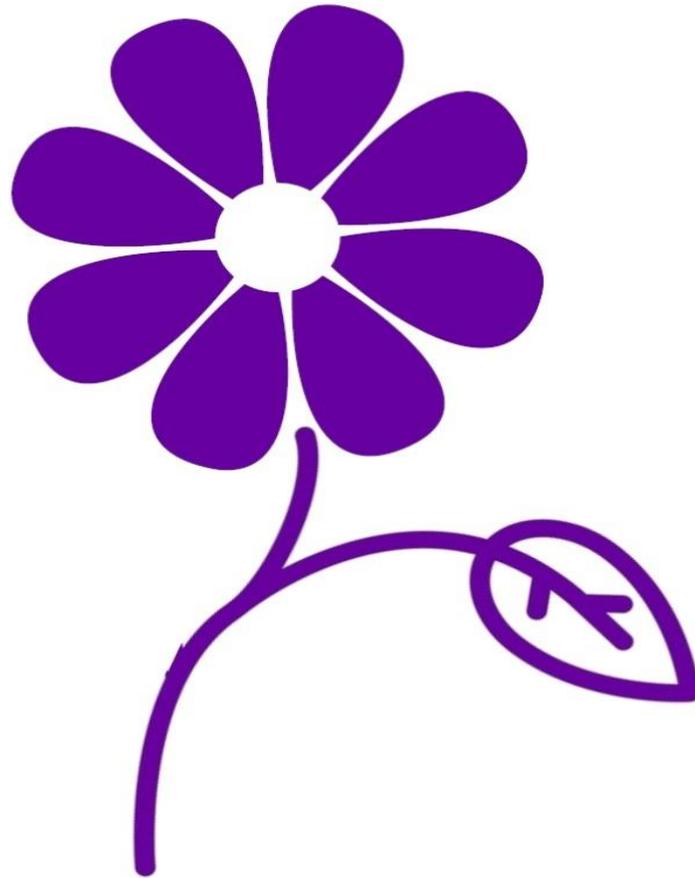


# Response



## Safety Planning

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A guide for survivors and supporters.

## Introduction to Safety Planning

A safety plan is a personalized, practical plan that can help you avoid dangerous situations and know the best way to react when you are in danger.

Creating a safety plan can be very helpful if you are experiencing abuse or if you are in an unhealthy relationship. Depending on your situation, you might be planning to leave an abusive relationship, in the process of leaving, or have already left. Safety plans are also a way to support a friend, family member, or someone else close to you that is experiencing abuse.

Safety plans come in all shapes and sizes; they should be unique to the survivor's needs in the moment.

## Safety Planning for Family and Friends

As friends and family members, you can help someone in an abusive relationship make a safety plan.

Remember to:

- Listen and be supportive. Even when you don't understand or agree with their decision, don't judge. They know what's best and safest for their situation.
- Connect them to resources and information in their area. Chat with an advocate to find information to share.
- Don't post information about your loved one on social networking sites. Avoid using social media to reveal their current location or where they hang out. It's possible that their partner will use your post to find them. You can access sites like [hackblossom.org](http://hackblossom.org) and [turnon2fa.com](http://turnon2fa.com) to learn more about how to protect yourself and others online.
- Empower the person you're trying to help to make up their own mind. Leaving an unhealthy or abusive relationship may be extremely difficult. The most dangerous time in a relationship is after the victim leaves. Avoid giving them ultimatums and never blame them for the abuse.

If you are struggling to provide support, you can also refer the survivor to more appropriate resources, such as Responses 24/7 crisis hotline. Self-care is important as well, so don't hesitate to reach out for support for yourself.

## Before You Leave

Because violence could escalate when someone tries to leave, here are some things you might consider before you leave:

- Keeping a journal of all violent incidents, dates, events and threats made, if possible. Keep any and all evidence.
- Knowing where you can go to get help. Telling someone what is happening to you.
- If you are injured, going to a doctor or an emergency room. If you feel comfortable doing so, you can report what happened to you. Ask that they document your visit.
- If you have children and pets, identifying a safe place for them, like a room with a lock or a friend's house.
- If you need a safe place to stay, contacting your local shelter and finding out about laws and other resources available to you before you have to use them during a crisis. Talking to a survivor advocate about finding and accessing these places.
- Trying to acquire a secure job or set some money aside for after you leave. Asking your support system or local resources for financial assistance may also help. If you don't have a safe place to hide your money or an individual bank account, ask someone you trust to hold the money for you.
- Let someone you trust or a local resource center know that you are considering leaving or when you are leaving. If possible, try to find a way that they can safely contact you to check-in.

