

Safety Planning:

Here are some general safety plans but remember individualized safety planning is best and **The Hamilton County Chattanooga Family Justice Center** can help. **423-643-7600**

While with and Abusive Partner:

Living with an abusive partner can make it especially hard to identify or create opportunities to leave. Here are some important steps you can take to help prepare to leave an abusive living situation:

- **Identify safe areas in your residence** with pathways to exit, away from any weapons. If arguments occur, try to move to those areas before they escalate.
- If safe, **have a phone accessible at all times and know what numbers to call for help**, including friends or family, the Hamilton County Chattanooga Family Justice Center 423-643-7600, the local hotline for PartnershipFCA at 43-755-2700, or The Hotline at 800.799.SAFE (7233), TN Hotline 800-289-9018
- **Let trusted friends and neighbors know about your situation** and develop a plan and visual signal for when you might need their help. Give them clear instructions on who you do or do not want them to contact in moments of crisis, including law enforcement.
- **Talk to others living in the residence how to get help, including children or roommates.** Instruct them not to get involved in violence between you and your partner and work with them to establish a mutual signal for when they should get help or leave the house.
- If possible, **practice how to get out safely**, including with others who may be living in the residence.
- **Plan for what to do if your partner finds out about your plan.**
- **If possible, keep weapons like guns and knives locked away** and stored as inaccessibly as possible. If you are concerned about your safety, reach out to The Hamilton County Chattanooga Family Justice Center 423-643-7600, Partnership FCA 423-755-2700, or TN Hotline 800-289-9018.

- **Be mindful of how clothing or jewelry could be used to physically harm you.** For example, if your partner has put their hands around your neck, avoid wearing scarves or jewelry that can be used to harm you.
- **Back your car into your driveway when you park at home and keep it fueled.** If possible, keep the driver's door unlocked with the rest of the doors locked to allow for quick access to the vehicle.
- **If violence is unavoidable, make yourself as physically small as possible.** Move to a corner and curl into a ball with your face protected and arms around each side of your head, fingers entwined and you are not in any room where you will be trapped or have weapons used against you.(a.k.a. The kitchen where knives are easily accessible)

With Children:

- Teach your children when, how, and who to contact during an emergency.
- This can include trusted friends, family members, neighbors, local service providers, and more.
- If possible, instruct them to leave the home when situations begin to escalate and establish where they can go. Create a plan ahead of time with trusted people who your children can turn to during a moment of crisis.
- Come up with a code word for when to leave the house in an emergency and make sure they know **not** to tell others what the secret word means.
- Identify a room in the house that they can go to when they're afraid, and something calming they can focus on for comfort.
- Instruct them to stay out of areas containing items that could be used to harm them, including kitchens and bathrooms.
- Teach them that they shouldn't try to intervene in moments of violence, even though they may want to protect their parents.
- Plan for what you will do if your children tell your partner of your plan, and remember never to blame them for their responses to your partner's abusive behavior

While Pregnant:

- Doctor's visits can be an opportunity to discuss your situation. If you've decided to leave your relationship, a health care provider can become an active participant in your plan to leave.
- If your partner goes to doctor's appointments with you, try to find a moment when they're out of the room to ask your care provider (or even the front desk receptionist) to help you by providing an excuse for them to talk to you one-on-one.
- If possible, find a prenatal class that limits its attendance to those giving birth. This can be a comfortable atmosphere for discussing pregnancy concerns or allow you to speak to the class instructor one-on-one.
- There's always a heightened risk during violent situations when you're pregnant. If you live in a home with stairs, try to spend your time on the first floor to avoid potential harm. If violence becomes unavoidable and you're unable to escape, assuming the fetal position and covering your stomach with your arms can help protect you and your pregnancy.

With Pets:

- Take steps to prove ownership of your pet. Have them vaccinated and licensed in the place where you live, making sure the registrations are done in your name. Take steps to have them changed if necessary.
- If possible, avoid leaving pets alone with an abusive partner.
- If your pet is microchipped, make sure your abusive partner is not listed as a contact.
- If you're planning to leave, talk to friends, family, or your veterinarian about temporary care for your pet if necessary. If that's not an option, The Hamilton County Chattanooga Family Justice Center can help. For help finding an animal shelter, visit the [Humane Society website](#).
- If you decide to leave, bring extra provisions for your pets including food and medications, copies of their medical records, and important phone numbers.
- If you're thinking about getting a protective order, add your pet
- After leaving, consider changing veterinarians and avoid leaving pets outside alone to ensure their long-term safety.

