

# GETTING OUT:

A Process Learned from the  
Courage + Wisdom of Survivors



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**If you are in danger or require emergency services, call 911.**

# Dedication

*To those who share the experience, strength, and wisdom they gain from leaving an abusive situation and to those still living in dangerous relationships.*



**HOPE**

# Introduction

Being hurt or abused by someone you love or care about is confusing and scary. At times, you might feel afraid for yourself, your children, your family, pets, or others who are close to you.

Abuse can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender or sexual identity, culture, income, ability, or where you live. It is our hope that those who are experiencing violence and abuse recognize that there is help and hope for the future.

This guide was created through a series of consultations across Saskatchewan with people who represent the diversity of our province. It is based on the experiences of people who have left violent and abusive relationships and are now living violence-free lives, and the knowledge of those who provide support and services to people dealing with abuse and violence in their lives.

This guide is offered with respect and humility to honour those who have shared their personal experience, wisdom, and courage, and those who work every day to support people in our communities to find their strength to heal and build healthy, resilient lives for themselves and their families.

This information is not a substitute for legal advice or personal counselling. Each situation is different and you may need professional support as you work through the process.

Remember that you are not alone. There are people who will listen and help you as you begin to make changes. You have worth and value. You deserve to be safe, healthy, and happy.

*It is important to keep this guide in a safe and private place if you are currently living in a dangerous situation. If you are in danger, or require emergency services, call 911.*



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# Part 1:

## Is This Really Happening to Me?

"When the violence first started in my marriage, I truly thought it was my fault and that I should never say or do anything to anger my husband. If I did, I thought he was justified in hurting me because in my mind he was always right, so I must be wrong. I didn't want to think badly of him so I just denied that any violence occurred."

- Cathy, 37 Years Old

# What is Abuse?

Abuse is when someone does or says things to gain control over another person by hurting that person or causing feelings such as fear, anxiety, nervousness, guilt, helplessness, or worthlessness. Abuse is done on purpose and is used to intimidate others. Abuse can occur in a variety of ways:

**Physical abuse** means using or threatening to use physical force. It could be actions like hitting, slapping, punching, pushing, grabbing, shaking, kicking, choking (strangulation), pulling hair, or burning you.

**Emotional and verbal abuse** involves the use of words and actions that attack how you feel about yourself or that make you feel unsafe. Emotionally abusive behaviour deliberately undermines your self-esteem and confidence. It could include put-downs, name-calling, swearing, yelling, blaming, shaming, or mocking you. They may threaten to harm you, themselves, children, or pets, or use silence and withdrawal as a means to control. They may stalk you or harass you with calls, emails, or text messages.

**Social abuse** includes isolating you from your social networks and trying to control where you go, what you do, and whom you see or talk to. It may include repeatedly cutting down your friends and family so that you slowly disconnect from your social supports. It can also be verbally or physically abusing you in front of others.

**Financial abuse** involves controlling money. It can include being denied access to money (even money you earn yourself), being given an "allowance" that doesn't cover your or your family's needs, or making you ask for money and explain everything you spend. "Borrowing" money and never paying it back, stealing, forging your signature, using your PIN number, or preventing you from working are all examples of financial abuse.

**Sexual abuse** is any unwanted sexual behaviour that you do not give your consent to. This includes touching, kissing, forced sexual contact, and rape. It might also be forcing you into sexual acts that cause pain, humiliation, or that take place while you are unconscious, asleep, or intoxicated.

**Spiritual abuse** impacts your spiritual, religious, or personal belief system, or uses beliefs to control you. This can mean using spiritual or religious teachings against you or justifying abuse and violence as "punishment" or "correction." It could also mean forcing you to stop practicing your spiritual beliefs, "calling down" your belief system and the values and morals you live by, or forcing you or your children into a belief system that you do not choose.

**Cyber abuse** is behaviour that can take place in various online spaces, including chat rooms, social networking sites, emails, messaging apps, or message boards. It is behaviour that threatens to hurt you socially, psychologically, or even physically. Cyber abuse includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about you. It can include sharing personal or private information about you, causing you embarrassment or humiliation.

**Animal abuse** is a form of abuse involving your pets and animals. The abuser may threaten to harm the animals if you leave or refuse to let you to take them to the vet if needed. The abuser uses the animals as another way to manipulate and control you.

# Who Can Be Abused?

Anyone can be abused. Anyone can be abusive. Abuse does not discriminate. Abuse and violence can happen to anyone of any age, race, religion, sexual or gender identity, political or socio-economic background, employed or unemployed, people with disabilities or able-bodied people. They can be your neighbours, co-workers, family, or friends.

Abuse and violence can happen in any relationship. It can happen between:

- People who live together – married or common-law partners
- People in a dating relationship – romantic and intimate involvement
- People who were in a relationship but it has ended
- People in a care-giving relationship – a person and someone providing care for them, such as a senior or person with a disability receiving care from a family member, friend, or someone paid to provide care.

*Abuse is never your fault.*

People who experience abuse might have challenges and concerns that can make it difficult to seek help including:

- **Assuming blame.** You may believe it is your fault or feel you deserve the treatment you receive. You may feel responsible to make things better.
- **Not being taken seriously.** You may fear that you will not be believed or taken seriously if you ask for help.
- **Dependency.** You may be mentally, emotionally, or financially dependent on the abuser. In the situation of immigration, the abuser may be the person who sponsored you into the country. The idea of leaving the relationship creates significant feelings of depression or anxiety.

