



Neighbours, Friends & Families

Safety planning for women who are abused

Are you experiencing domestic violence or abuse by your partner, but aren't sure how to protect yourself or find a safe place? If someone gave you this brochure, they are worried about your safety.

Domestic violence is deliberate and purposeful violence, abuse, and intimidation by one person against another in an intimate relationship. It happens when one person uses violence or threats that cause fear, physical or psychological harm. It may be a single act or a series of acts that form a pattern of abuse. We sometimes call this "intimate partner violence" or "family violence" or gender-based violence. Women are most often the victims and men are most often the perpetrators. It can happen in any relationship, including same-sex, transgender and intersex relationships as well.

This brochure describes some things you can do to keep yourself and your children safer. Neighbours, Friends and Families is a campaign to help people learn about the signs of violence against women.

We can all do something to prevent violence against women. You can reach out to organizations in your community that support abused women and those that help men who have been abusive.

Developing a safety plan

Safety planning is a very important. Making a safety plan helps to identify things you can do to increase your own safety and the safety of your children.

Staff at a transition house can help you with a safety plan, even if you are not staying there. Or call 1-855-225-0220 to talk with someone who can help.

You can't control your partner's behaviour and **you are not responsible for the violence.**

Here are some suggestions that help you stay safer. You don't have to do everything at once. Try one thing at a time and start with the one that is easiest and safest for you.

Keeping safer while living in a violent situation

Tell someone you trust about what is happening
Call 1-855-225-0220 or your local transition house or shelter for abused women to talk about safety planning options.

Think about the types of violence or threats your partner has used in the past – this may help you predict what type of danger you and your children are facing and help you decide when you might need to go to a safer space.

Tell your children that violence is never right, even when someone they love is being abusive.

Tell your children that they are not responsible for the abuse and neither are you.

Teach them it is important to keep safe when there is violence happening – practice what to do.

Plan where to go in an emergency and how they can get help.

Tell them not to get between you and your partner.

Plan a code word to signal that they should leave or get help.

Ask your neighbours, friends or family to call police if they hear sounds of abuse and to look after your children in an emergency.

If there is an argument, move to a place where you can get out easily – avoid rooms with potential weapons such as kitchens, workshops or bathrooms.

Park your car so that you can't be blocked and keep it fuelled.

Consider visiting the women's centre in your region to explore programs, build skills or make connections.

Hide keys, cell phone and some money near your escape route or with a trusted friend.

Have a list of phone numbers to call for help.

Call the police in an emergency.

Think about places you can go that are open late or 24 hours – diners, hotels, coffee shops, hospitals.

Transition house staff can help, even if you don't go to a shelter.

Research also shows that most victims of domestic violence do not report the violence to a formal agency. Only one in four Nova Scotian women who experience spousal violence reported it to police. Only one in three women reported it to a service-providing agency. *NS Domestic Violence Action Plan, 2010*

Most research about relationship violence looks at heterosexual relationships. Abuse also happens in lesbian, gay or transgender relationships. These suggestions apply in all types of intimate partner violence relationships.

If you are planning to leave

Do not tell your partner that you are thinking of leaving. This can be a very dangerous time.

Call 1-855-225-0220 or contact your local transition house or shelter for abused women to talk about the best approach.

Talk to a lawyer, especially if you have children.

If you are injured, go to a doctor or emergency room and tell them what happened. Ask them to put this in your record.

Gather important documents: identification, health cards, immunization records, bank cards, financial papers, Income Tax Return, keys, medication, pictures of the abuser and your children, passports, legal documents such as immigration papers, mortgage information or deeds, court orders, protection orders.

Visit the women's centre in your region to connect with other women and

If it is not safe to keep these things stored in your home, make copies and leave them with someone you trust. Talk to your local transition house or shelter for abused women – they may be able to keep them for you.

Talk to someone about applying for an Emergency Protection Order. Staff at a transition house, victim services or the police can help you decide if this is an option for you.

Keep any evidence of physical abuse – photos, notes about any violence or harassment date/time/witnesses.

Put together family pictures, jewellery, toys and things that are important to you and your children.

Arrange with someone to care for your pets until you get settled.

Clear your cell phone call history and disable your GPS so that he cannot track you and your calls.

Leaving the abuser

Do not tell your partner you are leaving. Leave quickly.

Ask for a police escort or ask a friend, neighbour or family member to accompany you when you leave.

Contact your local transition house or shelter for abused women. It may be a safer temporary place to stay than going to a place your partner knows.

Do not communicate with your partner in person or through friends, family or social media (like twitter or facebook, for example).

Have a backup plan if your partner finds out where you are going.

After you leave

Do not return to the home you shared unless the police come with you. **Never confront the abuser.**

If the violence or threats have continued, consider applying for an emergency protection order.

Keep a copy of any court orders with you all the time.

Examples include Peace Bond, Emergency Protection Order, Undertaking or Recognizance or Probation Order.

Talk to a lawyer about your rights and obligations if you share children or property with the abuser. Be sure to tell them about the abuse.

Alert the Maintenance Enforcement Program about your situation, if you are a client of that program.

Check your social media lists to make sure you are not in touch with people who will tell him.

Consider changing any service providers you shared with your abusive partner – telephone, cable/internet, bank, etc.

Change your telephone number or get an unlisted number.

Make sure your children's school or day care centre is aware of your situation and has copies of all relevant documents.

Carry a photo of the abuser and your children with you.

Take extra precautions at work, at home and in the community. Consider telling your supervisor or security at work about your situation.

Consider changing your routines – go to a different grocery store, place of worship or gym, for example.

If you feel unsafe walking alone, ask a neighbour, friend or family member to go with you.

Safety plans change as your situation changes.

Review your plans often to make sure they still meet your needs

To talk to someone who can help, call 1-855-225-0220

Or contact a transition house or shelter for abused women in your area: www.thans.ca

If you are a man who has been violent and wants to change, please visit:

www.gov.ns.ca/coms/families/MensIntervention.html

For more information and resources about domestic violence in Nova Scotia, please visit:

www.nsdomeesticviolence.ca

For information about family law in Nova Scotia, visit: www.nsfamilylaw.ca

The Neighbours, Friends and Families program is part of Nova Scotia's Domestic Violence Action Plan. It is a partnership between the government of Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia and many community volunteers. We are grateful to the Neighbours, Friends and Families program in Ontario and the University of Western Ontario for their generous support and permission to use and adapt their materials for Nova Scotia.