

Women's safety booklet

Introduction

Anyone in any type of relationship may become a victim of domestic abuse.

This booklet aims to help you protect yourself and your children.

It describes what domestic abuse may feel like; who you can turn to if you need help; and explains about crisis safety plans.

A crisis safety plan is a way to improve your own and your children's safety. It helps you to think about the potential risks to you and to plan for the possibility of future abuse. It can help you to be safer while remaining with your partner or if you decide to leave him.

Your partner is responsible for his abuse and only he can stop this. But you can take some control by planning how you can increase your and your children's safety.

There is a lot of information in this booklet. Just use what is helpful to you and your children. Do what you think is the right thing for you and your family to stay safe.

Remember that you are not to blame for the abuse. You have no control over when, why and how your ex/partner abuses you. But you do have control over what you do about it.

Risk assessment

The first step in breaking the pattern of domestic abuse is to admit that there is a problem. Domestic abuse is very common. It is not something to be ashamed of. It is a crime if someone physically hurts or threatens you or your children. You have the right to feel safe from harm especially in your home. Emotional abuse can have a serious effect on your well-being and self-esteem.

Ask yourself these questions.

- ? Has your ex/partner ever hurt or threatened you or your children?
- ? Does he frequently humiliate, criticise, insult or threaten you?
- ? Has your ex/partner ever forced you to have sex or made you do things during sex which make you feel uncomfortable?
- ? Are you isolated from your friends?
- ? Are you allowed to leave the house?
- ? Are you afraid for yourself or your children?
- ? Does his contact with the children frequently go wrong?
- ? Are you emotionally or physically drained because of your ex/partner's behaviour?
- ? Even though you are separated, do you still feel controlled and trapped by him?
- ? Does your ex/partner get jealous?
- ? Does he check up on you, for example, check your mobile phone?
- ? Does he control your finances?
- ? Does he abuse drugs or alcohol and frighten or worry you when he does?

If you answer yes to ANY of these questions you may be experiencing domestic abuse. But remember that you are the best judge of your situation.

Your options:

You can:

- Choose to leave permanently or temporarily
- Choose to stay hoping your ex/partner will change
- Choose to stay accepting that your ex/partner will not change
- Choose to take legal action against your ex/partner, for example apply for an interdict or report incidents to the police
- Choose to talk to someone such as a family member, friend, colleague or domestic abuse service (contact numbers for these are at the end)

Protecting yourself in an emergency:

To keep safe from your ex/partner if you think he is going to assault you can:

- Keep a phone in a room with a lock so you can call for help in an emergency
- Carry a charged mobile phone with you at all times
- In an emergency dial 999. Even if you are unable to speak, the police will come to your home. Try to leave the phone off the hook after dialling
- Stay away from the kitchen where there are potential weapons such as knives
- Stay away from bathrooms, cupboards or small places where you may get trapped
- Work out a 'signal' with a neighbour, such as knocking on the wall or floor. Agree what the neighbour should do if they hear or see the signal, for example, 'drop by' for a visit or call the police
- Teach children how and when to phone the police. Agree a code word so they know when you want them to do this. Teach them what to say, for example, their full name, address, telephone number and what is happening. You could practise this with them (depending on their age)
- Plan escape routes from your house. Rehearse how you would get out
- Plan what you will do with the children. You may be able to take them with you or it may be safer to come back for them with the police
- Try to leave without letting your partner know. Make an excuse to go out or leave the room
- Call for help. Shout loudly and continuously. You have nothing to be ashamed of
- Stay near safe exits

If you no longer want to be with your partner you could:

- Think about how to give your ex/partner the clear message that the relationship is over. This may mean stopping all contact
- Think about how he is going to find out the relationship is over and what this means for your safety
- Tell him by letter, text, phone or simply stop all contact with him
- Think about getting an interdict, which stops him contacting you
- Think about getting legal/housing advice about your rights
- Tell friends, family, neighbours and work colleagues that you are no longer with him and what they should do if they see him
- Ensure anyone caring for your children knows that you do not want your ex/partner to collect them
- Plan what to do with his possessions and how you can tell him about this. You can use a third party

