I will protect my children and try to keep them safe by teaching some of these strategies to some or all of my children, as appropriate.
  - List what you can do to help protect your children:
10. I will use my code word or signal with my children and/or friends when I am in danger, so they will call for help.
  - Note how you will teach your children or inform your friends about the use of your code word or signal:
11. I will reach out to my neighbors and friends and tell them about what is happening to me and ask them to call the police if they hear suspicious noises coming from the house.
  - List the names and telephone numbers of neighbors and friends that can be of assistance:
12. In the event of any injury, I will make every effort to have wounds treated as quickly as possible. This includes any injuries my children may have received.
  - I will advise my doctor or nurse practitioner how the injuries were received and ask them to document the incident in my/our medical records.

### GENERAL SAFETY AND WELL-BEING

Living with a violent or abusive partner often creates a chaotic environment. Getting “things” together and starting to make sense out life is often a major step towards getting your life back under your control.

13. I will increase my independence by opening a bank account and getting credit cards in my own name.

Banks I have evaluated:

Documents I will need:

If I have a joint bank account with my partner, I can make arrangements to ensure I will have access to money. My plan is to:

14. I can also increase my independence by taking classes, finding a job or increasing my job skills, working on relationships with family and friends, looking for my own apartment, buying a car.

Note sources and results of research to find out how to accomplish this:

15. I will talk to my family or friends to find out if they would be able to let me stay with them or lend me money, if I need it.

Names and phone numbers of those to contact:

Date contacts made and results – what they said to you:

16. I will buy a phone card or keep change for phone calls on me at all times so that my partner will not know what calls I am making.

Results of research on costs of phone cards:

17. I will teach my children how to use the telephone to contact the police and the fire department. I will make sure they know our address. If I have a programmable phone, I will program emergency numbers and teach my children how to use the auto dial.

Note the dates you accomplished these tasks:

18. I will locate and organize the following important documents I will need for myself and my children:

- Photo Identification
- Birth certificates
- Social Security cards
- School/vaccination records
- Money, checkbook, bank books, cash cards, credit cards
- Medications
- Keys: house, car, office
- Driver's license/car registration and insurance card
- Insurance papers (home, car, life)
- ID Cards – Public Assistance, Medicaid, health insurance, prescription plan
- Passports and work permits
- Marriage license, divorce or separation and child custody papers
- Lease, rental agreement or house deed
- Payment books – car, mortgage, other loans
- Pet vaccination records, name of emergency care giver
- Address Book and Personal Information Planner
- Sentimental photos
- Pictures of yourself, children and abuser
- My Personalized Safety Plan
- Protection from Abuse Court Order

- Date documents organized \_\_\_\_\_.
- I will photocopy these documents by (date) \_\_\_\_\_.
- I will place either the originals or the photocopies in a safe place such as a safety deposit box, a locked fire-proof box kept with a neighbor or friend, by (date): \_\_\_\_\_

-

19. I have identified the below contacts that are important for my on-going safety:

Police District Domestic Violence Detective:

Employer:

Child Care:

Pet Care Taker:

Children's School:

Veterinarian:

Doctors:

Counselor:

Lawyer:

Best Friend:

Coworker:

Family Contact:

Other Contacts:

## SAFETY PLANNING FOR CHILDREN AND PETS

The most important thing that children can do for their mothers and families is to get away from the area of violence. It is important to tell the children that the best and most important thing for them to do is keep themselves safe.