## When You Leave

Make a plan for how and where you will escape quickly. Some survivors request a close friend, family member, advocate, or police escort to act as a stand-by for when they leave. If you have to leave in a hurry, use the following list of items as a guide to what you might need to bring with you, depending on your situation. Remember, our advocates can help you come up with a personalized safety plan for leaving.

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PO BOX 287  
Woodstock, VA 22664  
Hotline: 540-459-5161  
Office: 540-459-5599  
Fax: 540-459-5799

<u>Identification</u>	<u>Legal Papers</u>	<u>Emergency Numbers</u>	<u>Other</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Driver's License</li> <li>• Birth Certificate</li> <li>• Social Security Card</li> <li>• Financial Information</li> <li>• Money and/or credit cards (in your name)</li> <li>• Checking and/or saving account books</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protective Order</li> <li>• Copies of any lease or rental agreements, or the deed to your home</li> <li>• Car registration and insurance papers</li> <li>• Health and life insurance papers</li> <li>• Medical records for you and your children</li> <li>• School records</li> <li>• Work permits/green card/visas</li> <li>• Passport</li> <li>• Divorce and custody papers</li> <li>• Marriage License</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friends, relatives and family members</li> <li>• Your local intimate partner violence program/domestic violence/sexual assault centers</li> <li>• Local advocates</li> <li>• Local shelters</li> <li>• Local, state, and national helplines</li> <li>• Your local doctor's office and hospital</li> <li>• County and/or District Attorney's Office</li> <li>• Your local police and/or sheriff's department</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medications</li> <li>• Extra set of house and car keys</li> <li>• Cell phone and (if possible) a secondary phone, such as a pay-as-you-go cell phone</li> <li>• Personal valuables, such as pictures and sentimental items</li> <li>• Several changes of clothes</li> </ul>

## Emergency Contact Information

<u>Helplines you can call...</u>	<u>Your important contacts...</u>	<u>Emergency Services...</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Response, Inc. (540) 459-5161</li> <li>• Virginia Action Alliance Helpline 1 (800) 838-8238</li> <li>• RAINN 1 (800) 656-4673</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name: Number: Relationship</li> <li>• Name: Number Relationship:</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Woodstock Police Department (540) 459-2141</li> <li>• Shenandoah County Sheriff's Department (540) 459-6100</li> <li>• Strasburg Police Department (540) 465-5230</li> <li>• Mount Jackson Police Department (540) 477-2242</li> <li>• New Market Police Department (540) 740-3776</li> </ul>

**Some suggestions for an emergency bag...** include the following: Cell phone/Laptop & Charger, Money, Keys (home and car), Copy of restraining order and/or no-contact order, Driver's license, list of all important numbers, Passports, Credit Card, Birth Certificate, Social Security Card, Immigration Papers, Change of Clothes (multiple sets, if able), Toiletries, Medications, Special Photos or other small valuable items, Health Insurance Card, All of your children's information, Work Permits, Car Title, Government Benefits Card

## Documenting Abuse

The warning signs of intimate partner violence aren't always dramatic, but if you keep track of incidents of abuse, you can better identify red flags, take steps to in case of future abuse, and be prepared if you ever do decide to seek criminal/civil remedies. Detailed documentation is important, especially if the incident took place in a private setting or was repeated in a distinct pattern. Documenting the abuse can also help as you see out other resources, such as counseling.

## Ways to Document Abuse

Keep a journal about what you're going through or experiencing. Consider including:

- Any and all incidents of abuse. Even if you're unsure if what happened was abuse, it's important to document it.
- Statements you, your partner or any witnesses made about what happened.
- The date and time of each incident. What month, day, and time? Did it happen in one moment or over a span of time?
- A description of any injuries, no matter how small. Take pictures if you can store them safely.
- A description of the scene. For example, is the furniture overturned? Are any items thrown around? Whose items did they destroy or damage? At what location and when did it happen? Again, take pictures if you can.
- How the incident made you feel. Were you scared? Did you feel threatened? Has this happened before?
- Seek medical care, even if there are no visible injuries. Just because you don't have any cuts or bruises doesn't mean you weren't physically harmed. Where did they hurt you? Are there visual injuries? If no, where does it hurt and in what way?
- File a report with the police. If you feel comfortable doing so, consider filing a police report. Keep the files of the report (preferably the originals, as well as copies).

## Digital Abuse Counts Too

In abusive relationships, threats and controlling behavior often occur by phone or over the internet. On occasion, your abuser may even admit to the abuse or an element of it in a message or online post. You may be hesitant to report this type of unwanted contact or even recognize it as abuse, but it definitely does (including in a court of law and other types of processes, such as OSARP). While you may feel pressured to, remember that you do not have to respond to your abuser and that you don't owe your abuser anything.