If you do not want your ex/partner in your home you could:

- Think about getting legal/housing advice to find out your rights
- Think about getting an interdict to prevent him from coming to your home
- Not respond if he comes to the door
- Make sure the doors and windows are locked
- Change the locks or fit new or stronger doors, windows or locks
- Put the key in the lock and turn it half way to stop him using a key from the outside
- Call the police on 999 if he comes to the door
- Tell neighbours to call the police if they see him
- Install outside lights
- Use a non-slip rubber door wedge
- Install a smoke alarm system. Contact the fire brigade which will install a smoke alarm free of charge
- Keep a list of emergency contact numbers with you at all times

If you do not want your ex/partner to contact you on the phone:

- Ignore his calls
- Change your number or Sim card
- Bar his number and withheld numbers from your phone
- Install caller ID
- Use an answer machine so you can screen all calls
- Call your phone company to ask for an unlisted number
- Dial 141 before dialling out so that the person you are phoning cannot see your number

Action plan for preparing to leave:

There may be a time when you feel the only option is to leave. Sometimes men increase the abuse if they suspect women are leaving, so it can be a dangerous time. They may also continue abusive behaviour towards their partner after they have left.

Planning to leave does not mean you have to do so now, or ever. But thinking about your options and how you might overcome difficulties can be helpful.

- Making the decision to leave can be the beginning of a long process. Remember that you do not need to go through it alone
- Decide who you could stay with, and if necessary, who would lend you some money
- Try to keep spare cash or a phone card with you at all times for emergencies and transport
- Open a savings account in your own name to establish your financial independence. Make sure the bank or post office has a safe address for contacting you. A credit union can be a good place to save and you can also borrow money from it
- Photocopy, or take originals of, important documents such as birth certificates, passports, marriage certificates and financial documents
- Try to get an extra set of keys cut for the house and car. Leave them with spare clothes for you and your children in a bag, with a trusted neighbour or friend, or keep it in a safe place. If you or your children have any medical conditions, make sure you have spare medication in the bag
- Keep useful phone numbers with you or try to memorise them. Don't rely on your mobile phone for the numbers in case you cannot get your phone. Think about having a spare Sim card
- Plan to leave at a time when you know your partner will not be around
- Try to take everything you need with you as it may be difficult to get it later

Protecting yourself if you do leave:

- Think about getting legal/housing advice to find out your rights
- Think about asking for police support to return home to collect belongings
- It may help to tell others that you are at risk, for example, family, friends, school, employer, college so that they do not give any information to your ex/partner
- Avoid usual routines which you had when living with your ex/partner, although this can be difficult when you have children. Plan ahead what you will do if you meet your ex/partner unexpectedly
- Tell the school or nursery who will pick the children up. Make sure they do not give your details out to anyone or give the children to anyone else. You could agree a password with them so they know any contacts are genuine
- Change bank accounts and cancel shared credit cards. Tell your bank that you are separated from your partner
- Keep court orders and emergency contact numbers with you at all times
- Make sure your new address is kept confidential and does not appear on any court papers

- Try to avoid isolated places
- Keep a fully-charged mobile phone with you at all times
- Be aware that your mobile phone could be 'tracked' This should only happen if you have given your permission, but if your partner had access to your phone, he could have sent a consenting message pretending to be you
- If you do need to phone your ex/partner or anyone else he has contact with, make sure you dial 141 before ringing so your number cannot be traced
- Think about contacting the police family protection unit for specialist advice on domestic abuse and safety
- If you are victim of stalking or domestic abuse, you can be anonymous on the electoral register. You need to provide evidence under the Family Law Act 1996 or the Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- If your ex/partner continues to harass, threaten and abuse you, phone the police and consider getting an interdict. Keep a diary of the incidents including dates and times; what he said or did; and, if possible, photographs of damage to your property or injuries to yourself. If you are hurt, go to your GP or hospital for treatment and ask them to document your visit
- Ask the police for an incident report form
- If your ex-partner breaches (breaks) any court order, tell your solicitor

Remember: in an emergency always contact the police on 999.