20. Personal safety and safety planning are extremely important and necessary for children whose families are experiencing violence. Children can learn ways to protect themselves. Here is a checklist of how you can safety plan with your children:
- Have your children pick a safe room/place in the house, preferable with a lock on the door and a phone. The first step of any plan is for the children to get out of the room where the abuse is occurring.
  - Stress the importance of being safe, and that it is not the child's responsibility to make sure that his/her mother is safe.
  - Teach your children how to call for help. It is important that children know they shouldn't use a phone in view of the abuser. This puts them at risk. Talk to your children about using a neighbor's phone or a cell phone, or a phone kept in their safe place. Make sure they know how to use it.
  - Teach your children how to contact police at the emergency number. Rehearse what your children will say when they call for help.
    - Make believe you have dialed Dial 9-1-1 and you are the operator who answers and says "Police, fire, ambulance."
    - Your child says: "Please help. Someone is hurting my mom. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ I am \_\_\_\_\_ years old. I need help. Send the police.  
The address here is \_\_\_\_\_  
The phone number here is \_\_\_\_\_"
    - Instruct your children not to hang up but ask the 9-1-1- operator to stay on the line until the police arrive. The child can either stay on the line or lay the phone down without hanging up.
  - Ensure that your children know their full name and address.
  - Pick a safe place for your children to go if they must leave the home.
  - Teach your children the safest route to the planned place of safety.

21. Pets are often injured during incidents of domestic violence. Here is a check list of how you can safety plan for your pets:
- Identify a temporary care-giver.  
Call the SPCA Pet-Net for assistance: 215-426-6300 x244
  - Have the following pet items easily accessible in a safe place:
    - Vaccination and medical records
    - A collar and identification tags (WITHOUT home address on them)
    - License for dogs
    - Leash, carrier and favorite toy or blanket
    - Medication (if any)
    - Information (food, likes/dislikes, behavioral problems) for a temporary caretaker.

## EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

The experience of being abused and verbally degraded by partners is exhausting and emotionally draining. The process of building a new life takes much courage and incredible energy. To conserve your emotional energy, and to support yourself in hard emotional times, take advantage of the opportunities that are available to you.

22. I will begin rebuilding my strength and support systems by participating in activities that will encourage my growth:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Attend Women In Transition counseling sessions and groups.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Become involved in community activities to reduce isolation.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Take a part-time job to reduce isolation and improve my finances.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Enroll in school to increase my skills.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Join groups of other women to gain support and strengthen my relationships with other people.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Take time for myself to read, meditate, play music, etc.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Spend time with people who make me feel good and provide support</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Take part in social activities, e.g. movie, dinner, exercise clubs</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Get enough sleep</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Eat nutritionally</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Join a health club or start an exercise program. It will increase my energy level and increase my sense of well being.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Keep a personal journal to write about my feelings – and write something positive about myself everyday – my own personal affirmations.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Take time to prepare myself emotionally before entering stressful situations like talking with my abuser, meeting with lawyers, or attending court.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Try not to “over-book” myself - limit my daily appointments to reduce stress.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Be creative and do whatever makes me feel good.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Avoid excess alcohol, food, or shopping.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> I will look at how and when I drink alcohol. If I am with others who are drinking socially, I will partake only when I am with people who are committed to my safety.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Find positive and constructive ways to express my feelings - anger sadness, etc.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Use "I can" statements with myself and be assertive with others.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Remember: I am the most important person to take care of right now.</li></ul> |
|---|---|

23. If I am feeling down, lonely, or confused, I will reach out and call:

24. I will remind myself daily of my best qualities. They are:

25. Whenever I feel that others are trying to control me or abuse me, I can tell myself:

26. I will take care of my physical health by getting a checkup with my doctor, gynecologist, and dentist. If I don't have a doctor, I will seek out help to find one by calling:

27. When I have to communicate with my partner in person or by telephone, this is what I will do to assure my safety:

28. If I have left my partner and am considering returning, this is what I will do before I make or act on a decision:

29. To feel stronger, more in control of my life, I can read the following books:

## SAFETY IN THE HOME

To create a safer environment, there are many things a woman can do to increase her safety. It may not be possible to do everything at once, but safety measures can be added step by step.

