

Safety Planning for Survivors

Safety planning is like having an emergency plan (in case of a tornado, hurricane, earthquake, etc.)- you know you can't control, stop or predict the emergency- but if it does happen you know the same way- survivors are not responsible for, nor can they stop the violence. However, by thinking through what might happen and how they could respond, survivors can enhance their own safety.

The best safety plans are ones that makes sense in a survivor's life and incorporate the things she is already doing to stay safe. When safety planning, think through the things that could potentially happen and then brainstorm ways to enhance safety in the event that those things do happen. Consider these suggestions:

If the survivor is still in the relationship:

- Always carry a cell phone or carry enough change for a phone call in case you need to call for a ride. Any cell phone (with or without an active service agreement) should call 911. Some domestic violence organizations can provide a 911 cell phone at on charge to women in danger.
- If the assistant starts getting physically abusive, try to stay in a room with more than one way out so he can't block the only exit. Avoid the kitchen and the bathroom- these are the most dangerous rooms in the house.
- Call 911 if you are in danger. Some survivors devise code words to alert others that they need help with out arousing the assailant's suspicion.
- Keep all important documents and belongings in an easy and quick location in case you need to leave suddenly.

If the survivor is ending the relationship (ending is the most dangerous time in a violent relationship and is the time when most assaults happen, so it is extremely important to safety plan before, during and after ending the relationship):

- Make a plan about how and when to end the relationship. Think about whether it would be safer to do in a public over the phone. If you decide to do it in person, tell someone where you'll be, when they should expect you home and what you want them to do if you're not home at that time.
- Spend some time thinking about how your partner might react when you break up with him. Is he likely to get angry and violent, or will he try to talk you out of it by making promises or getting upset? It can be helpful to think through what he might say so that you are prepared to handle it.
- Identify people in your life who will offer you the emotional support you need while you cope with the difficult feelings and emotions and emotions of ending a relationship.

If the survivor has already ended the relationship(the abuse may continue even when the relationship is over, sometimes in the form of stalking):

- Have someone walk with you to class or accompany you to places where you might run into your assailant. Have your parents intercept phone calls from your assailant so that you don't have to deal with his abuse.

- Alert school and work about the situation. Tell them how you want to react if he shows up or causes problems (ask him to leave, call police, don't leave you alone with him, etc.)
- If your assailant is stalking you (calling you repeatedly or showing up uninvited at your home, work, or school), keep a journal of all the incidents. This can be helpful if you decide to press charges or get a protective order. Save any answering machine messages or caller ID listings. Take pictures of his car outside your house or any other evidence that he is stalking you.

How to Help a Friend in an Abusive Relationship

Point Out the Different Types of Abuse.

Help your friend recognize that abuse is more than getting hit or slapped. Abuse can be emotional, verbal, physical, or sexual. Abuse gets worse over time and won't stop on its own.

Express Your Concerns.

Tell your friend you are glad she confided in you. You can never say the following things too much; I'm worried about you; it's not your fault; I'm glad you told me about what you're going through; you deserve better; or I'm here for you.

Be Accepting

Try to understand that there are both good and bad times in your friend's relationship. Don't become upset if she is not ready to break off the relationship and keeps returning to the abusive partner. Let her know you are there for her and will support her in whatever decisions she makes.

Support Your Friend's Strengths.

Point out your friend's strengths. Remember, abusive individuals often put down, make fun of or ridicule their partners. Encourage your friend to take time for herself and spend time with people who support her.

Reach Out to Someone Older for Help.

Encourage your friend to find someone to talk to about the abuse, such as a domestic violence counselor, school counselor, teacher, clergy member or relative. Offer to go with your friend or to make the first call for her.

Work on a Safety Plan.

Help your friend think of ways to increase her safety. The physical abuse may increase if your friend takes steps to end the relationship because the abuser may feel that he is losing control. Talk to your friend about what she thinks the abuser might do.

Be There. Listen. Stay There.

Keep supporting your friend. Avoid blaming her and make sure she knows you are standing beside her. If your friend is ready to end the relationship, continue to be

supportive and try to get her involved in activities. It takes time to get over any relationship- even one that is violent.

If your friend is the abuser:

- Tell your friend that is never acceptable to hurt someone, physically, emotionally or sexually.
- Give him examples of kinds of controlling and abusive behaviors that you observed.
- Don't let the conversation turn to a discussion of his partner's faults. No matter what she's done, she doesn't deserve to be hurt, intimidated, or abused.
- Tell the person that he has to take responsibility for his behavior. Abuse is a choice and he can make the choice to change. Acknowledge that change is difficult, but that you will support him.
- Tell him that hurting his partner is a crime and that you want to see him get help before he gets involved with the authorities.
- If you witness an incident of dating violence, call 911 or the local police.