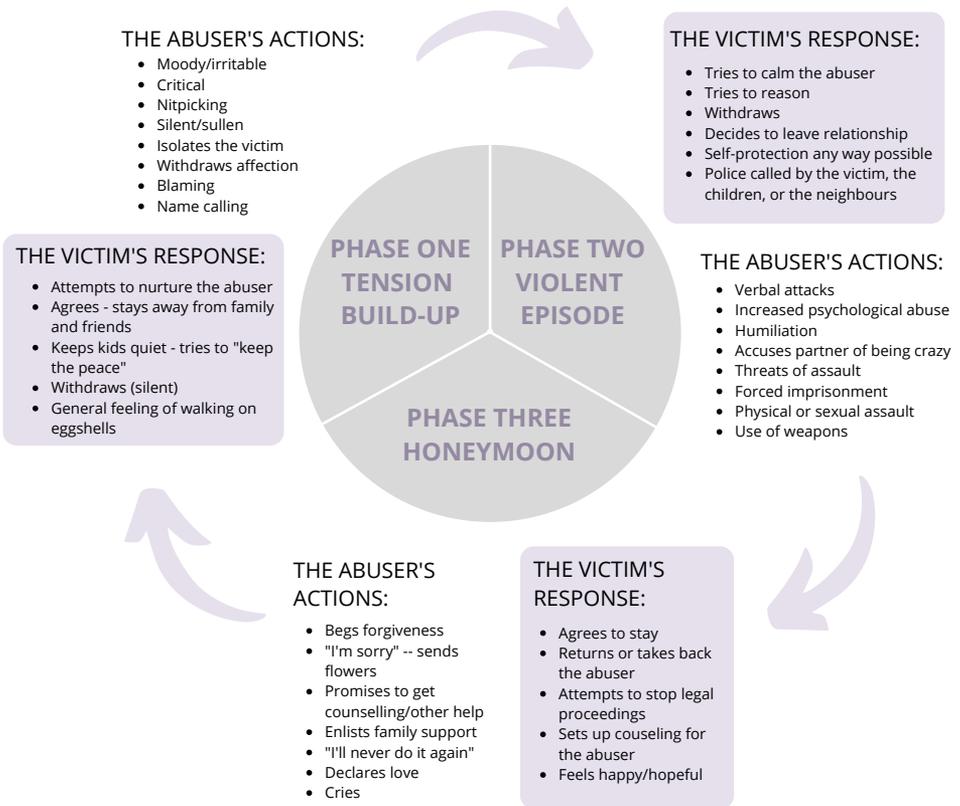
- **Obligation.** You might feel a sense of obligation to your relationship or to your family.
- **Protecting children.** You may be afraid to leave your children alone with your abuser. You may be afraid that the abuser will tell your children that you are a bad person or that you don't love them. You worry that if you leave, you will never be allowed to see your children again.
- **Feeling embarrassed/ashamed.** You may feel ashamed at being involved with someone who is abusive. Maybe family members or friends pointed out some concerns they had about your partner or early in the relationship there were red flags that you dismissed. You may feel embarrassed to tell anyone about the abuse because you believe that it is shameful to talk about your relationship with other people.
- **Access to information and services.** If you are new to Canada, you may not be familiar with the laws here. Regardless of the laws in the country you came from, abuse is never acceptable in Canada. You might feel that you do not trust anyone enough to talk about what is happening. Maybe you feel that you do not know enough English to communicate so someone will understand or believe you. Your abuser might also scare you by telling you that you will lose your children if you leave the abuse. This is not true. If you have a disability, you may face challenges in finding services that are accessible to you. There are services available that can work with you online or over the phone to help you to find the supports that meet your needs.

Deciding to reach out for help is a big decision. There are people to help you to work through challenges and concerns that you may have. Reach out for help. Check Part 3: Finding Help starting on page 23 for contact information.

# What is the Cycle of Violence?

The "Cycle of Violence" is used to explain patterns of abusive behaviour. In some relationships, abuse does not start until years into the relationship; for others the abuse begins right away. The cycle of violence is common in abusive relationships. Depending on the relationship, the cycle might take hours, days, or months to repeat. Often, each time the cycle repeats itself, the violence gets worse.

## The Cycle of Violence



## **Phase One - Tension Build-Up**

The tension build-up phase can be described as “walking on eggshells.” You most likely feel stress and strain as you try to keep the peace in the relationship. The abuser seems increasingly angry and emotionally abusive. You might feel afraid and avoid disagreeing with them. An incident occurs that triggers a violent episode.

## **Phase Two - Violent Episode**

The violent episode occurs when the abuser believes that they are losing control and tries to regain it by being abusive. During a violent episode, the abuser will lash out with the aim of hurting you physically and emotionally. You might feel afraid, hopeless, weak, and humiliated.

## **Phase Three - Honeymoon**

After a violent episode has occurred, the abuser will make excuses for their actions, trying to downplay what happened. The abuser might blame you for not keeping the peace. The abuser might try to convince you that it was your fault, and that the violence occurred because of something you did. At times, you may even find that you are blaming yourself for the violence and abuse.

Often, the abuser may seem sorry for the abuse. They might promise that it will never happen again or promise to get help. The abuser will look for your forgiveness. Things will seem better and you may believe that the abuser has changed. However, the cycle repeats itself and soon you will find yourself in the tension phase once again. It is the honeymoon phase that gives you hope and promise that things will get better. This may be one of the many reasons why you remain in the relationship.

As time goes on, often the tension building and violent episodes increase in frequency and length, and the remorse/romance phase becomes shorter and shorter. However, not all abusive relationships experience this same cycle of violence or abuse. For some people, violence occurs at random without warning; for others it happens constantly.

# Recognizing the Signs

Recognizing abuse is the first step to making changes. Abuse often escalates from threats and verbal abuse to physical violence. While physical injury may be the most obvious danger, the emotional and psychological impacts of abuse are also severe. There are many signs of an abusive relationship. The most telling sign is that you are afraid of the other person. If you feel like you have to walk on eggshells around them – constantly watching what you say and do in order to avoid a blow-up – then your relationship could possibly be unhealthy and abusive. Other signs include the other person belittling you or trying to control you. You may experience feelings of helplessness and desperation.

There are many different behaviours that demonstrate that the other person wants to control you. Do they:

- Have a bad and unpredictable temper?
- Humiliate or yell at you?
- Ignore or put down your opinions or accomplishments?
- Threaten to take your children away or harm them?
- Threaten or damage things that are important to you?
- Threaten or harm your pets?
- Keep you from seeing your friends and family?
- Limit your access to the phone, money, or car?
- Try to control everything you do?
- Constantly text or message you to see where you are or who you are with and get angry when you don't respond?
- Act excessively jealous or possessive?
- See you as property or a sex object rather than a person?
- Treat you so badly that you are embarrassed if your friends or family see?

## Making Excuses

Sometimes you may make excuses or minimize what is happening. Have you ever said any of these things to yourself or someone else?

- It won't happen again. They promised.
- They never hit me, and if I don't have bruises or broken bones, then it can't be abuse.
- It must have been a mistake and they were only trying to teach me to be better.
- They wouldn't hurt me if they'd only stop drinking or using. It's all because of the alcohol/drugs.
- They only have my best interests at heart. They really do love me.
- If I hadn't said (or done, or not said, or not done) that, they wouldn't have hit me (or yelled, or hid the car keys, or beat the dog).
- They are smarter than me so they should make the important decisions.
- It's because they love me so much and can't live without me that they say they will kill themselves if I leave.
- I am the only one who understands them.
- They won't take my money again. They probably just needed it for something important.