30. I am no longer living with my abusive partner and I will review this check list to help me focus on my on-going safety:

- If he/she has keys, change the locks on the doors, windows, and garage. Install a peep hole in the door.
- Teach my children to tell me if someone is at the door and not to answer it themselves.
- Keep my protection order near me at all times.
- Make sure that the school, day care and police have a copy of all court orders (including PFAs, custody and access orders) and a picture of my abuser.
- Have my telephone number changed and unpublished.
- Use Call Block when calling out (\*67) and teach my children how to do this.
- Find out how to get a cell phone and preprogram the numbers of people to call in an emergency.
- Install smoke detectors and put fire extinguishers on each floor in my home.
- Teach my children how to use the phone to make a collect call to me if they are concerned. Consider having them carry pre-paid phone cards for emergencies.
- Tell people who take care of my children which people have permission to pick them up. Make sure they know how to recognize these people. Do this in writing – signed and dated. **Also, provide them with copies of custody and protective orders, and emergency numbers.**
- If I live in a building with an elevator, I will carefully check the hallways as I exit the elevator. I can also check in with the landlord about safety concerns I may have. I will also teach my children about building safety.
- Purchase rope ladders for escape from upper floors.
- Replace wooden doors with steel/metal doors, if possible.
- Install a motion-sensitive or dusk-to-dawn outside lighting system, if possible.
- Do whatever is possible to install security systems, including additional locks, window bars, poles to wedge against doors, and electronic system, etc. - anything to provide added security.

## SAFETY AT WORK AND IN PUBLIC

Each woman must decide for herself if and/or when she will tell others that her partner is abusive and that she may be at risk. Friends, family and co-workers may be able to help protect women. However, each woman should consider carefully which people to ask for help.

31. The following is a check list of what I can do to increase my safety at work:
- I can inform security, my supervisor and/or the Employee Assistance Program about my situation. Phone numbers to have at work are:
  - I can ask to have my calls screened or to have my phone number changed. If I am having my calls screened, I will ask if it is possible to have the calls documented. The person to contact about this is:
  - I can ask for a flexible schedule. The person to contact is:
  - I can ask for a parking space closer to the building. The person to contact is:
  - I can ask to move my workspace to a safer location. The person to contact is:
  - I can ask security to escort me to and from my car. The person to contact is:
  - I can change my patterns to avoid places where my partner might find me, such as (list places such as stores, banks, Laundromats):
  - I can advise others at work that I am no longer with my partner and ask them to call the police if they believe my children or I are in danger. The person(s) to contact are:
  - I can explore the option of telecommuting with my supervisor and human resources office. The person to contact is:
  - When traveling to and from work, if there's trouble, I can (list your ideas):
  - When leaving work I can do the following to protect myself (list ideas):
  - Safety tips around arriving and leaving work:
    - Let someone know when you'll be home.
    - Carry your keys in your hands.
    - Get a remote or keyless entry car door opener.
    - Walk with someone to your car or bus stop.
    - Walk around your car, look in the back seat before getting in, check the trunk.
    - Keep your seats forward so you'll know if someone is hiding in your car.
    - Keep a sign in your car saying "Call Police".
    - Stay in populated areas, and change the patterns of when you arrive and leave work and the routes you take.
    - If you see your abuser, get to a public place and call attention to yourself.

### SAFETY WITH A PROTECTIVE ORDER

Protective orders are available from the Philadelphia Family Court. Many abusive individuals obey protective orders, but some do not.

32. I understand that I may need to ask the police and the courts to enforce my protective order. I can do some or all of the following to increase my safety:
- I can keep a copy of my protective order with me at all times.
  - I can contact the domestic violence detectives in my police district to advise them that I have protective order and to ask them to make sure it is on record with them. If not, I will give a copy of my protective order to them.
  - I will also give a copy of my protective order to police departments in the community where I work and in those communities where I usually visit family or friends.
  - I can tell my employer, my domestic violence program counselor, my spiritual leader, my closest friend, that I have a protective order in effect.  
Other people I can tell are (list names):
  - If my partner destroys my protective order, I can call the Women Against Abuse Legal Center for help: 215-686-7086.
  - If my partner violates the protective order, I will immediately call the police by dialing 9-1-1. I can also report a violation to my district domestic violence detective, and I should also advise my counselor at the domestic violence program, and if I have a lawyer, I should also advise her/him.
  - I can call a domestic violence program if I have questions about how to enforce an order or if I have problems getting it enforced.

