

“Your life belongs to no-one but you.”



# Safeguarding Families

## Safety Planning booklet





# What is Family Violence or Domestic Abuse?

- Family and domestic violence or abuse is a pattern of behaviour used by one person (or more) in a family relationship, to gain power and control over another.
- In addition to physical violence, abuse includes name calling, humiliating in front of others, controlling what one wears, says and does, controlling financial decisions, destroying property, and using children to control one's partner. Abuse can be attacking your spirituality, threats towards or actual harm of pets, and threats of suicide as a form of manipulation. This is called 'coercive control'.
- Family violence happens between people of all racial, economic, educational and religious backgrounds, in heterosexual and same-sex relationships, whether living together or separately with a partner, married or unmarried, in a short-term or long-term relationship.
- It can also happen between family members, not just intimate partners.

## What is a Safety Plan?

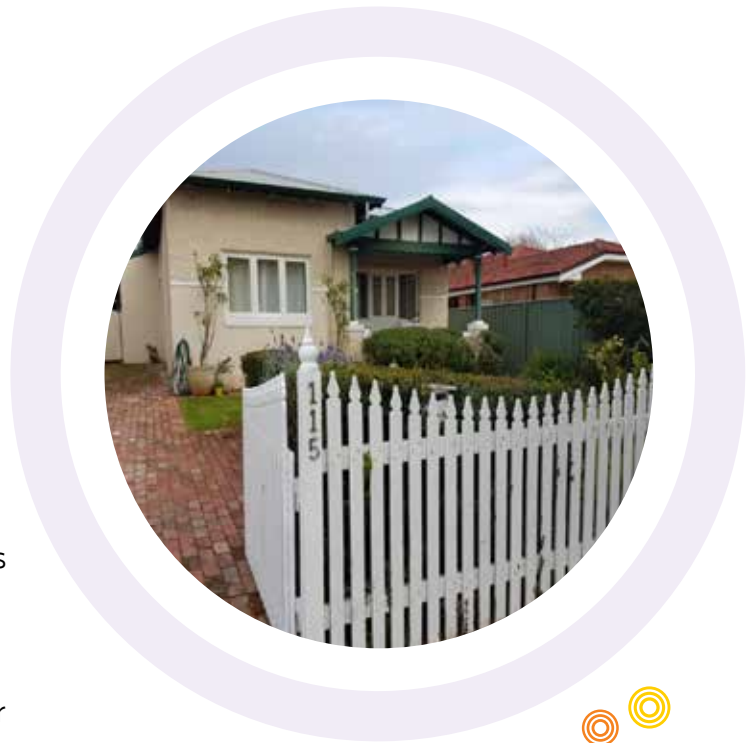
A safety plan is a guide to help with your safety and wellbeing when experiencing abusive episodes.

- You probably plan for your safety already – monitoring the abuser's mood swings, trying to calm them down, keeping everything tidy or doing what they say to stop an argument. You have likely been managing these situations for quite some time.
- We can talk about what you already do and add some other ideas about what else you might need to help you feel safer in your situation. There are some strategies that other agencies can put in place to help you as well.
- Your safety plan can focus on your needs (and the needs of your children) and be adapted if your situation changes. We include an escape plan and can refer you to a Safe At Home worker to help with practical strategies to add personal and home security.
- Safety plans also include safety strategies for different environments such as home, social, work and vehicle security. It is important to adjust your online settings to make sure your social media is safe as well.
- This booklet highlights some strategies for making your home and workplace safer. There is also space for you to make your own notes.

# Planning for my safety

## My home

- If threats are made against you or your family, contact 000 or 13 1444. Make sure you keep all text messages as this is evidence.
- The most dangerous rooms in your house are the bathroom, kitchen, garage, or any room where the person who has used abuse or violence has access to knives and other items that can be used as weapons.
- Speak to the Belmont Safeguarding Families (BSGF) Advocacy Service about a FVRO (Family Violence Restraining Order), which is a legal order putting boundaries in place to reduce or limit contact with you and your children.
- Keep a diary with the dates, times and details of breaches of the FVRO or suspicious behaviour such as phone hang ups – this helps to show a pattern of intimidating behaviour.
- Report all breaches of a FVRO to police or talk this through with the BSGF Advocate.
- Know your street address and the nearest cross-street. This will help guide police to your location.
- Have deadlocks installed. Do not deadlock yourself in at night; you need to be able to leave the building in case of an emergency such as fire.
- Install lockable security screens and external doors and keep them locked when at home.
- If door keys go missing, change the locks.