Digital evidence is often fleeting and can be deleted, accidentally or intentionally, very easily. For this reason, it's important to secure evidence quickly. Consider:

- Printing out all emails that contain any evidence or information about the incident. Make sure the printout includes the sender, recipient, date and time.
- If possible, screenshotting and printing out text messages. If not, take a picture of the cell phone displaying the message, contact information, date and time.
- If possible, printing out your call log or taking a picture of the cell phone showing the contact information, date and time.
- Printing screenshots of social networking sites that contain evidence, such as admissions of abuse, threats of violence or pictures that you didn't consent to. Remember to check both your and your partner's site.
- Recording voicemails onto a digital recorder and include the time and date of the message. You can also consider recording phone calls, as it's legal to record your phone calls through the one-party consent law.

## What If I Don't Have the Right Technology?

If you don't have a cell phone, camera, computer, or other technology to help you document the abuse, there are other options. It might be inconvenient, but it will be worth the extra effort.

Consider these options:

- Public Libraries usually have computers and printers available and sometimes even rent cameras and other equipment for free. Contact Response, Inc. to see if we can assist you as well.
- A friend or family member might be able to lend you theirs.
- If you have a cell phone with a camera, you can send them to a safe email address. Make sure to delete them from your phone and any cloud devices afterwards.

## How to Safely Store the Evidence

Make sure to keep everything you document in a place that your abuser is either unable or unlikely to ever look. Be creative, think of ways to store the evidence that make sense for your situation. Here are a few suggestions:

- Make a secret email address and don't use it for anything else.
- Make a password-protected online journal. For example, tumblr.com offers an option to add a password to a blog.
- Hide all evidence in a place they would never look
- Memorize any passwords you create so that you don't have to write them down. Also, avoid mentioning your plan to anyone electronically. The abuser might be reading your texts, emails, or social media sites.

## After You Leave

Your safety plan should include ways to ensure your continued safety after leaving an abusive relationship. Here are some safety precautions to consider:

- Changing your locks and phone number.
- Calling your telephone company to request caller ID. Ask that your phone number be blocked so that if you call anyone, neither your partner nor anyone else will be able to get your new, unlisted phone number.
- Changing your work hours and the route you take to work.
- If you feel comfortable doing so, telling friends, family, and other close ones about your situation.
- If you have a restraining or no-contact order, keep a certified copy of it with you at all times. If you feel comfortable doing so, consider informing friends, family, roommates, hall mates, neighbors, employers, area/hall directors, resident advisors, and/or local authorities that you have a restraining order or no-contact order in effect.
- Consider renting a post office box or using the address of a friend for your mail (be aware that addresses may be on restraining orders and police reports, and be careful to whom you give your address and phone number).
- Rescheduling appointments that your abusive partner is aware of.
- If you can, accessing counseling and/or other support. A survivor advocate can help you research and reach out to different resources for help. Planning for your emotional safety is just as important as planning for your physical safety.

## Emotional Safety Planning

People often focus on planning around physical safety (which is important), but it's important to consider your emotional safety as well. Emotional safety can look different for different people, but ultimately it's about creating a personalized plan that helps you feel accepting of your emotions and decisions when dealing with abuse. Below are some ideas for how to create and maintain an emotional safety plan that works for you.

### Seek Out Supportive People

A caring presence such as a trusted friend or family member can help create a calm atmosphere to think through difficult situations and allow for you to discuss potential options. If you need help creating a support system, Response, Inc. and our advocates are here for you.

### Identify and Work Towards Achievable Goals

An achievable goal might be calling a local resource and seeing what services are available in your area, or talking to one of our advocates. Remember that you don't have to do anything you aren't comfortable with right now, but taking small steps can help options feel more possible when you are ready.

### Create a Peaceful Space for Yourself

Designating a physical place where your mind can relax and feel safe can be a good option when working through difficult emotions that can arise when dealing with abuse, sexual assault, and other difficult experiences. This can be a room in your house, a spot under your favorite tree, a comfy chair by a window, or in a room with low lights.

### Remind Yourself of Your Great Value

You are important and you matter, and recognizing and reminding yourself of this reality is a form of self-care. Taking care of your emotional health is incredibly important in your recovery. It is never your fault when someone chooses to be abusive to you, and it has no reflection on the great value you have as a person.

### Remember That You Deserve to Be Kind to Yourself

Taking time to practice self-care every day, even if it is only for a few minutes, really creates a space for peace and emotional safety. It's healthy to give yourself emotional breaks and step back from your situation sometimes. In the end, this can help you make the decisions that are best for you.



**We believe you.**  
**We support you.**  
**We care about you.**

[www.responseva.org](http://www.responseva.org)

For questions and further support, call Response, Inc.'s 24/7 crisis hotline at: (540) 459-5161

Information in this pamphlet has been adapted from the New Directions, Inc. Safety Planning Guide