### SAFETY AND DRUG OR ALCOHOL USE

Many people use alcohol and drugs. Using illegal drugs and abusing alcohol can be very hard on a abused woman physically and emotionally, and may hurt her relationship with her children and put her at a disadvantage in court. Beyond this, the use of alcohol or other drugs can reduce a woman's awareness and ability to act quickly to protect herself from her battering partner. Therefore, in the context of drug or alcohol use, a woman needs to make specific plans.

33. If drug or alcohol use has occurred in my relationship with my partner, I can enhance my safety by doing some or all of the following (list ideas):

34. I will look at how and when I drink alcohol. If I am with others who are drinking socially, I will partake only when I am with people who are committed to my safety.

List ideas about how to keep safe:

35. If my use of alcohol and/or drugs is interfering with my daily life, I will do the following to enhance my safety and the safety of my children (list ideas):

36. If I am still living with my abusive partner who is using alcohol and/or drugs, I can do the following to enhance my safety and the safety of my children (list ideas):

## PROTECTING YOUR PRIVACY

These are some important safety "tips" to help keep you safe while using telephones and the internet.

37. The following steps will help to protect telephone privacy:
- Blocking stops your number and name from being revealed on Caller ID display units and prevents anyone from hearing your number or calling you back with Talking Return Call.
  - Line Blocking (ordered from your phone company) and Per Call Blocking (\*67 / 1167) are the two FREE options that prevent your number and name from being revealed.
  - Operators can assist you if your Blocked call is rejected and you need to complete your call without revealing your number and name. Your local phone company can provide more information.
  - Calls to toll-free numbers (800, 888, 877), 900 numbers, and 911 cannot be Blocked.
  - Know the code: Dial \*67 (touch-tone) or 1167 (rotary) before placing a call to control who gets your phone number and name.
38. If you are deaf or hearing impaired and use a TTY machine, you can clear the memory (history) of conversations you don't want saved.
39. If you use a fax machine or have a computer that can fax, it may display the fax number of the sender on the fax printout. Line blocking may not keep the sender's fax number from being revealed. Therefore, do not fax from a phone number you are trying to protect. If a fax is needed, use a business such as Kinko's.
40. If you use a cordless and/or cellular phone, be aware that it is easy to overhear conversations on most cordless phones by using scanners, other cordless phones, radios, etc. So be careful to avoid using them for private/confidential information. If possible, use a 900 MHZ cordless phone which is safe from most scanners.
- Since it is also possible for cellular/wireless phone conversations to be overheard, to be safe, avoid using a cell phone for private conversations. If you are calling 911 with a cell phone, immediately give your detailed location since dispatchers have no way of knowing where you are.
41. If you use an answering machine, they are great for screening calls and increasing privacy, but don't put your name or phone number on the greeting. If someone chooses to leave a message on an answering machine, permission to be taped is assumed. Therefore, the tape may be used in court. If there is a harassing message or violation of a protection order on an answering machine, be sure to save that message tape if possible and do not tape over it with new messages. If you have a digital answering machine, call the police for instructions - they may come listen to the message to witness it.
42. If you have access to the internet, you should know the following about E-Mail:
- If an abuser has access to your e-mail account, he/she may be able to read your incoming and outgoing mail. If you believe your account is secure, make sure you choose a password he/she will not be able to guess.
  - If an abuser sends you threatening or harassing e-mail messages, they may be printed and saved as evidence of this abuse. Additionally, the messages may constitute a federal offense. For more information on this issue, contact your local Attorney General's office.

43. If you have access to the internet, you should know the following about History/cache file:

If an abuser knows how to read your computer's history or cache file (automatically saved web pages and graphics), he/she may be able to see information you have viewed recently on the internet. However, this information may not completely hide your tracks. Many browser types have features that display recently visited sites. The safest way to search for information on the internet if you are in danger is at a local library, a friend's house, or at work if possible.

