

SAFETY PLANNING FOR WOMEN

How to be prepared to leave urgently

A woman who realises that she may need to leave home suddenly can be greatly assisted by being prepared. She needs to plan where she and the children would go, how they would get there and what they would take. The following checklist might help:

- Have important telephone numbers available (Refuge & Women's Aid 24 hour help-line number, friend, family);
- Keep birth and marriage certificates, passports, medical cards together, or copies in a safe place;
- Keep benefit books, bank and building society books handy;
- Have rent or mortgage details written out;
- Carry change, phone card or mobile phone all the time;
- Carry driving licence, car registration and details of car insurance;
- Hide some money, credit cards, or open own savings account;
- Hide or leave spare keys to house and car with someone;
- Have necessary medication for self and children ready;
- Have someone write out a statement of her situation in English if not English speaking;
- Photograph of violent man (useful for serving court documents);
- Decide what to do about personal items or valuables, e.g. family photos, which are often important later;
- Have packed bag with a change of clothes, toiletries, toys hidden or at someone else's house;
- Plan to take all the children that she wishes to have with her (the longer children are 'left at home' the harder it is to get them later);
- Talk to the children about the situation;
- Keep together any documents relating to her immigration status;
- Talk to friends or family about staying in an emergency;
- Use a call box or a friend's phone to keep calls private;
- Be ready to call 999 if she or her children are in danger;
- Tell people she trusts about the abuse;
- Talk to agencies, e.g. a solicitor, about her legal rights, or the health visitor;
- Develop and keep reviewing her safety plan if there is the risk of abuse. For instance, avoid some rooms (kitchen, because of potential weapons; or bathroom, with no exit). Help her think about all possible escape routes: windows, doors, stairs (and suggest she practice before it's needed, if possible). An alternative may be a safe room to barricade while the police are coming;
- Ask neighbours and friends to call 999 if they see or hear noises that could mean she or the children are in danger. (Think about what she will scream or shout if attacked);
- Teach the children to use 999 and ask for the police. Talk to the children about staying safe, how they get out, where to go.

IF SHE DECIDES TO LEAVE

If she decides to leave, before she goes

- Help her think about a place she can go where she will be safe, or where the abuser will not know to look for her, such as to a friend or relative (only if it is safe), to a hotel, or refuge, or to another town or city;
- She can also ask the Housing Department (or Homeless Person's Unit) or Social Services for help. Suggest she plans now, and also makes a back-up plan. Suggest that she gets legal advice;
- If possible, suggest the following:
 - Put some money away in a safe place a little at a time;
 - Move some of her things out a little at a time (for example, identification and other things that may not be noticed);
 - Keep a diary and record the abusive incidents (only if she can do this safely, in a hiding place or a safe address).

At any stage she can, encourage her to make careful notes of everything that happened, including times, dates, names, and what everyone said. If she is able to keep a diary, it can help her to remember. If she was injured, she (you, and the GP) might record all of the details including:

- *Exactly where she received the injuries (for example, the upper thigh);*
- *How she was hurt (for example, by a fist or boot);*
- *How many times she was hit; and*
- *How severe her injuries were (for example, bruises or cuts requiring stitches).*

These notes are very important. They may help her access legal rights, welfare rights and benefit her and the children. Keep them in a safe place.

- Identification, including benefit books, medical cards, legal papers (like court orders, marriage certificate, passports, birth certificates, drivers licence);
- Proof of her housing situation e.g. mortgage paper, tenancy agreement, a bill with name and address, rent book;
- Money for fares, credit cards, cheque book;
- Clothes for two or three days, in a bag which is not too heavy;
- Things of special personal value (like writing, photos), or hide or store them;
- A few of the children's favourite toys, books or games;
- Toiletries, nappies, sanitary towels.

Any proof of the abuse like notes, photos, taped messages, her diary, crime reference numbers, names and numbers of professionals who know.

If there is a residency or a parental order in place, she might consult a solicitor who specialises in child and family work before leaving, or as soon as possible after she has left with the children. It may prevent a missing persons investigation or an emergency order being issued by the abuser for the children's return. Ideally, she might leave a note that says that she has left with the children, that they are safe, and that she will contact the non-resident parent in the near future. (She should keep a copy of the note).

She can also contact the national 24 hour National Domestic Violence Help-line run in partnership between Refuge and Women's Aid, voluntary agencies in her area, the police, Social services or the Housing department.