- Make sure windows and sliding doors have good locks. A dowel stick can be used to prevent sliding doors and sliding windows from being opened – make sure these are an exact fit so windows cannot be forced open.
- Be alert to any suspicious people hanging about. Don't ignore any 'funny feelings' – trust your intuition – it has kept you safe so far!
- Ask for identification before opening the door.
- Install a veranda light at a height that makes it hard to reach - consider installing a sensor light.
- Trim shrubs and bushes from entrance ways and ensure pathways are well lit.
- Keep electric fuse boxes locked. Check with your electricity supplier as they will need access to read the meter and can supply padlocks.

- Keep torches and spare batteries in an easy-to-reach place.
- Consider a back-to-base alarm system with a remote button. Know the range of this device.
- Let trusted people know if you go away, e.g. neighbours or family.
- Give a phone contact list of important people or services to people you trust in case of emergencies.
- Consider installing a loud outside alarm that can be activated from inside the house.
- Make sure everyone in the home talks about suspicious calls or occurrences. Add this to the information in your diary.

## CODE WORDS

Choose a code word that you can use without attracting attention e.g. on the phone. You can say to the person using abuse that you have to call your friend or family member to cancel catching up for a coffee that day otherwise they will come over. Then use the code word (e.g. **raincheck on our coffee today**). This will alert your friend or family member to contact police. Make sure you let at least five family members or friends know that when they hear the word it means that a crisis is occurring and you need police assistance immediately.

- You can upload the Positive Pathways app and enter your five trusted people's details into your immediate contacts. It will send out an alert to all five immediately.
- Keep in touch with neighbours. Ask them to let you know if anyone has been hanging around your house and to contact the police if they hear any abusive incidents or have any concerns about your safety.
- Keep trusted friends and neighbours informed about what's going on.

- Make a safe evacuation plan. Make sure all household members, including children and young people, know about the plan – and practice it occasionally.
- Is there a 'safe room' in your house that you can secure and that has mobile phone coverage? This could be the toilet or laundry – you could think about leaving a low-cost mobile phone in this room permanently. Install a lock to make it a more secure place for you and your children to wait for the arrival of the police.
- Keep your outside area clear of garden tools such as rakes, shovels, ladders or wheelie bins. Keep the shed door locked.
- Consider installing a manhole padlock.
- Prepare an 'escape bag' of your belongings and hide it in a safe place (or your safe room). If you leave, you will need money, keys, clothes, bank cards, driver's licence, immigration papers, health care or Medicare cards, property deeds, medication, birth certificates, passport and any other important documents for yourself and your children.
- Keep copies of important papers in a safe location, perhaps with people you trust or an FDV service provider.

Sometimes asking  
for help is the  
bravest move you  
can make. You don't  
have to go it alone.



## How will I teach my children to manage their safety?

- Teach your children how to telephone the police and how to give their full name and address. You can also put the Kids Helpline phone number into their phones and teach them to use it when they are on contact visits and feel unsafe.
- Tell your children's school or childcare centre about the situation and provide clear instructions on who has authority to pick up the children.
- Provide the school or childcare centre with copies of family law orders or Family Violence Restraining Orders.



### **Kids Helpline Information and Support:**

[kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au) (web chat and FAQs)

1800 55 1800 (24-hour telephone counselling and support)

[counsellor@kidshelpline.com.au](mailto:counsellor@kidshelpline.com.au) (email counselling and support)



## My plan if my children or I are put at risk at home:

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## Safety strategies when meeting new people

It can be hard after experiencing controlling behaviour and/or abusive incidents to begin to trust someone new coming into your life. Here are some tips on what to look for:

- People using abuse tactics will be very charming and seem to be 'perfect'. They will pay you lots of attention and quickly try to become important in your life.
- Pay attention to your body signals – trust your feelings, especially if you feel uncomfortable. Remember, your pace is important and you have a right to your boundaries.
- People have to earn our trust. Sometimes people who choose abuse will look for vulnerable women after a relationship breakdown because it is easier to control someone while they are feeling vulnerable.
- Be aware that feelings of loneliness can be very normal but also can be a vulnerability – abusers look for this.
- Watch out for early warning signs of controlling behaviour (such as checking your phone, monitoring your time, asking you to justify why you visit friends and family).



- How does the abuser talk about their ex-partner or opposite gender in general? If they blame the ex, this is a sign of blame shifting. They may also talk about their ex partner as being 'helpless' or 'needy'.
- Have your own personal checklist of warning signs based on your experience.

## Phone and mobile

- Get an unlisted phone number. Make sure everyone you give it to knows it's a silent number. Make sure they know not to give it out to anyone.
- Consider installing caller identification and use an answering machine to screen callers.
- In cases where family law court orders allow the other parent to have contact with your children and you would prefer not to give out your landline phone number, consider purchasing a pre-paid mobile phone that the other parent can call.
- Make sure you know where in your house you can and can't get reception for your mobile phone.
- Keep your mobile charged and with you in case the phone line is disconnected. Note that portable landline phones rely on electricity. If there is a power outage, you have no phone.
- Report all phone abuse. Phone abuse is against the law. Keep accurate records and original messages for police and courts. Do not delete text or voice messages from your phone.
- Consider changing your number if the phone abuse continues.
- Program emergency contact numbers into your phones, i.e. both mobile and landline.

