

SAFETY PLANNING AND AWARENESS

ARE YOU LIVING IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP?

HELPFUL GUIDELINES TO KEEP YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN SAFE:

A. HAVE A SAFETY PLAN

A safety plan will go a long way to ensuring that you and our children are able to get to a safe place when you are in danger. An effective plan will set out where you will go; what you need to take with you; who you need to contact; emergency phone numbers of trusted, supportive people; a list of any medication or other urgent things you must have with you or the particulars of those things in the event that you are unable to take them with you.

B. EDUCATE YOURSELF AND YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT THE CYCLE OF ABUSE:

The **cycle of abuse** is a [social cycle theory](#) developed in the 1970s by Lenore Walker to explain patterns of behavior in an abusive relationship.

Walker's theory rests on the idea that abusive relationships are characterized by a predictable repetitious pattern of abuse, whether emotional, psychological or physical, with psychological abuse nearly always preceding and accompanying physical abuse.

The cycle usually goes in the following order, and will repeat until the conflict is stopped, which frequently only happens when the survivor terminates the relationship although in many cases where there are children, the parenting relationship may be used to by the abuser to continue the cycle and abuse by using access to the children or communication with the co-parent to do that. The cycle can occur hundreds of times in an abusive relationship, the total cycle taking anywhere from a few hours, to a year or more to complete. The length of the cycle usually diminishes over time so that the "making-up" and "calm" stages may become infrequent or may disappear altogether.

1: Tension building phase

This phase occurs prior to an overtly abusive act, which act can be one that is physical; emotional, verbal or one of financial intimidation or any combination of the foregoing and is characterized by poor communication, [passive aggression](#), rising interpersonal tension, and fear of causing outbursts in one's [partner](#). During this stage the survivors may attempt to modify his or her behavior ; accommodate their partner's demands; rationalize their partner's irrational behavior or excuse their partner's conduct to avoid triggering their partner's outburst and also due to their fear of loss of the relationship; fear of financial consequences resulting from the breakdown of the relationship; and other feelings of loss, guilt, confusion.

2: Acting-out phase

Characterized by outbursts of violent and abusive incidents wherein the abuser attempts to dominate, intimidate and or manipulate his/her partner (survivor), with the use of domestic violence broadly defined as mental, verbal, physical abuse and or financial intimidation.

3: Reconciliation/Honeymoon phase

Characterized by affection, apology, or, alternatively, ignoring and or denying the incident. This phase marks an apparent end of violence and or abuse, with assurances that it will never happen again, or that the abuser will do his or her best to change or be a different person. During this stage the abuser shares overwhelming feelings of remorse, guilt and sadness. Some abusers walk away from the situation with little comment, but most will eventually shower the survivor with affection; love; apologies; desperate pleas for forgiveness. The abuser may provide excuses such as stress due to work or finances or such other underlying cause; admissions of anger management issues; genetic or family of origin issues. The abuser may use self-harm or threats of suicide to gain sympathy and/or prevent the survivor from leaving the relationship. Abusers are frequently so convincing, and survivors so eager for the relationship to improve, that survivors who are often worn down and confused by longstanding abuse, stay in the relationship. Other factors which influence the survivors remaining in the relationship include those that are financially related; self-esteem issues such as low self-worth; fear of managing the family life on their own; fear of being judged by family and friends; feelings that they will have failed their children if the relationship fails; fear of taking a partner away from the children.

It is easy to see the outbursts of the Acting-out Phase as abuse, however it is equally important to recognize that even the more pleasant behaviors of the Honeymoon Phase which perpetuate the abuse are equally dangerous because it is these behaviors which help to confuse survivors and convince them to stay (frequently with their children) in these abusive relationships.

4: Calm phase

During this phase (which is often considered an element of the honeymoon/reconciliation phase), the relationship is relatively calm and amicable. However, interpersonal difficulties will inevitably arise, leading again to the tension building phase and the cycle will begin anew. It is during the building phase that the chances of assault are much greater. You must put some distance between you and our partner during these high-risk times.

WHY HAVE A PLAN?

- If you are living in the cycle of abuse you need to be prepared to get yourself and the children to a place of safety. You must learn to recognize when the tension is building and leave before the cycle moves into the "incident" phase placing you and your children's physical and emotional safety at risk;
- If you stay in the home, it is possible that your partner may refuse to leave; may return to the home; may threaten or assault you or the children again. If your partner is prone to violent episodes, s/he may lose control and you or your children may be seriously injured (even inadvertently) or killed;
- Even if you have obtained a Protection Order or have a recognizance as a result of your partner being charged as a result of violence as against you or your children, this is no guarantee that s/he will stay away from you or the home.

Every abusive person has his/her own set of signs that they are escalating into the "incident" phase. Being aware of these "signs" can help you and your children identify risk and help you to manage that risk. **YOU MUST TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS.**

To help increase your awareness, take the time to work through the following questions and then **CREATE, RECORD AND SHARE YOUR SAFETY PLAN:**

- What does your partner say before an incident?
- What are your partner's typical behaviors before an incident?
- Does alcohol, drugs, gambling or any other addiction/addictive behavior play a role in the violence towards you?
- Is there a predictable period of time between incidents?
- When was the last incident and when do you think you can expect the next one?
- What is going on in his/her life now? In your relationship now? Are there factors/triggers which may assist you in predicting that an incident may happen? Such factors may include unemployment; pregnancy; health issues; financial issues; relationship issues;
- Are there guns or other weapons in the home? Where are they stored? Are they locked? Where are the keys kept?
- Are there places in the home that are safer than others - eg if an incident is likely avoid the kitchen; workshop; closets where weapons may be stored;
- Are you aware of where the shelters are? Do you have the contact information for these stored in your phone or in a purse/briefcase or glove compartment?
- Can you talk to your neighbors? Can you ask them to call the police if they hear noises coming from your home? In the event that the abuser has left the home or been removed from the home, will they call the police if they see him/her at the home?
- What is your transportation plan in the event that you need to get to a safe place? If you have a car, can you hide a spare key? Can you keep a Jerry can of gas in the garage? Who are your emergency people to call?
- Do you have a detailed plan mapped out? This is no different than having a fire escape plan. Is there a door or window you can use and can your children be taken out through these exits? What neighbor can you go to? Where is the nearest public phone? What numbers can you memorize? Do you have numbers saved on your phone? Your Ipod? Your navigation system?
- Is there somewhere that you can hide some spare money? Can you open a private bank account? Have you maintained private passwords for bank, credit card and email accounts?
- Have you taught your children how to contact the police?
- Do you have identification for yourself and your children organized and in a safe place?
- If you have young children have you taken them to Childfind to be photographed and to have a profile completed?
- Have you copied and stored in a safe place copies of important legal, financial and health related documents?

FINALLY, IF YOU FEEL UNSAFE; IF YOU ARE THREATENED; IF YOU ARE FOLLOWED; IF YOU ARE ASSAULTED, CALL THE POLICE IMMEDIATELY.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE; YOUR LEGAL RIGHTS WHEN LEAVING AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP; AND FOR INFORMATION ON RESOURCES IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO ASSIST AND SUPPORT YOU, DO NOT HESITATE TO CONTACT THE LAWYERS AT MACLEAN FAMILY LAW, LLP. HELPING TO KEEP YOU SAFE; EMPOWER, EDUCATION AND GUIDE YOU THROUGH THE RESTRUCTURING OF YOUR FAMILY FOLLOWING SEPARATION.

