Domestic and Family Violence
Safety Planning Guide
The information provided in this booklet is not an exhaustive list of options. It is information that others have found useful when they have left a violent relationship. This booklet contains suggestions that may be adapted to suit your individual circumstances; only you can decide on the best options for yourself and your family and what is realistic and affordable.

Acknowledgements

The Northside team gratefully acknowledge and thank the following organisations and resources that have contributed to the development this safety booklet:

My Safety Plan- Women’s Health West

Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool- NSW Government

Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework- Department of Human Services, Victoria Government

Safety Plan for Victims of Domestic Violence- The Women’s Centre
What is Domestic or Family Violence?

Domestic or family violence occurs when a person uses violence, threats, intimidation or force to control or coerce a family member, partner or former partner. Abuse can be verbal or physical including sexual abuse, social isolation, financial abuse, emotional abuse and intimidation. This can include threats to harm you, your pet/s, other people close to you, damage to property, spiritual deprivation, and threats to commit suicide as a form of manipulation. It is an act or behaviour that causes fear.

It is against the law for one person to assault another person, whether they are living together or not.
What is a safety plan?

A safety plan is a guide for staying safe from violence.

Planning for your safety is a process of looking at your situation and assessing what you might need to help you feel and be safe. Your safety plan must be relevant to your needs and be adapted if your situation changes. It needs to incorporate an escape plan as well as practical strategies to improve your home and personal security.

Safety planning is not about focusing on living in fear; it is about taking proactive steps to improve your and your children’s safety. It is about taking back control over your life.

Safety plans need to include safety strategies for different environments such as home, social life, work, electronic and vehicle security.

This booklet highlights some strategies for making your home and other environments safe. There is also space for you to make your own notes.

Organisations offering additional information and support.

1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) is the National Sexual Assault Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service. It is a confidential online and telephone counselling, information and referral service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. - https://www.1800respect.org.au/get-help/staying-safe-understanding-safety-planning/

WESNET’s Safety Net Australia project provides resources to help victims and agencies respond effectively to the many ways that technology impacts victims of domestic and dating violence, sexual violence and stalking for more information see - http://wesnet.org.au/safetynet/safetynetdocs/

DVCS (Domestic Violence Crisis Service) is the leading community organisation in ACT seeking to address violence and abuse in family and intimate partner relationships. For 24 hour crisis support contact DVCS on 02 6280 0900 or link to their website - https://dvcs.org.au/our-services/
Safety at home

The following information is designed to help you stay safe in your home:

- If there are threats made against you or your family, contact 000.
- The most dangerous rooms in your house are the bathroom, kitchen, garage or any room where the person who has used violence has access to weapons.
- Keep a record or diary of any breaches of intervention orders or suspicious behaviour such as phone hang ups.
- Report all breaches of your intervention order to the Police.
- Keep a note by your phone that includes information such as your street address and nearest cross-street that will help guide Police to your location.
- Have deadlocks installed. Do not deadlock yourself in at night; you need to be able to leave the building in case of emergency.
- Install lockable security screens where possible, and keep them locked.
- If door keys go missing, change the locks and keep external doors locked when at home.
- Make sure windows and sliding doors have good locks. You can lock windows cheaply by drilling a hole through the window jamb into the window frame and using a bolt to secure the window shut. A dowel stick can be used to prevent sliding doors and sliding windows from being opened. Make sure these are an exact fit so windows cannot be forced open.

Speak to the local Family and domestic Violence Liaison Officer at your local Police station or any other Police Officer, about applying for a Domestic Violence Order (DVO) which can include an exclusion order to keep the person using violence away from you.
Safety at home (continued)

- Be alert to any suspicious people hanging about. Don’t ignore ‘funny feelings’ - trust your intuition.
- Ask for identification before opening the door.
- Install a veranda light at a height that makes it hard to reach. Consider installing a sensor light.
- Trim shrubs and bushes form entrance ways and ensure pathways are visible and well lit.
- Keep electric fuse boxes locked. Check with your electricity supplier as they will need access to read the meter and can supply padlocks.
- Keep torches and spare batteries in an easy to reach place in various spots around the home.
- Consider a back-to-base alarm system with a remote button. Know the range of this device.
- Let trusted people know if you go away, e.g. neighbours, family or friends.
- Give a phone contact list of important people or services to people you trust in case of emergencies.
- Consider installing a loud, outside alarm that can be activated from inside the house.
- Make sure everyone in the home talks about suspicious calls or occurrences.

Prepare an ‘escape bag’ of your belongings and hide it in a safe place. Please refer to the ‘Emergency Escape Plan’ at the back of this booklet for more details.
Safety at home (continued)

- Choose a code word that you can use without attracting attention e.g. on the phone. Let family and friends know that when they hear the word it means that a crisis is occurring.

- Keep in touch with neighbours; ask them to let you know if anyone has been hanging around your house and to contact the Police if they hear any violent incidents or have any concerns about your safety.