## Has the abuser ever said any of these things?

- I am sorry but...
- Quit making such a big deal out of it.
- It's just a little scratch.
- What are you talking about? Nothing happened.
- If you hadn't done this, I wouldn't have hit you.
- Where do you think you're going? You're not leaving this house.
- I was tired.
- I was drunk/high.
- I'm under stress at work.
- The kids were making too much noise.
- You're so crazy - no one will believe you.
- You make things hard for me because taking care of you is so much work.

## How You Might Feel

Abuse wears down your body, mind, and spirit. The stress from the abuse affects your health and wellness. You may experience physical symptoms like headaches, stomach pains, diarrhea, heartburn, chest pains, and aching muscles. You may notice breakouts and acne, increased allergies, or aching jaws from grinding or clenching your teeth. You may be restless, have problems sleeping, or have nightmares.

Your mental health and wellbeing can change. You may be depressed. You may feel overwhelmed with everyday life and be nervous, tense, anxious, and on edge most of the time. You may have difficulty thinking clearly and making decisions. You may feel "numb" and helpless, like you are not present in your own body. You may feel self-conscious and bad about yourself. You may be easily irritated or angered. You might have thoughts of suicide.

Coping with abuse is stressful. You may feel afraid of the abuser most of the time and avoid certain things because you are afraid of angering them. Perhaps you feel like you can't do anything right. You may cry uncontrollably. You may have difficulty controlling your anger and lash out at people. You may find that behaviours like shopping, smoking, gambling, gaming, having unsafe sex, drinking, or using drugs are hard to control. You may overeat or eat too little and gain or lose a lot of weight. You might not care about what you look like and may lose interest in healthy sex. Nervous behaviours like biting your nails, pulling your hair, or not being able to be still may increase. You might harm yourself by cutting or hurting yourself in other ways. You might isolate yourself by avoiding friends and family, not returning calls or messages, or not wanting to go out in public. These behaviours and feelings are natural reactions to a stressful situation.

***If you, or someone you know, is having thoughts of suicide, reach out for help. Go to the nearest emergency room, or call 911 or 811.***

## Is it Still Abuse If...

### **There has not been any physical violence? YES!**

Many people are emotionally and verbally abused. This can be just as frightening and is often more confusing to understand.

### **The abuse seems minor compared to what you have read about, seen on TV, or heard other people talk about? YES!**

There isn't a "better" or "worse" form of abuse.

### **Physical abuse has only occurred once or twice in the relationship? YES!**

Studies indicate that if the abuser has physically hurt you once, it is likely to happen again.

### **The physical assaults stopped when you became passive and gave up your power and right to express yourself? YES!**

It is not a victory if you have to give up your rights as a person in exchange for not being abused.

## Is this "Normal"?

Often people don't realize that the situation they consider "normal" is actually abusive. If you grew up in a violent environment or have become used to living in an abusive relationship, you may think your situation is "normal." It is not. Most times abuse does not start at the beginning of a relationship. It happens slowly, very subtly and over time. Because of this, the acts of violence can be explained away. The abuser comes up with many different reasons as to what went on, causing you to question your own perception of what took place. It's "crazy making" behaviour.

Sometimes you might feel that the abuse is your fault. You are not responsible for the abuse. Everyone is responsible for their own behaviour. **The abuse is NEVER your fault.**

When you feel this way, you might make excuses for the abuser's violence or justify the abuser's behaviour.

**Abusers are able to control their behaviour – they do it all the time. Abuse is intentional and purposeful.**

- **Abusers pick and choose whom to abuse.** They don't insult, threaten, or assault everyone in their life. Usually, they save their abuse for the people closest to them, the ones they claim to love.
- **Abusers carefully choose when and where to abuse.** They control themselves until no one else is around to see their abusive behaviour. They may act like everything is fine in public, but lash out instantly as soon as you're alone.
- **Abusers are able to stop their abusive behaviour when it benefits them.** Most abusers are not out of control. In fact, they're able to immediately stop their abusive behaviour when it's to their advantage to do so, for example when the police show up or their boss calls.
- **Violent abusers usually direct their blows where they won't show.** Rather than acting out in a mindless rage, many physically violent abusers carefully aim their kicks and punches where the bruises and marks won't be visible.

## Impact on Children

Exposure to violence and abuse, including children witnessing, hearing or being aware of violence by one adult figure against another adult, has potential to leave a child vulnerable and at risk of physical and emotional harm. If you are a parent who is experiencing violence and abuse, it can be difficult to know how to protect your child. When it is believed that a child has been exposed to violence and abuse and there is concern for the safety of the child, Child Protection Services in Saskatchewan may become involved with your family and be required to offer services for you and your child.

Children living in a home where there is abuse may hear adults fighting, see bruises or a hole in the wall, or witness the actual abuse. They may feel the tension and become part of the cycle of violence. Children who see abuse at home are likely to think that abuse is a normal part of relationships. Many parents stay together “for the sake of the children.” When living in a home where there is abuse, children learn unhealthy lessons about relationships. They are more likely than other children to abuse someone or be abused when they grow up. Children might see violence as a way to get what they want. They might believe that when they hurt others they won’t get in trouble.

These experiences can possibly have serious effects, including:

- Behaviour problems at school or at home
- Feelings of guilt for not being able to stop the abuse
- Depression, anxiety, substance use, and other mental health problems
- Low self-esteem
- Mental, physical, and emotional health problems that will carry into their adult lives
- Difficulty with relationships

Children depend on adults to look after them. They sense the emotions of their caregiver and respond accordingly. If the adult is calm and responsive and is able to maintain their daily routine, the child will feel secure. If the adult is anxious and overwhelmed, the child may feel unprotected, experience a range of emotions, and act out.

Children exposed to abuse and violence need special care and support to rebuild their trust, self-esteem, and feelings of safety. Spending time with your children is a simple way to do that. They need to see and experience healthy, supportive relationships to learn positive relationship skills for their futures.