- If you've had to leave your pet behind with an abusive partner, consider seeking assistance from local services like animal control to see if they can intervene.

Leaving:

- Record evidence of physical abuse, like pictures of injuries. If possible, keep a journal of violent incidents, noting dates, events, and any threats made. Store your journal in a safe place.
- Establish where you can go to get help, like the Hamilton County Chattanooga Family Justice Center. If you're comfortable doing so, tell someone trusted about what's happening.
- Plan with your children and identify a safe place where they can go during moments of crisis, like a room with a lock or a friend's house. Reassure them that their job is to stay safe, not to protect you.
- When preparing to go to a shelter, if you can, call ahead to see what the shelter's policies are. They can give you information on how they can help, and how to secure a space when it's time to leave. The Hamilton County Chattanooga Family Justice Center can also provide you with local resources.
- Try to set money aside or ask trusted friends or family members to hold money for you somewhere an abusive partner can't reach it.
- If relevant and feasible, pursue job skills or educational qualifications that expand your opportunities for independence.

Leaving:

if you're forced to leave in a hurry, use the following list of items as a quick guide for what to bring with you:

Identification

- Driver's license or state ID card
- Birth certificate and children's birth certificates
- Social security cards
- Financial information
- Money and/or credit cards (in your name)
- Checking and/or savings account books

Legal papers

- Protective order, if applicable (make multiple copies if possible)
- Copies of any lease or rental agreements or the deed to your home
- Car registration and insurance papers
- Health and life insurance papers
- Medical records for you and your children
- School records
- Work permits/Green Cards/visas
- Passport
- Any legal documents, including divorce and custody papers
- Marriage license

Emergency numbers

- Your attorney
- Your local domestic violence program or shelter, like the Hamilton County Chattanooga Family Justice Center 423-643-7600 or TN Hotline 800-289-9018
- Trusted friends and family members
- Your local doctor's office and hospital
- Criminal legal resources
- Children's school
- The 24/7 local Hotline: 423-755-2700, The TN Hotline 800-289-9018

Other items to keep in mind

- Medications and refills (if possible)
- Emergency items, like food, bottles of water, and a first aid kit
- Multiple changes of clothes for you and your children
- Emergency money
- Address book
- Extra sets of house and car keys
- Pictures and sentimental items
- Valuable items, such as jewelry
- Safe cell phone, if necessary

After You Leave:

- Change your locks and phone number if possible.
- If possible, change your work hours and the route you take to get there.

- Alert school authorities of the situation. If there is a protection order in place, provide a copy to the school. Designate who is and is not allowed to pick your children up from school. If possible, change the route taken to transport children to school; if necessary, consider changing your children's schools.
- If you have a protection order, keep a certified copy of it with you at all times, and inform friends, neighbors and employers that you have a protection order in effect. If you move to a new state, register your protection order with the courts in your new state.
- Consider renting a post office box or using a trusted friend's address for your mail (remember that addresses are used for restraining orders and police reports — be careful who you give your address and phone number to). Inquire about the Safe at Home project.
- Reschedule appointments that your partner might be aware of.
- If possible and necessary, use different stores and frequent different social spots.
- Alert neighbors and work colleagues about how and when to seek help if they feel you may be in danger (if you feel comfortable doing so). Be clear about who you do or do not want them to contact, including law enforcement.
- Tell people who take care of your children (if you are comfortable doing so) or transport them to/from school and activities. Explain your situation and provide them with a copy of your restraining order if you have one.

Emotional Safety:

- **Seek out supportive people.** A caring presence such as a trusted friend or family member can help create a calm atmosphere to think through difficult situations and discuss potential options.
- **Identify and work towards achievable goals.** Achievable goals can be as simple as calling The Hamilton County Chattanooga Family Justice Center at 423-643-7600, or talking to one of our advocates at The Partnership Hotline 423-755-2700, or TN Hotline 800-289-9018. Remember that you don't have to do anything you aren't comfortable with, but taking small steps can help options feel more possible when you're ready.

- **Create a peaceful space for yourself.** Designating a physical place where your mind can relax and feel safe can help you work through the difficult emotions that arise when dealing with abuse. This can be a room in your house, a spot under your favorite tree, a comfy chair by a window, or in a room with low lighting.
- **Remind yourself of your inherent value.** You are special and important, and recognizing and reminding yourself of this reality is important for your emotional health. It's never your fault when someone chooses to be abusive to you, and their actions are no reflection of the great value you have as a person.
- **Remember that you deserve to be kind to yourself.** Take time every day to practice **self-care**, even if only for a few minutes, in order to establish space for peace and emotional safety in your life. It's healthy and recommended to give yourself breaks from the stressors in your life, to the extent that you're able to. Little moments like these can go a long way in helping you think more clearly and make informed decisions.

