



SAFETY PLANNING WITH CHILDREN

During the Violence

The abuser may have patterns to his abuse. Try to be aware of any signs that show he is about to become violent so that you can assess how dangerous the situation may be for you and your children. If it looks like violence may happen, try to remove yourself and your children from the situation before the violence begins if you can. If the abuser does start to harm you, do not run to where the children are; the abuser may hurt them too. Identify a safe room they can go to when they are afraid and something they can think about when they are scared. Teach them that although they may want to protect you, they should not get involved if the abuser is hurting you since this may get them hurt.

What to tell the children

- Create a plan with your children for when the violence happens. Decide on a code word to let them know that they should leave the house and get help. This needs to be prearranged with a neighbor or friend that is close by and that will help you with the incident. If you think the abuser would not let them leave the house safely, figure out with them where would be a safe place for them to go within the house where they can call for help. Make sure they know that their first priority is to stay safe; not to physically protect you.
- Explain to them that it is important not to tell the abuser about what you are discussing. Plan for what you will do if the children tell the abuser about your safety plan or if he finds out about the plan some other way.
- Tell your children that violence is never right, even when someone they love is being violent. Tell them that the violence isn't their fault. Tell them that when anyone is being violent, it is important to keep safe.

Getting to safety

- Make a habit of backing the car into the driveway (so you can pull away quickly) and having a full tank of gas. Keep your car keys in the same place so you can easily grab them. If you need a car seat, make sure there is always one in the car.
- Practice different ways to get out of the house safely. Practice with your children.

Supporting your children

- Let them know that the abuse is not their fault and check in with how they are doing.
- Listen to your children. Listening can help you connect with them. Don't push them to talk about events or topics they are not ready to discuss. If children discuss traumatic events they have seen or heard, try to be supportive, neutral and comforting. Don't make them feel bad for expressing their feelings, even if they express feelings of missing or loving the abuser or anger or resentment towards you. They may cry, scream, or express their feelings in any number of ways. Allow them to communicate their feelings.

- Think of ways to help them reduce stress and build coping skills. You may ask if certain activities such as spending time with friends, playing sports, or creating art helps them to feel calm and give them options to do these activities when possible.
- Connect them with resources, such as a therapist, a children's support group, and art therapy program, equine therapy or any other locally available programs that specialize in helping kids heal from trauma.