*Young children may fuss more, have problems with sleeping, toileting or bedwetting, or may have problems with irritability and frustration, such as tantrums.*

*School-aged children may experience increased anxiety and aggression or problems with attention and hyperactivity.*

*Adolescents and teens may feel hopeless, have difficulties in their own relationships, or engage in risk taking behaviours like alcohol and drug abuse, unsafe sex, or self-harming behaviours like cutting.*

Here are some ways you can provide care and support for your children:

- Get help for your children by getting help for yourself.
- Find ways to reduce your own stress, like getting emotional support from a friend or counsellor. This will help you to be a positive support for your children.
- Talk to a health professional (like a doctor or a counsellor) about your children or get involved in community programs to build support.
- Have your children talk to a counsellor or attend a program for children who are exposed to violence.
- Surround them with healthy role models – people that you trust who can show them that violence and abuse are not acceptable. This could be teachers, family, friends, or people from organizations that provide programs for children.
- Encourage them to talk about their feelings.
- Listen to them and believe them.
- Teach them non-violent ways to express fear and anger, and how to settle disagreements.
- Make sure they understand that violence and abuse are wrong and that what is happening is not their fault.

*Children, teens, and young adults can contact the **Kids Help Phone** for support by phone, text, or online chat.*

**1.800.668.6868**  
Text CONNECT to 686868  
**KidsHelpPhone.ca**



# Part 2:

## What Can I Do?

An abusive or violent relationship is unsafe. Protect yourself by creating a safety plan, talking to someone you trust about what is happening, and keeping track of events in case reports need to be made.

Think about how you can leave the situation when you recognize that the abuser may become violent towards you. Avoid retaliating, even if provoked, as it may make things escalate and you might get seriously hurt. If you retaliate and the police are called, it may appear that you are the aggressor. You could be arrested and charged, particularly if the other person has any injuries caused by your retaliation.

**You are not to blame and you are not weak.** There are many people who can help and support you. Contact community services or crisis lines for help. See Part 3: Finding Help on page 23 for information about programs and services.

# Safety Plan

A **safety plan** helps you to decide how to respond and how to get yourself to safety when a situation turns violent or abusive.

Planning ahead is very important – it will help you to act quickly and to know what to do in a crisis. Staying safe is important whether you are still in the abusive relationship, are planning to leave, or have already left.

You can start creating your own personal safety plan. A safety plan is your plan for leaving the abusive relationship and includes information on what to pack, important telephone numbers, and steps for putting your plan into action. See the Safety Planner at the back of this booklet for information.

If you have children, you can also help them to develop a safety plan. This plan should be easy to follow and aimed at getting the children to a safe place when needed. Based on the age and maturity of your children, you can decide how much information to give them. Remember the abuser may try to get information from the children. This could be very dangerous. Make sure you only share your plan with your children if you are sure you will all be safe.

Some suggestions for creating a safety plan with your children:

- Decide ahead of time on a safe place the children can go when they feel unsafe or there is conflict.
- Teach your children how and when to call police and other emergency contacts.
- Make a list of people your children can trust and talk to when they feel unsafe. Talk to these people about providing support to your children.
- Practice the steps of a safety plan several times with your children, including leaving the house quickly and quietly, and getting to a safe place.

Consider a plan for the safety and wellbeing of your pet(s). Make arrangements with friends or family to care for them if need be. Note that some transition houses accept pets or can make arrangements for them and some local SPCAs will take pets temporarily.

# Keeping Track of Events

Keeping a record of what happens is important. You can use this record to consider what the abuser has done and decide what steps you want to take. It will also be helpful if you decide to report the abuse to the police, apply for full custody of your children, file for a divorce, or take other legal action. Documenting the abuse does not mean you have to talk to the police. **It is very important that you keep any documentation or other materials (such as this guide) in a safe place where the abuser will not find it.**

- Keep a daily journal. List specific details of what happened, when, and where. Include your feelings and fears about what happened. This can help you to reflect on your situation and plan what to do next.
- Save or print any threatening or harassing texts, messages, or emails. Keep any threatening or harassing voice messages or texts received from the abuser. If you don't know how to do this, do a Google search or ask your internet or phone service provider for help.
- Keep a list of money or other items that the abuser may have taken from you.
- Document beyond just words: take pictures of injuries or broken property; keep articles of clothing or personal items that were damaged during assaults (including clothing with rips or blood on it).
- If you are ever injured, keep any hospital, doctor, or dentist records. You can ask health care professionals to keep a copy of these records for you.
- Call a trusted person (for example, counsellor, crisis line, family violence worker, or police) immediately after an incident and tell them what happened and how you feel.
- Tell the police about your situation. The police can be an important resource for you. They can help you to keep your evidence safe and start a report of the abuse. Talking to the police helps them understand your situation so if there ever is an emergency, they are better equipped to handle it. They will know that they need to keep an eye on you and the abuser in case things turn violent. When you talk to the police or have them start an abuse report for you, it is not your responsibility to file charges.

# Safely Using Technology



Technology makes it easy to search for help and to find supportive people and places. However, the abuser might also use technology as a form of control and to monitor you. The abuser might look through your device or computer to see who you have called or messaged, read through your personal messages, or install apps to monitor your activity. There are apps that track how you use your device and send reports to them. This type of app allows the abuser to watch the sites you visit, view the information you collect, and even record your passwords. Trying to uninstall the app is not helpful because the abuser will receive a notification that the app was uninstalled.

If you think your abuser is watching your online activity, use a different device to search for help or to plan to leave. Public libraries, domestic violence services, or a trusted friend or family member may have a device you can use. You might be able to use a computer or device at your workplace if you talk to your employer and explain your situation.

If you continue to use your home computer or personal device, remember to take extra steps to keep yourself safe online. The abuser may become suspicious if you start changing your online habits. You may want to continue your normal activities as before – such as using social media, checking your emails, looking up the weather, playing games – but find a safer device to use when researching your safety plan, looking for a new job or place to live, or asking for help.

## The Internet

An internet browser is the program you use to look for information on the internet. An internet browser keeps a record of every website you visit. It is important to completely erase your browser history so your abuser cannot keep track of the sites you visit. Only use a device or computer if you feel certain that you will not be tracked. Some abusers are very skilled at using technology and can easily access files you have deleted. Take extra caution by using a safe device or computer and clearing your history every time you use it. To learn how to do this, do an internet search for "clear history" and the name of the browser you are using. Most websites that offer help and information about abuse will have a "quick escape" button on their pages. Look for this. If someone comes along and you do not want them to see what you are looking at, press the quick escape button and it will take you to a common website like Google.