- Keep trusted friends and neighbours informed about what’s going on.

- Make a safe emergency plan. Make sure all household members know about it and practice it occasionally.

- Get a dog. A family dog can be one of the least expensive and most effective alarm systems. Some breeds are better watch dogs, but any breed will bark at an intruder. If this has been a family dog known by the person who has used violence, consider getting another one as well.

- Keep your outside area clear of garden utensils such as rakes, shovels, ladders or wheelie bins. Keep the shed door locked.

- If possible, lock the area under your house and consider installing a manhole padlock.

- Keep copies of important papers in a safe location - both inside the house and a location external to your home.

Is there a safe room in your house that you can secure and that has mobile phone coverage? This could be the toilet or laundry. Install a lock to make it a more secure place for you and your children to wait for the arrival of the Police.
Teaching children personal safety

Children need to understand that they can’t stop the violence, although there are some things they can do to help. It is important to tell children that the best and most important thing they can do is keep safe.

Children who experience domestic or family violence can be profoundly affected. It is very traumatic for them to be faced with violence directed at them or at someone they love. Personal safety and safety planning are extremely important and necessary for children whose families are experiencing violence.

Children should learn to protect themselves and there are several ways you can develop a safety plan with your children.

- Tell your children they must NOT try to intervene if there is violence
- Make a list of people the children can trust and talk to if they are feeling unsafe (neighbours, teachers, relatives, friends)
- Decide ahead of time on a safe place where your children can hide or run to when they feel unsafe
- Teach your children who to ring for help and where the phone numbers are so they can find them easily
- Develop a code word that signals they need to leave now
- Teach children to ring the police on 000 and rehearse with them what to say in advance
- Practice what each child should say if they have to report violence e.g: “My name is …… and my mum is being hurt”
- Teach children their full name and their address
- Give children permission to get help from neighbours or others if needed

Remember to remind your children that what is happening is not their fault. The only person who can be blamed for the violence is the person who is being violent.
A safety plan for your children

- Help your kids to know when there are warning signs of danger.
- Teach your children how to telephone the Police and how to give their full name and address.
- Teach your children to let you know when someone is at the door, before answering the door.
- Keep the conversation practical like other safety conversations you might have around natural disaster planning, fire safety, etc.
- Practice emergency escape routes – talk about these at the same time as you talk through a fire drill.
- Create a code word when in danger and ensure your children are familiar with it.
- Tell your children’s school or early education centre about the situation and about who has the authority to pick up the children. Provide the school or centre with copies of any family law orders or intervention orders, and a photo of the person using violence so they know who to look out for.
- Help your children practice getting to the safe room quickly.
- Make sure your children understand the importance of being safe and help them to understand that it is not their responsibility to make sure a parent is safe. Help your children practice what they will say if they need to call for help.
- Plan your emergency exits, teach your children and know them well.
- Teach your children how to call for help. Talk to your children about using a neighbour’s phone or a pay phone (if available) if they are unable to use a phone at home. If you have a mobile phone, teach your children how to use it.

Teach your children that it is not their responsibility to stop the abuser when they are angry or violent.
Keeping safe at work, in the car and in the community

- Make sure everyone in the workplace is aware not to give out your contact details.
- Park in a well-lit space of possible when at work or shopping and ask a work colleague or security person to escort you to your car.
- Keep your garage door and car locked at all times.
- Always park in a secure garage if possible.
- Keep a torch in your car.
- Keep a personal alarm on your key ring and regularly check to ensure the battery has not gone flat.
- Form a buddy system with a co-worker in sharing rides or catching public transport.
- Have a plan of action if you are followed home. Know where your nearest Police station is and drive there if you are in a car.
- Plan what you would do if you are followed while catching public transport.
- Change your routines. If you have always shopped on a certain day at a certain location, change the days and the shopping places form week to week.
- If there is an emergency in a public place, find someone and ask for help.

It is important that there is someone in your workplace who knows what is happening for you, but you can be selective about how much to tell them. In a large workplace this could mean a manager or HR.
Phone, mobile and computer safety

- Get an unlisted or private number. Make sure everyone you give it to knows it’s a silent number. Make sure they know not to give it out to anyone.

- Consider installing caller ID on the landline and use an answering machine to screen callers.

- In cases where family law court orders allow the other parent to have contact with your children and you would prefer not to give out your landline phone number, consider purchasing a pre-paid mobile phone that the other parent can call.

- Make sure you know where in the house you can get reception for your mobile phone.

- Keep your mobile phone charged and with you in case the landline is disconnected.

- Consider changing your number if phone abuse continues.

- Program emergency contact numbers into your landline phone and your mobile phone.

- Computer use can be monitored. Although you can clear the history that shows what web pages you have visited, it is impossible to completely delete where you have been surfing on the net. The only way to be sure is to use a safer computer e.g. at a friend’s house, a library, or an internet café.