You can clear your history or empty your cache file in your browser's settings:

- Netscape:  
Pull down Edit menu, select Preferences. Click on Navigator and choose 'Clear History.'  
Click on Advanced, then select Cache. Click on "Clear Disk Cache."

On older versions of Netscape: Pull down Options menu. Select Network Preferences;  
select Cache. Click on "Clear Disk Cache."

- Internet Explorer:  
Pull down Tools on the pull down menu, select Internet Options. On General page, under Temporary Internet Files, click on "Delete Files." Under History, click on "Clear History."
- AOL:  
Pull down Members menu, select Preferences. Click on WWW icon. Then select "Advanced." Purge Cache.

Final Note: Use this space to log information about your abuser – you never know when you will need it!

Full Name (List also any aliases)

Last Known Address:

Last Known Phone & Cell Number:

Social Security Number:

Date of Birth:

Immigration Status/Information:

If Arrested, Police Photo ID Number:

If On Probation, Name and Number of Probation Officer:

## Defending Yourself

As many martial art masters have said, one of the main goals of learning about self-defensive martial arts is doing everything you can so you never have to use it. Part of learning a martial art is doing what you can to avoid violent confrontation so you do not have to use physical violence. Similarly, this information is provided to help you develop further strategies for avoiding your partner's violence so that you never have to be in a position of defending yourself physically.

We know that abused women use many different strategies to reduce and avoid their partner's violence. For some women, going along with what the abusive individual says reduces the violence. For others, staying out of his way, or not talking back may help to reduce the violence. But we also know that for many women, no matter what they do (or do not do) the violence continues.

Some women choose to or are forced to fight back physically. We know of many situations in which women have defended themselves physically or fought back. For some of these women, the mere act of defending themselves or fighting back has been an effective method of stopping or reducing the violence directed against them. For others, however, the act of defending themselves or fighting back has further enraged the abusive individual and the violence has actually increased in response. In some cases, the violence directed at the women escalated dramatically.

We believe that you know better than anyone else how your partner will respond to you defending yourself or fighting back. How has your partner responded to you defending yourself or fighting back in the past? What has happened? Did the violence become worse? Was it an effective strategy in ending or reducing the violence? In the short-term? In the long-term?

Although we all have a legal right to defend ourselves under certain circumstances, we have found that for many abused women the legal system is not particularly understanding of their circumstances and why they needed to defend themselves. Many abused women who have defended themselves against their abuser's violence are currently serving time in our Nation's prisons and jails. Therefore, we encourage you to do what you can do to avoid the violence and situations where you might need to defend yourself. But we also know that for many women, it may not be possible to completely avoid their abuser's violence and they may be faced with a situation in which they are forced to defend themselves.

We have heard about a lot of abused women who have gotten arrested for defending themselves or for fighting back. We also know about many abused women who are falsely arrested based on made-up stories by their partners.

No matter what the circumstances, if you get arrested, remember that you have a right to an attorney. Before talking to the police, you can tell them that you want an attorney to be present. If you cannot afford an attorney one should be appointed to you.

Once you have secured an attorney to assist you with your legal matters, you may also want to call the Women Against Abuse Self-Defense Program which is designed to help abused women who are charged with homicide or assault:

215-686-7068 (Monday - Friday, 9:00 - 5:00)

## Hiring an Attorney: Screening Questions

### 1. General Questions about Divorce or Custody Cases

- Have you or any members of your firm ever represented my former partner or anyone associated with him?
- Do you handle divorce or custody cases? How many of these cases have you handled?
- How many of them were contested?
- How many of them went to trial?
- Did any of the cases involve expert witnesses?
- How many were before the judge(s) who will hear my case?
- What kind of decisions does this judge usually make?
- Have you ever appealed a case, and if so, what was the issue appealed? How many of these appealed cases did you win? (Remember that even excellent attorneys lose cases.)