## Internet Browser Privacy

Many browsers now have a private browsing feature that will keep your online activities hidden on your computer. This feature helps you obscure your online activities from people who use your computer; however, private browsing will not protect you from keyloggers or spyware that your abuser may have installed on your computer. Remember that information such as bookmarks and downloads will be saved and data may still be logged by employers or schools and internet service providers.

Private browsing has different names depending on the browser you're using. Below is a list of some of the most popular browsers and what their private modes are called:

- Google Chrome: Incognito Mode
- Internet Explorer/Microsoft Edge: InPrivate Browsing
- Firefox: Private Browsing
- Safari: Private Browsing

## Email

The abuser may try to monitor your emails. Make sure that your account is secure. Sign out of your account after every use on all computers and devices. A helpful tip is to change your email password often (at least once a month) so that your account is more difficult to access. Do not choose obvious passwords like birthdays or names of people. Create passwords that include letters, numbers, and special characters, making them harder for someone to guess. Longer passwords are more secure.

If the abuser knows your password, always delete emails in your “Inbox” and “Sent” folders that contain personal information. Remember to go into your “Trash” folder and delete those emails from there as well.

Another option is to create a secret account using something like Gmail ([www.gmail.com](http://www.gmail.com)). Only use this email on safe computers or devices that the abuser cannot access. Keep this email secret so the abuser does not know that you have it. This private email address should not contain any information that can identify you – for example, use `blackcat@gmail.com` instead of `your.name@gmail.com`. You can use this email to safely contact organizations and people for help and support.

## Your Phone or Device

The abuser might monitor your phone or other devices. They may listen to your phone conversations, look through your apps or contact list, read your messages, check your call history, or look to see what websites you have visited. Think about the devices you use (including land lines) and who has access to the call histories and other information on the device. Only use a device that is safe from the prying eyes and ears of the abuser.

Cell phones and phone cards may be available free of charge to help you remain in contact with family and friends. The SaskTel Phones for a Fresh Start program is available for clients of domestic violence shelters and some family violence counselling centres. Ask your counsellor for further information about the program.

Delete messages you do not want your abuser to read or hear or save them in a secure place. If you have a voice mail service on a phone that you share, make sure to tell people not to leave voice messages that might cause your abuser to become suspicious. If possible, get a new cell phone and number that your abuser does not know about. Make sure only those you trust know about this phone. Consider keeping this cell phone with a friend or at work. Ensure that your bills for this phone are not sent to the residence where the abuser lives. Get a post office box or ask your employer or a trusted friend if you can use their address for billing. Prepaid phone cards or monthly pay cell phones are other good options.

## **Cloud Storage**

Nearly all cell phones, tablets, laptops, and other devices offer the option to save or back up data in a cloud. Even though you may delete messages or history from your device, they can still be found in the cloud. Be certain that the abuser does not have access to your cloud accounts. If you share any accounts with the abuser, including cloud accounts, you may want to consider setting up new accounts that are just yours or removing yourself from the shared accounts. If you are unsure about how to do this, contact your service provider for help.

## **Using Social Media**

Social media apps have privacy policies and controls that you can set. These will limit who can see your online activity, who can see your posts, and who can reach you through social media. When your privacy controls are low, it is easier for the abuser to access your personal information. They can monitor your posts, friends, and messages and know where you are. Keep in mind, even when your social media privacy settings are high, anything posted online will never be fully private.

When using social media, double check to make sure your privacy settings are set the way you want them. If you don't know how, ask a trusted friend or look in the help section of the website. Do not post personal information online and ask that your friends do the same, otherwise your abuser can find out where you are and easily follow you. For example, if you post "going out to the hockey game," the abuser might read this and decide to go there to check up on you. Ask your friends not to tag you in photos. Adjust your privacy settings so you must give permission to be tagged in photos or posts. Always make sure you log out of your profile each time you use it.

## Location Tracking

Location tracking apps are commonly installed in cell phones, tablets, and cars. Using these apps, the abuser can easily track where you are or where you've been. Some cell phone cameras come with location-tagging enabled in them. The location of where the picture was taken will show when the picture is posted online. Instant messages can have the location of where the message was sent from attached to them. Most apps use location tracking to send you information and notifications. Location tracking can be turned off or limited to only certain apps. To turn location tracking off, read your device instructions or Google "turn off location tracking" and the brand name and model of your device. Many browsers now have an "Incognito" or private browsing feature that will keep your online activities private; however, there are limitations to what this feature will keep hidden. Often bookmarks and downloads will be saved. Activity may still be logged by employers or schools and internet service providers.



# Part 3:

## Finding Help

### Where Do I Start?

Consider these steps if you are in an abusive situation:

- If you are in immediate danger, call 911 or leave.
- If you are hurt, go to a doctor, hospital, or clinic for medical care.
- Make a safety plan so you know what to do when abuse happens.
- Reach out for help using the resources listed or other supports.
- Contact 211 Saskatchewan to find services in your area.

# What is Available?

There are services and supports available in Saskatchewan for all gender identities and ages. It can be overwhelming to try to sort through which one is a fit for you. The most important thing is to make contact with someone and they will help you find the services that are right for you.

When you are talking to people who provide support services, you will be asked to tell your story. The more information you can give about what is happening and what you need, the better. Service providers want to understand your experience and find services that are right for you. Their job is to listen to you, respect the information you give them, and assist you to find the help you are looking for.

## Emergency Services

**If you are in danger or require emergency services, call 911.**



**Saskatchewan**<sup>®</sup>

Connect to Services You Need

Call 2-1-1, text 2-1-1, web chat or search independently through [sk.211.ca](http://sk.211.ca) to connect with services and supports in your local area. Trained professionals are here to help you find community, non-clinical health, and government services – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Over 175 languages, including 17 Indigenous languages, are available over the phone.

Need Help? It's just a click, call or text away.

Phone: Dial 211 from a landline or cell phone

Web Chat: Visit [sk.211.ca/contact\\_us](http://sk.211.ca/contact_us) to start your chat

Text: Text "Hello" to 211

Out-of-province phone call: Dial 1-306-751-0397

## 211 Saskatchewan will connect you with services such as:

- **Help Lines/Crisis Support** services can provide assistance over the phone or online. Some services are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Services are anonymous, confidential, and available to anyone, regardless of gender identity or age. You do not have to give your name and what you tell them is safe. If you are experiencing abuse, having suicidal thoughts or difficulty managing emotions, have been assaulted, or need support because of trauma or crisis, help is available. If you are not sure who to call, 211 can help you find the services you need.
- **Counselling and Support Centres** provide counselling services for victims of violence. These programs can assist people to access shelters or offer other support services. There are Children Exposed to Violence Programs available across Saskatchewan to address the needs of children who are exposed to violence. These programs assist children and youth who have been exposed to violence or abuse, with a goal of preventing them from becoming victims or perpetrators of violence and abuse in the future.