- Change or delete your Facebook account and your children’s accounts, or review your privacy settings to restrict access. People can accidently give away details of where you are living or where you will be.

- Change your email account. Make it hard to trace – don’t use your name and birth year in the account name.

Report all phone abuse. This is against the law. Keep accurate records and original messages for Police and courts. Do not delete text or voice messages from your phone.
An emergency escape plan

An emergency escape plan focuses on the things you can do in advance to be better prepared in case you are forced to leave a violent situation with no warning.

- Plan and practice quick emergency exit routes from all the rooms in your home.
- If you have any mobility issues or disabilities, arrange in advance for a friend to come straight away if you ring or text them.
- Do not tell the person who uses violence that you are leaving. Leave quickly.
- If you are injured, go to a doctor, emergency room or clinic and report what happened to you.
- Have a back-up plan in case the person using violence finds out where you are going.
- Consult a lawyer and keep any evidence of physical abuse, such as photos.
- Arrange in advance for someone to care for your pets temporarily, until you get settled.
- Remember to clear your phone of the last number you called so the person using violence cannot use redial.
- Have a small escape bag somewhere with spare keys, important papers, extra clothes, a special toy for the kids, small saleable items, and some spare cash in case you need to leave in a hurry. If you need prescription medicines, keep a spare script in your escape bag.
- Open a bank account in your own name and arrange that no bank statements are sent to you. Arrange that mail be sent to a friend, a family member or open a Post Office Box in another area.

If the situation is very dangerous, use your own instinct and judgement to keep yourself safe. Call the Police as soon as it is safe to do so.
Emergency Escape Plan (Continued)

- Save and set aside as much money as you can- out of groceries if necessary.
- Set aside, in a place you can get to quickly, some money for a taxi.
- Plan your emergency exits. Think about safe areas of the house where there are no weapons and where there are at least two ways to escape.
- Plan and rehearse the steps you will take if you have to leave quickly, and learn them well.
- Leave spare copies of house and car keys, money, important papers, photocopies of bank cards and credit cards etc. with a family member, friend or someone you trust.

Try to keep your wallet handy, and containing the following:

- Car/house/office keys
- Bank statements
- Driver’s licence, registration, insurance
- Address/telephone book
- Picture of person using violence
- Emergency money (in cash) hidden away

Take a photocopy of the following items and store in a safe place (maybe in your emergency bag), away from the originals. Hide the originals someplace else, if you can:

- Passports, birth certificates, immigration papers, for all family members
- School and vaccination records
- Driver’s licence, registration and insurance
- Medications, prescriptions, medical records for all family members
- Divorce papers, custody arrangements, court orders, marriage certificate, DVO papers
- Lease/rent agreement, homeownership papers, record of mortgage payments
- Any bank statements
- Address/telephone book
- Picture of person using violence
- Health care cards for yourself and family members
- All cards you normally use i.e. credit cards, bank cards, Medicare card etc.
## Personalised safety plan

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<tr>
<th>Plan in Place</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If you decide to leave the violent situation, how will you get out safely? Consider what doors, windows or other exits you will use. Also consider the health and physical abilities of yourself or others who may need to leave with you.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Where will you keep your wallet and car keys handy in order to leave quickly?</td>
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<td>Who will you tell about the violence and request that they call the Police if they hear suspicious noises coming from your home?</td>
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<td>Who else can you tell?</td>
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<td>How and when will you teach your children to use the phone to contact Police if required?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What will you use as your code word with your children or your friends so they can call for help?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>If you need to leave your home, where will you go?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>If you cannot go to the location above, where else will you go?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>When will you teach your children the code word and the safe locations from above?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>When you think there might be potential for a fight with the person who uses violence, where will you go that is lowest risk and a safe space? (Try to avoid the bathroom, garage and kitchen, near weapons or in rooms with no access to an outside door)</td>
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### Considerations

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<td></td>
<td>When and where will you open a separate bank account to increase your independence?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Where can you stay and who will be able to lend you some money if you need it? Who can you leave extra clothes with?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Who will you contact to change the locks on your doors and windows?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Who will you contact to install a security system?</td>
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<td>Who will you contact to set up an outside lighting system that lights up when someone is close to your house?</td>
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<td>Who will you inform at work about your situation?</td>
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<td>What routines will you change to ensure the person using violence does not know where to find you?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What will you do if the person using violence confronts you in a public place? (Consider each environment, what is around and who or where you might turn to for help)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Details of your actions in relation to this safety plan are somewhere secure or are safe with someone you trust.</td>
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</table>
The Northside team are strong advocates of the Housing First approach.

**Housing First** recognises that stability is more likely to be achieved if an individual or family has a safe, permanent place to live. This approach harnesses the power of permanent, safe housing to help people recover and heal from the trauma of homelessness and gives them a safe space in which to address the issues that may be stopping them from living the lives they want.