### 2. Questions about Attorney Fees and Costs

- What are your fees? What work do these fees cover? Is this an hourly fee or a flat fee for the entire case?
- Is there an additional charge for appearing in court?
- Do you ever charge less for people who do not have much money?
- Do you charge a retainer? How much? What does it cover?
- Do you refund all or part of the retainer if my case ends up being dropped or doesn't take much time? (Attorneys should be willing to refund any part of the retainer not spent.)
- Are there other expenses that I may have to pay? What are they and how much are they likely to be?
- Will you be the only person working on my case? What will other people do? How will I be charged for their work? Will I be charged for speaking to your secretary? Your receptionist?
- Are there ways that I can assist you so as to keep down my costs?

- Will you send my copies of letters, documents and court papers that you file or receive regarding my case?
- Do you charge extra if the case gets more complicated or we have to go back to court?
- Will you require that I pay everything that I owe you before you will go to court with me or finish my case? (Many attorneys do this. They may also refuse to return your original papers or copies of your file, and in some states this may be legal. Therefore you should insist on getting a copy of any paper filed with the court, or given or received from another party or otherwise relevant to your case. Be sure to keep all of them in a safe place, in case you ever need them.)
- Are you willing to work out a payment plan with me?
- Will you put our agreement in writing about fees and what work you will perform?

### 3. Questions about Cases Involving Domestic Violence

- How much experience have you had with cases involving domestic violence? Which party did you represent (the victim, the abuser or the children)?
- Do you generally believe women who tell you that they have been abused?
- Do you go to court with women wanting to obtain orders of protection against their abusers?
- How sympathetic to abused women is the judge who will hear my case?
- What are the laws of this state regarding which parent should be given custody when one parent has abused the other parent? Does the judge who will probably hear my case follow these laws? What does he/she usually recommend?
- What do you think about joint custody awards in cases involving domestic violence?
- What do you think about mediation in cases where there has been domestic violence?
- Do the expert witnesses likely to be involved understand the need to protect abused women and children?
- What kind of custody and visitation arrangements do they usually recommend in cases involving domestic violence?
- Do the judges usually follow their recommendations?
- Do you have a working relationship with the local abused women's program? With whom have you worked?
- Do you have a working relationship with any intervention programs? Which ones?
- How helpful is the local prosecutor in handling domestic violence cases?

#### 4. Questions about Contested Custody Cases

- Do you usually believe mothers who tell you that their children's fathers have physically and/or sexually abused the children?
- How do you handle cases where parental alienation syndrome is alleged? (This is a popular theory that blames mothers for turning their children's affection against the father, most often in cases where the father has abused the mother or the children. The American Psychological Association says there is no scientific basis for this theory.)
- How do the custody evaluators you work with feel about cases where the father has abused the children? Do they usually believe a mother's statements about the abuse? What kind of custody and visitation recommendations do they usually make?
- How does the judge who will probably decide my case feel about cases where the child's father has abused the child? Do they believe mothers who have made reports about the fathers' physical abuse of the children? About the father's sexual abuse of the children?
- Will someone be appointed as an advocate for the children, and how will that person feel about the father's physical and/or sexual abuse of the children?
- Will it matter if the child protective service agency has substantiated the abuse? If the father was convicted or pled guilty to the abuse in the criminal case? What do you do to protect children in cases when you know that their father is abusing them? Are you willing to stand up for my case, even if it angers the judge?
- If none of the abuse allegations have been made public yet, what do you recommend about whether and how to raise them publicly, and how to keep my children safe?