*Most phone books have pages at the front that list help lines or other resources that may be useful to you.*

- **Mental Health Supports**



HealthLine 811 is a free, confidential health and mental health & addictions information and support telephone advice service available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to all residents of Saskatchewan.

Services are offered in English, with translation available in over 100 languages.

HealthLine 811 is staffed by experienced and specially trained Registered Nurses, Registered Psychiatric Nurses and Registered Social Workers.

When you call 811, a licensed health care professional will assess and triage physical and mental health concerns, provide care options, support, health information and access to community services.

You can call HealthLine 811 for many reasons such as, breastfeeding concerns, fever, cough, vomiting, pain, anxiety, depression, injuries and more.

Visit HealthLine Online on the Saskatchewan Health Authority website at [www.saskhealthauthority.ca](http://www.saskhealthauthority.ca)

- **Emergency Shelters and Transition Houses** provide temporary housing, food, and support for women and their children who are fleeing violence. When you are at the shelter, the staff can assist you as you plan for your future by offering a safe place, a supportive ear, information about abuse, and referrals to counselling and other services for financial, legal, and housing supports. Emergency shelters and transition houses can be accessed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You can also call shelters and transition houses for assistance over the phone. You do not have to contact or go to the shelter that is closest to you. You can access services in another area if you feel safer or more comfortable. For victims of violence who have disabilities, please double check with the emergency shelter/transition house to ensure that the home is accessible for you. Men who are the victims of violence and abuse may be able to access outreach services through shelters.



# Part 4:

## Preparing to Leave

"No matter what, no one has the right to abuse anyone. I had to separate my own behaviour from my husband's behaviour before I could realize that the abuse was by husband's problem, not mine. I did this by removing myself from the battles. Arguments are useless. Talking to a person who is in a rage is a waste of time. I am taking the unnecessary risk of being hurt when I meet anger with anger."

- Priyal, 24 years old

You may face obstacles and challenges as you prepare to leave your relationship. For example, you could be faced with pressures that might lead you to believe that ending the relationship is wrong. Your family or community might try to convince you that you are disgracing the family name. It may seem that there is no one to ask for help and that you are without support. You may feel that you are being judged for wanting things to change. Maybe you believe that people will look down on you. You may be afraid for your safety or fear that no one will support you when you leave. You might think it is easier to stay than to leave. You may be worried about having enough money or being able to find a place to live. These fears are all valid.

Your safety plan is your guide to leaving the abuse. Your safety plan should include what you will take with you, where you can go, and who you can contact for help. While you should try to make your safety plan as solid as possible, leave some room for flexibility in case the situation changes. Sometimes things come up at the last minute. Having a backup plan and leaving room for change will make things easier.

## Building a Support System: Seeking Help

It is common for people to leave a relationship only to return because they didn't find support. Part of your planning includes building a support system to help you through the changes you want to make.

Choose people for your support system who you feel safe with and who will protect your privacy – those who will not betray your confidence or tell your abuser or others what you have told them. The people in your support system are an important resource for you. They will help you stay safe and strong as you make changes in your life. These people need to understand that sharing any information about you leaving the abuser can place you in serious danger. At the time of leaving an abusive situation, you are at an extremely high risk for a lethal assault. **Please be extra cautious.**

The people in your support system will help you in different ways. Friends and family members might be good listeners and emotional helpers. They might watch your children while you attend appointments. They may be able to provide you with a safe place to stay or other basic needs.

People from service organizations or other professionals can help you stay calm and focused so that you can follow through with your safety plan. They can intervene during a crisis. They can let you know about other programs and services that could assist you or they can help you through legal processes. The ways in which a support system can help will depend on your needs. Be clear about what you need from each person and what they can expect from you. Above all else, do not be ashamed or afraid to ask for help. People who care about you want you to be safe.

Stay connected with your support system through phone calls, emails, texts, or visits in person. Tell someone from your support system when you come and go from home or appointments. Communication like this can help keep you safe. Create a safety code word that you can use in emergency situations. Share this code word with your support system and make sure that your system knows what to do if you use this word. Should they phone the police? Meet you somewhere? Come to where you are?

*If someone in your support system is unable to reach you and is concerned that you are in danger, they should call the police.*

# Financial Planning

Leaving the abuser might mean there is a change in the amount of money you have or receive. Having money to purchase food, gas, pay the phone bill, or find a place to live are all things you need to consider. Do not let the fear of not having money keep you in an unsafe situation. More often than not the abuser has made you feel that you are dependant on them; that without their help, you would not survive financially in the world. As part of your planning, you can make a budget and research options for income or income assistance. Organizations and people in your support system can help you apply for jobs or government support programs, work with you to create a budget, and teach you how to manage money.

Here are some things to consider to gain financial freedom from your abuser and to build greater financial stability:

## **Know where you stand**

It is helpful to know where you stand financially. Knowing your sources of income, bank account balances, property owned (house, car, cabin, etc.), monthly expenses and any debts owed (mortgage, line of credit, credit cards, loans) will give you a better picture of how financially secure you are and help you to consider your options.

## **Who to contact?**

- Bank or Credit Union: if possible, choose a different bank or location from the one the abuser uses
- Ministry of Social Services – Financial Assistance Saskatchewan Client Services Centre 1-866-221-5200 (toll free) 1-866-995-0099 (TTY); [www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/family-and-social-support/financial-help](http://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/family-and-social-support/financial-help)
- Band Office
- Trusted friends or family members

# Legal Issues

You have the legal right to be protected from abuse and violence. Talk to a service provider or someone in your support system for advice on affordable or free legal supports and services. Legal aid, pro-bono legal clinics, and community organizations are great resources. There are options to protect you, your children, and your property (including pets). There are a number of criminal and civil actions that you can take depending on your situation. Two of the most common are:

- **Peace Bond:** If you have a real fear that you may be harassed or abused, you can get protection from the courts in the form of a Peace Bond. A Peace Bond is a promise made in court by the abuser to "keep the peace" for a certain length of time. The abuser must also obey any other conditions the court might add. As long as the conditions of the Peace Bond are met, the abuser will not be charged with a criminal offence.
- **Emergency Intervention Order (EIO):** An EIO is a court order and can include things like removal of the abuser from the home, supervision by a police officer as you or the abuser pack up personal belongings from the home, or a condition that the abuser cannot contact you, your children, or your family. EIOs can be requested in an emergency situation when evidence of violence exists. EIOs can be issued 24/7. Police officers, victim service coordinators, and mobile crisis workers can help you apply for an EIO.

