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These safety and security tips are arranged by phases. Take a look at the items below, especially those related to the phase you're currently in.

When at home, planning to leave

Avoid unexplained changes. The general idea is to not make any sudden changes to your routine, practices, or other behaviors unless they can be readily explained. For example, a "cover story" should be created for why you're setting money aside if asked.

Remember Need to Know. Only tell people about your plans if they absolutely need to know and can be trusted. Limit the number of people that know your plan; even if you trust them, they may be tricked into giving up your location.

Know your plan. Think ahead and plan where you can go when you need to leave. Know where to find family justice centers- they have free advocates, legal resources and other assistance. They also know how to put you in touch with safe houses, food and clothing resources and more. Churches may also be able to provide food, gas cards, and other resources.

Be careful of your browsing history. Most browsers keep a record of websites you visit. Whenever you're researching new locations, shelters, or anything else related to you plan, use "private browsing" or "incognito" mode. Alternately, download the Tor Browser Bundle to

browse securely. Although the Tor Browser Bundle is a secure, private way to browse the internet, be aware that it runs from a folder that may be found. You can hide this folder or run it from a thumb drive for added security.

Delete text messages or emails that might reveal your plans.

Keep a "Go bag". It's a good idea to pack a "go bag" with enough clothes, medicine, money, and essentials to last for a few days, as well as important documents and records. However, this bag must not be kept anywhere that can be found by the abusive partner or someone that might tell them. Keep it at a safe location, such as work, a storage locker, a trusted (and preferably not mutual) friend's house, etc.

Prepare, but don't spend too much time preparing. The longer you take to prepare, the greater the chance of detection. Life and safety is more important than any possession; if you need to leave, leave as soon as you can. If you have time to take the bare essentials, do so.

Bring as much cash as possible, or know where you can borrow some. Do not use credit cards if the abuser has any way of seeing what's been charged and where. If you borrow money, make sure it's from a trusted friend or relative that has no connection to the abuser.

Tell your kids what they need to know. Children are likely aware of the violence, but may not be sure what they can or can't share. Tell them that if there's violence, it's their job to get to safety, not to intervene. Teach them how to find a safe place and call 911. Establish an "emergency word" to use with your children, which would indicate that they need to get to an established safe area.

Document the abuse. Take photos of injuries and save any written or recorded threats. Keep a journal documenting incidents. All of this information should be kept in a place inaccessible by the abuser, such as a secure email account.

Know what to do if you're in immediate danger. Move away from anywhere with dangerous objects, such as the kitchen or bathroom. If possible, secretly designate an area of the house as 'secure' by moving any dangerous objects out of it. This area should also offer clear escape routes.

Know your escape routes. Plan ahead for which routes offer quick and safe escape routes. Practice the routes with your children, and establish a code word so they know when to escape and call the police. Make sure they understand to keep this code word secret.

Avoid wearing necklaces or scarves.

Secure weapons. Keep guns locked up and unloaded; secure bladed weapons.

Program 911 into your phone, so you don't have to dial it. If you need to secretly get help, you can pretend you're ordering a pizza or some other food delivery. In most sizable cities, 911 operators can find you using your phone's location so know if you're in one of those areas. If you call 911 but don't say anything, they will find you if possible. Just be careful of the speaker volume.

While traveling to a safe location

Don't take the most direct route to your destination. When you leave, head off in the opposite direction from where you're actually headed, just in case someone sees you leave and may tell the abuser which direction you went. Afterwards, double back and take another route to your actual destination.

Know what to look for to make sure you're not being followed. Look several car lengths back and in adjacent lanes, not just immediately behind you. If you think you're being followed, simple checks can help to make sure. For example, make a u-turn and see if anyone else does the same thing. Drive slightly below the speed limit and see if anyone doesn't pass you. Make a series of turns and see if the same car follows you. If you feel you're being followed, pull into a police or fire station parking lot or call the police.

If your vehicle has OnStar or a similar service, call to either cancel tracking entirely or set a password to ensure no one else can find the vehicle's location using their "find my family" service.

Remove anything identifying from your vehicle, such as bumper stickers or things visible in the window or hanging from the mirror.

You need to assume that you are being watched and followed. Do not take the most direct route to your destination, especially if you are going to a location that you've been to before. If someone is behind you, walk into a well lit and populated area. Avoid moving towards your destination if you are being followed.

If driving, you need to keep the following in mind:

- You need to look several cars back, not just the ones immediately behind you.
- Your car may have a tracker installed, do not, under any circumstances park at or near your destination. If possible, walk as far as you can from your vehicle and have an intermediary pick you up and transport you the rest of the way. Multiple hops will make you safer, so do so if you can.
- Avoid locations with traffic, as it's actually easier for someone to observe you when you're moving slowly

If you feel like someone is directly behind you, here are some basic things that you can do to confirm:

- Wait excessively long at stop signs
- Stop at a green light, and only go through when it turns yellow
- At a stop sign, put your blinker on for the opposite of the direction you plan on turning; if the follower does the same, you can be fairly certain that you're being followed.