Checklist: what to take with you:

Remember that these items are not as important as your or your children's lives!

- Identification, driving licence, car registration documents
- Welfare books and identification
- Birth certificates for you and your children
- Police reports and documentation of previous abuse
- Money
- Bank books and bank account numbers
- Cheque books and debit/credit cards
- House/rent documents
- House/car keys
- Medications/medical records
- Address books
- Pictures/photographs (including ex/partner to help identify him)
- National insurance card/number
- Passport/visa/work permit
- Court orders
- Divorce papers/marriage certificates
- Children's clothing/favourite toys/blanket
- Jewellery
- Other personal items important to you

Your safety can be increased at work if you:

- Inform your boss and find out if there is a domestic abuse policy at work. Contact your union rep or human resources manager if you need advice
- Think about changing your working hours, even temporarily
- Try to choose a safe route and vary routes/transport to work if possible
- Give a photo of your ex/partner to security staff and other employees
- Describe your ex/partner's vehicle or give registration number to security staff
- Ask colleagues to screen calls from your ex/partner
- When possible, enter and leave with another person
- Think about what you will do if something happens on your way home. You could go to a public place and call the police
- If going out of the building, make sure people know where you are and when you are coming back
- Ask colleagues to check on your safety if you are unexpectedly absent

How to keep children safe:

A crisis safety plan teaches children how to get out of danger and reach safety. It also plans how to let other people help to keep your children safe.

Teach your children:

- Not to get involved between you and your partner no matter what the circumstances. Even if they want to help, their safety comes first
- How to get out of the house safely
- How to contact the police using 999. Practise what they should say, their full name, address and phone number
- Who to call for help – neighbour or friend

Talk to your children about what is happening. Even if they do not see the abuse, they may hear it or know about it. Let children know they have the right to be safe and happy, and that they can talk to you about what they are thinking and feeling. Children who live with domestic abuse are often good at keeping secrets from parents.

Children living with domestic abuse sometimes look for safety outside the home. Know who they are making friends with. Keep them safe by talking to them about the dangers outwith the home.

Some children who live with domestic abuse find routines difficult and can display difficult behaviour or become withdrawn. Find support for your child as soon as you think they may have a problem. Ask your child's school or health visitor to help your child get support.

If you have separated from your partner:

- Give copies of all court orders to anyone looking after your children. Tell them not to release the children to anyone without talking to you. If you have a recent

- photo of your partner, give this to them
- Agree a password with the school/nursery so they know that it is you on the phone
 - Make sure the school does not give your name or address or phone number to anyone
 - Encourage the children to identify an adult they are able to talk to and trust, in case they are scared and need someone to talk to at school
 - If your children need someone to talk to, ask the school or health visitor to help find someone
 - Think about getting support for your children from the Cedar Project or Women's Aid children's workers

Taking care of yourself:

There are things you can do to take care of yourself. Some ideas are:

- Get involved in community activities or get paid work to reduce isolation
- Enrol in college to increase your skills and reduce isolation
- Join support groups to meet other women
- Spend time with people who make you feel good and who support you
- Eat well and get enough sleep
- Find activities that make you feel good and practise them
- Take time for yourself to develop hobbies/interests
- Join a gym or start an exercise programme. It will increase your energy, reduce stress and promote well-being
- Don't overbook yourself – limit yourself to one appointment per day to reduce stress
- Write about how you feel in a journal
- Write something positive about yourself every day
- Avoid excessive alcohol or food as they depress your mood
- Avoid excess shopping and impulse buys
- Find positive and constructive ways to express your anger

Remember it is important to take care of yourself right now.