## Who to contact?

- Legal Aid 1-800-667-3764; [www.legalaid.sk.ca](http://www.legalaid.sk.ca)
- Community Legal Services for Saskatoon Inner City Inc. (CLASSIC) – Saskatoon 306-657-6100; [www.classiclaw.ca](http://www.classiclaw.ca)
- Pro Bono Law Saskatchewan 1-855-833-PBLS (7257) (toll free); [www.pblsask.ca](http://www.pblsask.ca)
- Lawyer Referral Services, Law Society of Saskatchewan – Regina 306-569-8242; [www.lawsociety.sk.ca](http://www.lawsociety.sk.ca)
- Victim Services 1-888-286-6664 (toll free) or 1-866-445-8857 (TTY)
- Your local police service (RCMP, municipal, or First Nations)

# Ready, Set, GO

Leaving is one of the hardest decisions you will ever make. There is no right or wrong way to leave an abusive relationship. Keep safety as your top priority and when it's time, just leave. Don't doubt yourself or your decisions. It will be a long journey and it won't be easy, but it will be worth it.





# Part 5:

## Starting Fresh

"Today, two years later, I've relocated, gone back to school and I am working on raising my child as a single parent, free of the fear of violence. My problems are not all solved but have changed. I have my fears, lack of money, loneliness and a lack of time, but I feel directed now to use my talents to the fullest and to see my problems as opportunities for growth."

- Eliza, 33 years old

# What Might Change?

It is normal to feel many emotions after you've left. You might have "happy" feelings such as relief and empowerment and "sad" feelings like fear and loneliness. While you are happy that you left, you might also feel worried about where you will go from here. You might miss the good times you had with the abuser. Allow yourself to feel these emotions and recognize that they will not last forever.

## Change is Hard

Leaving an abusive situation will bring many changes. You may not be able to go to the same stores, cafes, and hangouts that you are used to going to because the abuser still goes to these places. You might have to switch the grocery store you shop at, the gym you exercise at, or the parks you go to. Changing personal routines is common when leaving a relationship.

Your circle of friends might change. Friends you have in common with the abuser may not be trustworthy and might tell the abuser where you are living, what you are doing, and how your life is going after you have left. Some can be a constant reminder of the abuse and might even push you to get back together with the abuser. Let go of these people to make room for others who will support you.

There are many emotions you will experience as you work through this change. You will likely grieve the end of your relationship. You may feel anger, sadness, or regret, and think about the "what ifs." You may feel like you have lost something after you leave your relationship. The change will feel difficult and overwhelming at times. You may start to think that perhaps the situation wasn't that bad or that you made a mistake. Talk to people in your support system who will remind you of the changes you want to make and encourage you to keep moving forward. Talk with service providers about support groups and other ways to keep moving forward. Connect with others who have left abusive relationships who can share their experiences and the difference it has made for them. One day at a time, things will become easier.

## "But I still have feelings for the abuser"

Just because you have left the abuser does not necessarily mean you will stop loving or caring for that person. Sometimes, the hardest part about leaving is dealing with the loving feelings you may still have for the person who was abusing you.

You might begin to remember the good times you had with the abuser and this might lead you to forget about the bad times. Acknowledge that you have good memories and enjoyed some good moments with the abuser but do not minimize the abuse and violence.

After leaving, you might feel that you want to go back. Maybe you are having a hard time supporting yourself, caring for the children alone, feeling lonely, or want to feel loved and have someone there with you.

It is unlikely that the abuser's behaviour will improve if you return. If anything, the abuser may become more violent and abusive in an effort to control you and prevent you from leaving again.

*Remember, the abuse is not your fault and the abuser's actions are not your responsibility.*

## Dealing with the Abuser

If possible, cut all ties with the abuser – no phone calls, messages via other people, letters, texts, emails, and so on. If you have to contact the abuser for whatever reason, such as discussing the children, keep the conversation to that topic.

Before meeting with the abuser, prepare yourself. Talk to a trusted person in your support system about the emotions you are feeling. If it makes things easier, practice what you are going to say; decide the topics of conversation you are willing to accept and where you will draw the line. Consider taking someone with you when you need to meet with the abuser, especially if the abuser has ever threatened to kill you or themselves. This can be a friend, a family member, or another person from your support system.

Meeting in a public place is another option. Having someone with you will make the meeting easier and help you to face the abuser, especially if you have recently left the relationship. It will also help to deter any harassing behaviours the abuser may try to use.

If you still feel unsafe speaking to the abuser, consider communicating through a third party such as a family member or lawyer.

***If you have any concerns about your safety, do not meet with the abuser alone under any circumstances.***

Leaving the relationship is an important step in moving on and starting fresh, but can also be scary at the same time. The abuser has now lost the power and control that they held over you. It is important to continue to record any incidents with the abuser because it will help you to further build a case if you decide to report the abuse. The abuser might start calling you or sending threatening emails, texts, and voice messages. They may try to enter your home without your permission, follow you around as you run errands, harass you at work, or threaten your children at school. Keep track of everything. Contact the police if you feel you are in danger. Remember, you don't have to put up with this behaviour any more. You have a right to feel safe.

# Staying Safe After Leaving

Leaving an abusive situation can be dangerous. It is important to be aware of the possible dangers you may face after leaving and take some simple steps to help make sure you are safe at home, in public, and at work.

## At Home

- Keep your doors locked at all times. If you are not at home, close and lock all your windows.
- Change the locks on your doors as soon as possible, especially if you live in a place that the abuser has access to. If possible, add locks to your windows and don't forget to change the lock on the patio door.
- If you have a yard, make sure to keep it well lit. Lock garages and sheds.
- Consider installing a motion detector or security system in your home to keep you and your property safe at all times.
- Consider telling your neighbours about your situation. Tell them that you've just left an abusive situation and ask them to keep an eye out for the abuser.
- Install a peephole in your door so you can see who is on the other side.
- If you rent, ask your landlord to help you secure your home. Do not put your name in the apartment/rental building directory.
- Get an unpublished and unlisted phone number for your home and cell phone. Have your phone service provider block your number when calling out so that your phone number does not show on the caller display.
- Don't give copies of your keys to anyone unless you fully trust this person and know that they will keep the keys safe.