*"Abusers thrive on creating confusion, including confusion about the abuse itself – remember, there is nothing wrong with you. Your partner's abuse problem is his own."*

Lundy Bancroft, 2008

## Workplace and social events

- It is important that there is someone in your workplace who knows what is happening to you. You can be selective about how much to tell them. In a large workplace, this could be your manager or HR Officer.
- Make sure everyone in the workplace is aware not to give out your contact details.
- Park in a well-lit space if possible and ask a work colleague or security person to escort you to your car.
- Form a buddy system with a co-worker for ride-sharing or catching public transport.
- Have a plan of action if you are followed home. Know where your nearest 24 hour police station is and drive there if you are in a car.
- Plan what you would do if you are followed while catching public transport.
- Change your routines. If you have always shopped on a certain day at a certain location, change the days and the shopping places from week to week. Keep a copy of your FVRO in your bag.
- Purchase a small, battery-operated alarm and be prepared to activate it. Keep it somewhere you can access it readily.
- If you have a back-to-base alarm, carry the mobile button with you. Often this is worn around your neck or as a wrist band. Although this alarm cannot be activated away from the home, it can be used when entering or leaving the premises.
- If there is an emergency in a public place, find someone such as a security person, and ask for help. Show them a copy of your FVRO.



## Your computer and data

- Computer use can be monitored. Although you can clear the history or cache that shows what web pages you have visited, it is impossible to completely delete where you have been surfing on the internet. The only way to be sure is to use a safer computer such as a computer at a friend's house, a library, or an internet cafe.

### Passwords and PIN numbers

- Some abusers use the other person's email and other accounts to impersonate and cause harm. If you believe the abuser can guess your passwords, change them quickly and frequently.
- Think about changing the passwords for any protected accounts, including online banking and voicemail.
- Use a safe computer to access your accounts.

### Personal mobile phones

- When making or receiving private calls, or arranging escape plans, try not to use a shared or family mobile phone as the phone bill and phone log might reveal your plans to an abuser. Consider using a prepaid phone so that you won't get phone calls and numbers listed on your bill.





### **Records and data**

- Ask government agencies about their privacy policies for how they protect or publish your records.
- Request that courts, government, post offices, other agencies and organisations restrict access to your files to protect your safety.

### **Private post boxes and real addresses**

- When asked by businesses, doctors, other agencies, and organisations for your address, have a private post office box address or a safer address to give them. Don't give out your real address. Doctors and hospital can have silent records.

### **Google yourself**

- See if your private contact information can be found online. Go to Google's search engine and search for your name in quotation marks ("Full Name").
- Checkout E-Safety for women online: <https://www.esafety.gov.au/women>

### **Your car**

- Keep the garage door locked at all times.
- Keep the car locked when at home.
- Always park in a secured garage if possible.
- Park in well-lit areas when shopping or at work.
- Keep a torch in your car.

## **My plan if my children or I are put at risk in a public place:**

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# Useful information

Information is a powerful way to understand more about your situation.

The more you know about the dynamics of abuse and what causes or contributes to your partner's choice to be abusive, the better able you are to understand your risk and what can help minimise your risk issues. If you are considering staying in your home after getting legal help:

- Your local Safe At Home Program can carry out a safety audit of your home.
- The Belmont Safeguarding Families Advocacy Service can refer you to specialist agencies for practical assistance.
- You might be eligible for the Victims Assistance Scheme to reimburse you for changing locks.
- You might be eligible for a crisis payment from Centrelink (you need to apply within seven days after the incident).

This booklet has explored ideas that give options for helping you manage safety. Making your own notes about how you have managed past situations can remind you of your current strength and what has worked for you in your unique situation. The following numbers offer more advice and ideas to add to what you already do:

Police **000 (EMERGENCY ONLY)** or **131 444**

Crisis Care (24 hours) **(08) 9223 1111** or **1800 199 008**

Women's Domestic Violence Helpline (24/7) **(08) 9223 1188** or **1800 007 339**

Men's Domestic Violence Helpline (24/7) **1800 000 599** or **1800 RESPECT (737 732)**

Ruah Safe At Home **(08) 6189 2571**

Belmont Safeguarding Families Advocacy Service **0466 438 360**

Starick Safe At Home **0422 809 814**

Ruah Living Free Women's Group **(08) 9451 0059**

Relationships Australia FAIR Program **(08) 6164 0270**

Legal Aid WA Domestic Violence Legal Unit **1300 650 579**





**RUAH**

COMMUNITY SERVICES

*Open Hearts. Bold Strides.*

 13 RUAH (13 7824)

 [ruah.org.au](http://ruah.org.au)