## Bibliography

### Domestic Violence

#### Books

- The Women's Book of Courage, Sue Patton Theole
- You Can Be Free, Ginny Nicarthy and Sue Davidson
- When Love Goes Wrong, Ann Jones and Susan Schechter
- Time To Break Free: Meditations for the First 100 Days After Leaving, Judith Smith
- The Battered Women's Survival Guide, Sharon Obregon
- When Love Goes Wrong, Ann Jones and Sue Davidson
- The Anger Workbook, Lorraine Bilodeu
- Breaking the Silence: Workbook for Adult Children of Alcoholics, Kathryn Tessman
- You Can Heal Your Life: Love Yourself; Heal Your Life Workbook: Heart Thoughts, Louise L. Hay
- Boundaries: Where You End and I Begin, Annie Katherine
- Live Your Dreams, Les Brown
- Journey Beyond Abuse: A Step-By-Step Guide to Facilitating Women's Domestic Abuse Groups, Kay-Laurel Fischer, Michael F. McGrane
- Pattern Changing for Abused Women: An Educational Program/Book and Supplement (Interpersonal Violence: The Practice), Marilyn Shear Goodman and Beth Creager Fallon
- A Women's Guide to Divorce and Decision Making, Christina Robertson  
Healthy Relationships, Louise L. Hay

#### Videos

##### "Gaslight"

(Recommended because of how perfectly the film depicts emotional abuse and psychological torment. The MGM film is directed by George Cukor, and stars Ingrid Bergman and Joseph Cotton. Bergman shines in her first Academy Award winning performance. Hers is a delicate, well balanced tour de force that draws the viewer in and makes us sympathize and pull for her to triumph. As the diabolical husband, Boyer is properly menacing and cruel, carefully orchestrating Bergman's descent into madness. With all this talent and star power in one film, Gaslight couldn't help but be a masterpiece. Gaslight is also noteworthy for 17-year-old Angela Lansbury's film debut as the saucy maid Nancy. With all the polish and resources of the MGM film factory at its peak, Gaslight is superb in every way.

#### Tapes

"Getting Free: Are You Abused? (And What To Do About It)" Ginny Nicarthy

"Getting Unstuck," Les Brown

"Self-Healing," Louise L. Hay

#### Cards

Courage Cards: Affirmations for Empowerment and Peace of Mind  
Sue Patton Theole

## Sobriety

### Books

- The Women's Book of Courage, Sue Patton Theol
- Time to Break Free: Meditations for the First 100 Days After Leaving, Judith R. Smith
- Each Day a New Beginning Journal: A Meditation Book and Journal for Daily Reflection, Karen Casey (Hazeldon)
- Domestic Abuse: What Is It and How to Keep Safe, Kate Ihus, C.C.D.C.R., C.P.S. (Hazeldon)
- You Can Be Free, Ginny Nicarthy and Sue Davidson
- When Love Goes Wrong, Ann Jones and Susan Schechter
- Until Today, Iyanla Vanzant
- Each Day a New Beginning Journal: A Meditation Book and Journal for Daily Reflection, Karen Casey (Hazeldon)

### Videos

"We Are Not Who You Think We Are"

"Defending Our Lives"

"Domestic Abuse and Substance Abuse"

"Treatment Issues for Women"

"Women Beat the Street, Getting Clean, Safe and Sober"

"Sheila Not Along: Special Addition to Beat the Street, Clean and Sober in the City"

## Same-Sex Domestic Violence

### Books

- Breaking the Silence, Kathryn Tessman
- Same-Sex Domestic Violence: Strategies for Change, Beth Leventhal & Sandra Lundy
- Violence in Gay & Lesbian Domestic Partnerships, Claire Rezetti & Charles Harvey Miley
- Violent Betrayal Partner Abuse in Lesbian Relationships, Claire Rezetti
- Woman-To-Woman Sexual Violence: Does She Call It Rape? (The Northeastern Series on Gender, Crime, and the Law) , Lori Girshick
- Naming the Violence: Speaking Out About Lesbian Battering (out of print), Kerry Lobel
- Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism, Suzanne Pharr
- This is What Lesbian Looks Like: Dyke Activists Take on the 21st Century, Kris Kleindienst (Editor)
- This Bridge Called My Back, Writings by Radical Woman of Color Cherríe Moraga & Gloria Anzaldúa (out of print)