Emotional Safety with Children:

- Make sure your safety planning is age-appropriate. A safety plan will look differently for a younger child than it would for a teen, but your love and support will look the same.
- Let your children know that what's happening isn't their fault and that they didn't cause it. Tell them that you support them no matter what.
- Let them know that abuse is never right, even when the person being violent is someone they love.
- Tell them that you want everyone to be safe, so you have to come up with a plan to use in case of emergencies.
- Remember that your child might tell your partner whatever information you come up with together, which could make an abusive situation more dangerous. ******When talking about safety plans, use phrases like, *"We're practicing what to do in an emergency,"* instead of, *"We're planning what you can do when _____ becomes violent."*
- Help them make a list of people they're comfortable talking with and expressing themselves to, and make sure they can contact those people if needed.

- If possible, enroll them in a counseling program or therapy. If you need resources, The Hamilton County Chattanooga Family Justice Center 423-643-7600 can help.

Protective Orders and Other Legal Resources:

- A protective order is a legal document intended to prohibit your partner from physically coming near you or harming or harassing you, your children, or other loved ones.
- You can apply for a protective order at the courthouse.
- Protective orders may be able to put a stop to physical abuse but they depend on your partner's adherence to the law and law enforcement's willingness to enforce the protective order. Psychological abuse is still possible, and **a protective order should never replace a safety plan.**

Other Legal Resources

- WomensLaw.org has state-by-state information about laws including protective and restraining orders and child custody laws
- [Legal Services Corporation](http://LegalServicesCorporation.org) is an independent nonprofit established by Congress in 1974 to provide financial support for civil legal aid to low-income Americans. The Corporation currently provides funding to 134 independent nonprofit legal aid organizations in every state, the District of Columbia, and U.S. Territories.
- [VINE](http://VINE.org) allows crime victims to obtain timely and reliable information about criminal cases and the custody status of offenders 24 hours a day. Victims and other concerned citizens can also register to be notified by phone, email or TTY device.
- [National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women](http://NationalClearinghouse.org) assists battered women charged with crimes and members of their defense teams such as defense attorneys, advocates, expert witnesses.
- Ask a volunteer legal services provider (attorneys who offer free legal services to low-income individuals) or a local advocacy group about actions against your partner for behaviors like criminal assault, aggravated assault, harassment, stalking, or interfering with child custody.

Protections for non-U.S. citizens

- [The Immigrant Legal Resource Center](#) and [WomensLaw.org](#) offer information about your rights as an immigrant. Further information about [resources available to non-U.S. citizens](#) can be found here.
- The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) states that people without citizenship status who are experiencing domestic violence and are married to abusers who are U.S. citizens or Legal Permanent Residents may qualify to self-petition for legal status. [Learn more about USCIS guidelines concerning VAWA.](#)
- Victims of certain crimes including domestic abuse and trafficking may be eligible for specific visas based on [certain eligibility requirements](#).
- Legal actions to escape abuse can come with their own risks of immigration consequences depending on the findings of the judge who presides over your petition. A [specialized immigration attorney](#) should always be your first point of contact for immigration questions and concerns.

Safety and Law Enforcement:

- If you determine that it's safe for you and others for you to do so, call 9-1-1 during a life-threatening emergency.
- For non-life threatening situations, consider [contacting The Partnership for Families Children and Adults at 423-755-2700](#) or [thehotline.org](#) 24/7 or the TN Hotline 800-289-9018 to speak confidentially with an expert advocate.

Create Your Own Safety Plan:

My safe places without weapons and with pathways to an exit:

My emergency numbers:

Trusted people I can give clear instructions on who I do or do not want them to contact in moments of crisis, including law enforcement.

Instructions to others in the home on how to get help and not get involved in any violence. My signal for help to my trusted people is:

Other:

(i.e. I plan to reach out to other organizations such as the Family Justice Center to connect with other agencies for help, like Legal Aid)

____ I have **practiced how to get out safely**, including with others who may be living in the residence.

____ **All weapons like guns and knives are locked away** and stored as inaccessibly as possible.

Resources: hotline.org and Hamilton County Chattanooga Family Justice Center at <https://fjc.chattanooga.gov/>