## In Public

- Carry your fully charged phone with you at all times. If you need immediate help, call 911.
- Establish check-in times with your support system. Tell someone when you are leaving the house, where you will be going, and what time you will be back. Agree on what to do if they do not hear from you.
- Develop a signal or code word that you can use with your support system in case of emergency situations. Let people know what to do if they see or hear this signal.
- If you have a Peace Bond, Emergency Intervention Order, or custody order in place, carry a copy with you. If you need to contact police, you can quickly show them to confirm these orders so they can act. **If you do not have a copy of this document, ask for one at the local court house. You may be asked for ID and have to pay for photocopying.**
- Consider changing your doctor, dentist, and other professional service provider if you and the abuser see the same one, or if your abuser knows which ones you see.

## At Work

- Consider talking to your employer about your situation so they can support you.
- Provide your employer with a list of individuals to contact in case of an emergency.
- Give your employer a picture of the abuser in case you are confronted by them at your workplace.
- If you have a Peace Bond, Emergency Intervention Order, or custody order in place, provide a copy to your employer so they are able to protect you and other staff. If your employer needs to contact police, they will be able to share the orders with the police so they can act.
- If you have concerns about your safety, park near the building so you can enter and leave work quickly and safely. Ask your employer to work with you in developing a safety plan for the workplace.

- Victims of interpersonal violence are able to take five paid days and five unpaid days off work. The time away from work is to assist the victims of violence to take care of things such as finding a new place to live or attending court.

## Social Media

- Disable the location tagging on your social media profile page so that your location does not show up every time you post, comment, or share something.
- Be aware that social media can be a way for an abuser to track your activity and to maintain contact with you. Consider not actively using social media if you have any concerns.
- Increase the security settings in your own profile and your children's so that it becomes more difficult to access your page.
- If you or your children are friends with your abuser, "un-friend" and block them. You don't need the added stress of having them look at your profile.
- Clean out your friend list. There may be people on your friend list who are close to the abuser. The abuser can access your page and your information through these friends.
- Do not post anything on your page that can tell someone where you are, where you are going, or what you are doing. Posts like "had a great time at the concert" or "heading out to visit Paula" can be used to track where you are.
- Talk to your friends and your children's friends and ask them not to post any pictures of you or tag you in any pictures or posts. Adjust your privacy settings so you have to approve when you are tagged in pictures or posts.
- If you are sending messages through social media, private message people rather than posting publicly.
- Do not accept friend requests from anyone you don't know. It is very easy for the abuser to create a fake profile to keep tabs on you and your children.

# Children's Safety

If you have children, you need to make sure that they are safe too. Taking extra steps for your children will help create the safe and loving family life they need and deserve.

Here are some steps you can take to ensure the safety of your children:

- Inform all the people you feel necessary (teachers, supervisors, coaches, school bus drivers, youth group mentors, etc.) about the abusive situation you have left and the need to keep your children safe. Show these people a photo of the abuser and make it clear that the children need to be protected from the abuser and what the conditions of their contact are.
- Contact the daycare or school officials to clearly discuss and create a safety plan for the children. Include a list of people who can pick up the children, contacts to phone in case of emergency, and any code words that your children may use to describe a threatening or emergency situation.
- Maintain regular communication with the daycare or school and keep everyone who needs to know up-to-date with changes to your plan.
- If you have a Peace Bond, Emergency Intervention Order, or custody order in place, provide a copy to the daycare and school principal. This lets the school know what contact is acceptable.
- Join a counselling or support group. Also many community based organizations have groups specific to children who have been exposed to violence.
- Talk to your children and develop a safety plan that they can follow if they are in an emergency situation but you are not with them.
- Teach your children how to call the police and any other family members or important people in your support system in case of emergencies.
- Teach them to use the privacy settings on all social media.

# Taking Care of Yourself

As you start rebuilding your life, it is important to take care of yourself and your personal needs. The abusive situation may have taken a toll on your self-esteem and you might find you are feeling lonely, depressed, and not very confident. Remember that the abuse was never your fault and you did nothing to deserve it. Feeling good about yourself is an important part of rebuilding your life. Boosting your self-esteem starts by thinking positive thoughts about yourself and your life.

## **Building your self-esteem is an important part of moving on.**

This will take time and effort and does not happen overnight. At times, you might feel like you are on a rollercoaster ride of emotions.

**Make time to do things and activities that you love.** Make a list of things that you enjoy doing (for example, "I love to go for walks, cook, fix things, write poetry, play video games, ride horses, play hockey, watch a movie") and make some time each week to do at least one thing on your list. Spending your free time doing things you love will help ease the stress and emotional hardships you might be facing while you rebuild your life. Life can be stressful and busy – remember to make time to relax and have fun!

**Maintain contact with your support system.** When you're in the midst of change, having supportive people in your life is essential. Your support system might include friends, family, and community members, or professionals such as counsellors and support groups. You might find resources online or at your local bookstore or library that can offer support as well.

**Rebuilding your life after leaving an abusive partner can be a challenge.** At times you may find yourself feeling overwhelmed. Taking on too many things at once can lead to even more stress and you may find yourself giving up. Take things slow and plan out your days. A good idea is to start a log of daily, weekly, and monthly goals you want to accomplish, and the steps you are going to take to achieve these goals.

**Accept yourself.** No one is perfect. Be gentle with yourself.

## You Can Do It!

You can succeed. You deserve a life that is safe, healthy, and full of love. Over time you will find your hard work is worth it. This is a process of self-development and change. You will notice that you will develop new positive behaviours and attitudes. You will find that you are creating new celebrations and family traditions that you are sharing with those you love and who love you back – whether it be your friends, family, children, or yourself.

Take a new picture of yourself with your friends, your family, your children, or on your own. Frame this picture and place it in a special place in your home. Notice the new life in your eyes.



*Realize that change is possible. You deserve love and abundance.  
You can rebuild your life, and find peace, health, and goodness.*

Additional copies of the *Safety Planner* are  
available at [www.violencelink.ca/GO](http://www.violencelink.ca/GO).

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