National support services

The following agencies can tell you about services in your area. They are all free and confidential. Some provide text and email support and online resources.

Scottish Women's Aid

Phone: 0131 226 6606 (office hours)

Website: www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk

Women's Aid provides information, support and safe refuge for women and children who have experienced domestic abuse. There is a network of Women's Aid groups across Scotland. You can get details on the website, from the above number or your local police or CAB.

Scottish Domestic Abuse Helpline

Phone: 0800 027 1234 (24 hours)

Website: www.scottishdomesticabusehelpline.org.uk

Confidential information and support 24 hours a day, every day of the year. Can put you in touch with services in your area.

Police

Phone: 999 in an emergency (at other times you can contact your local police station. The number is in the telephone directory)

The police have specially trained officers who will speak to you separately from your partner. You can ask to see a female/male officer. The police can, if you wish, arrange medical aid, transport and a safe place for you to go.

Rape Crisis Scotland

National helpline: 08088 01 03 02 (every day, 6pm to 12 midnight)

Website: www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk

Free and confidential support, information and signposting to anyone aged 13+ who has experienced sexual violence as well as family, friends and workers.

There is a network of local rape crisis centres across Scotland. You can get details on the website, from the helpline or your local police or CAB. The national office of Rape Crisis Scotland can be contacted on 0141 331 4180.

Victim Support Scotland

Phone: 0845 60 39 213 (Monday to Friday 8am-8pm)

Website: www.victimsupportsco.org.uk

Information and support to victims of crime, including domestic abuse. Local services all over Scotland. All help is free and confidential. The national Victim Support Scotland can be contacted on 0131 668 4486. To find your local Victim, Witness or Youth Justice Service, phone the number above, look in the telephone directory, or use the online directory of services.

Forced Marriage Unit

Phone: 020 7008 0151 (Monday to Friday 9am-5pm)

Website: www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage

Joint Foreign and Commonwealth Office/Home Office service for victims of forced marriage.

For emergencies out of hours, phone 020 7008 1500 and ask for the Global Response Centre.

Child Line

Phone: 0800 1111 (24 hours)

Website: www.childline.org.uk

Free national helpline for children and young people in trouble or danger.

Scottish Child Law Centre

Phone: 0800 328 8970 (helpline for under 18s) and 0131 667 6333 (advice line)

Website: www.sclc.org.uk

Free legal advice for and about children.

Shelterline

Phone: 0808 800 4444 (Monday to Friday 9am-5pm)

Website: <http://scotland.shelter.org.uk>

Free, national telephone advice line providing information about emergency refuge/housing services and general housing matters.

Samaritans

Phone: 08457 90 90 90 (24 hours)

Website: www.samaritans.org

Confidential emotional support, 24 hours a day for anyone in crisis. This number links up all their branches; or you can phone your local branch, which you can find in the phone book.

Amina – the Muslim Women’s Resource Centre

Phone: 0808 801 0301 (Monday to Friday 10am-4pm)

Website: www.mwrc.org.uk

Confidential information, advice and a listening ear for ethnic minority women.

Scottish Refugee Council

Phone: 0141 248 9799 (office hours)

Website: www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk

Helps refugees and people seeking asylum in Scotland.

Other useful websites

www.scottishvictimsofcrime.org.uk

Information for victims of crime.

www.survivorscotland.org.uk

Information for adult survivors of child sexual abuse.

www.caledoniayouth.org

Services for young people on any aspect of sex, contraception and relationships.

www.womenssupportproject.co.uk

Information on violence against women and children.

www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk

Self-help guides for anyone in crisis, for example depression, anxiety, stress, panic and sleep problems.

www.cci.health.wa.gov.au - click on workbooks

Workbooks for adults suffering from anxiety, mood and eating disorders.