

FAMILY SAFETY PLANNING

We understand what a struggle it can be to balance your efforts to keep your children from being burdened with adult responsibility, while at the same time equip them with strategies for keeping themselves -- and you -- safe.

If your partner sometimes gets scary or violent, your children are almost certainly aware of the fact. You cannot avoid that fear by not talking about it, and in fact, children feel safer if they can talk to their mothers about how frightened their father's behavior makes them, and discuss actions they might take next time he erupts. Children aren't just afraid for themselves; they are worried about *you*, and they need to be able to express that concern and feel that you hear them. They also want to know how they might be able to protect you.

When you sit with your children, individually or as a group, to talk about safety strategies, be sure to emphasize the following points:

- Adults are responsible for their own safety. Children can help if they want to, but it isn't their job.
- Safety plans won't always work, and if someone gets hurt, it isn't the child's fault.
- If they make a mistake and do the safety plan wrong, they *still* aren't at fault for what happens; the abusive man is always responsible for his own actions.
- They can't manage your partner or make him change.
- They don't have to talk with you about safety planning if they don't want to.

Then begin the discussion by asking your children what *they* think might help, or what they would like to plan to do next time they feel scared of your partner. Get as many ideas from them as possible; in this way you will learn what strategies they may already be using, and they are more likely to be able to effectively practice actions that they have come up with themselves. Then add ideas of your own, and see if you can agree on a plan.

Here are some of the strategies we have learned about from families over the years, which you and your children might try to consider:

- Running out of the home when the incident starts.
 - Designate a safe place for the children to go to, or a spot to meet.
 - Decide whether to tell anyone else, such as a neighbor, about the abuse.
 - Decide whether children will call police from their safe place.
- Locking themselves in a safe room, ideally one with a phone.
- Arranging a code word with friends or relatives, so that they can use the phone to call for help without the abuser knowing what they are doing
- Dialing 911 for help, or teaching children to call a hotline to talk.
- Making an excuse to get Mom out of the home (such as going outdoors and faking an injury, so that she has to come out to help)
- Keeping a cellular phone hidden somewhere indoors, or in a garage or shed, without the abuser's knowledge, where the children know where to find it if they need to call for help
- Planning phrases they can say to themselves or to each other to help them stay calm and get through the scary incident (such as, "We're going to be okay.")
- Leaving home as soon as they see that Dad has been drinking, or observe other behaviors that they know are warning signs of a scary incident
- Hiding weapons or other dangerous objects in the home so that Dad won't be able to find them

Excerpted from "When Dad Hurts Mom" by Lundy Bancroft.

MOM'S SAFETY PLAN

*Remember, you know your abusive partner best.
You know how to protect yourself and your children better than anyone else.*

- I will use _____ as my code word/phrase with my children or my friends so they know the information is from me and not my abuser.
- I will keep an emergency copy of my court order _____.
- If problems occur while I am around town, I will _____.
- If I ride the bus and see my abuser, I will _____.
- _____
- _____
- I will review and update my safety plan regularly.

CHILDREN'S SAFETY PLAN

- We will use _____ as our code word/phrase with we know a message is from mom.
- We will _____ if we think things are going to get scary or dangerous.
- If something scary happens we can hide _____.
- If something scary happens we can go to _____.
- If something scary happens we can call _____.
- _____
- _____
- We will review and update our safety plan regularly.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SAFETY PLANNING WITH SCHOOLS OR CHILDCARE

- Give your children's teachers, daycare and babysitters a copy of any court order you have.
- Tell the school and/or childcare who has permission to pick up your children.
- Use a password so the school and/or childcare can be sure that it is you on the phone.
- Give the school and/or childcare a photo of the abuser.
- Make sure the children know to tell at school if they see the abuser.
- Make sure that the school knows not to give your address or phone number to ANYONE.

**If your children have unsupervised visitation with your partner,
or you want additional safety planning information, please speak to an advocate.**