The first 24 hours

Consider a protection order, but remember that the order itself offers no physical protection. If it's violated, inform the police *immediately*. Ask if your state grants permanent or lifetime orders. Make sure to add your children's names to the order.

Change website passwords. Even if you're pretty sure that no one else knew them. Make sure to change your social media, bank and email passwords. Take this opportunity to enable two-factor authentication (2FA), sometimes referred to as multifactor authentication. This can help protect your account even if your password is compromised.

Get a new phone. One option is to purchase an inexpensive, reloadable cell phone from any major retailer. These phones, commonly referred to as "burner phones" will have no connection to the abuser and can help you keep in touch with your support system. Another option is to visit a retail location for your provider and have them move you over to a new plan. If they don't offer you a new phone with the plan, make sure they perform a factory reset of the device to ensure any apps that could track your location are removed. Make sure your new number is unlisted.

Consider deleting all social media accounts. Posts on social media may directly reveal your location, or it may give information that can be used to determine your location. If you choose to keep your social media accounts, be very careful posting anything about your location or destination. Be 100% certain that none of the abuser's coworkers, former coworkers, friends, relatives, contacts- anyone that could possibly pass information to them- can see your posts. Then, make sure that none of your contacts know those people as well. Do not add any new contacts!

Get a new email account. Make a new email account that doesn't include your name. Don't back it up with any email tied to you or your phone number. You can keep phone numbers, photos, and other digital copies in this email account.

Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline (800-799-7233) to find shelter information, or just if you need to talk. They're there for you 24/7.

Resist the urge to contact family and friends through social media or to turn your mobile devices back on until someone shows you how to do so safely. These can be used to track you. If you need to contact someone (extremely close friends or relatives), ask someone how to do so safely. It is normal to want to tell people that you are okay, just have someone help you to mitigate the risks.

While at a shelter

Depending on the nature of the shelter, you may be asked to **follow specific security rules** designed to protect you, other residents, and the shelter staff. Although those rules may sometimes seem a little bit restrictive, it's important to follow them for everyone's safety.

If the abusive partner had access to your cell phone or your account, you may be asked to **remove your phone's battery**, and maybe even wrap it in tinfoil to block any transmissions. Although this may sound a little bit extreme, this might be done because a cell phone may be used to track you or find out where you're going.

The shelter staff will help you navigate the **complex legal issues**, such as divorce and the laws related to leaving the state.

At a hotel

Choose a secure hotel. Look carefully at the hotel before registering. Can someone get inside without a keycard, except through the main entrance? Are the grounds well-lit and maintained? Are there cameras in the hallways and lobbies? Does the staff appear attentive? Does the door have a deadbolt and peephole?

If possible, pay in cash. If that's not possible, pay using a credit card that has no connection to the abuser.

When making reservations, instruct the hotel staff not to disclose your name or confirm your presence to anyone, no matter who they say they are (including spouse or relatives); also tell them to inform you if anyone is asking about you. They will note this in your file, which will pop up whenever they look up your information. Also instruct them not to give a copy of your key or keycard to anyone but you.

Call the front desk to confirm any unrequested deliveries to your room. Don't open the door until you've confirmed this.

Use additional security measures. Portable locks and telescoping door jambs are inexpensive and effective ways to make a room more secure.

Request a room on the fourth through sixth floor. You're less likely to have a break-in if you're not on the ground floor, and the sixth floor is the limit for most fire department ladders.

Do not use the Wifi unless it is open, and you are connecting to the internet through a secure VPN or using Tails. You are taking a risk connecting to the internet, but in today's world it is difficult to do without. Tails is freely available and may or may not have been distributed to you.

Pay cash, do not give your credit/debit card. While it is not ever advised to break the law, it would be preferable to use an alias.

Ask hotel staff to not disclose your name or to tell absolutely anyone of your presence there, this includes specifying your relatives and/or spouse.

While at work

Remember that this is where you will be the most exposed in your daily life, particularly if you are still at the same job that you had before you left.

Come up with a **safety plan** at work. Your employer may screen your calls, assign a new phone number, move your desk, and provide an escort to your car.

If available, **ask for a transfer,** and make sure all of your coworkers know not to disclose where you moved to. This is usually pretty simple, and most employers are understanding regarding this matter.

Provide a photo of your abuser to building security. This would allow quick identification and make sure they know not to allow them into the building.

Inform your employer and coworkers of your situation. If you are at a point where you have to interact with the public, ask for a temporary reassignment to somewhere that you don't have to be visible to the public.

At your new place

Set phone passwords for utilities and services. Call services like any utilities and your phone company to ensure that no information is given out without a phone password that only you know.

Establish a "safe word" for your children. Decide on a word that can be given to your children in the event that you need someone to pick them up from school or daycare. This word should only be given to trusted individuals when needed and changed after use. Do not give the safe word to anyone until it is needed.

Tell your employer and children's daycare what they need to know. Develop a safety plan with both, but limit what you tell them to what they need to know. Make sure that your employer and daycare provider know about any protection orders and what to do if the abuser shows up.

Upgrade the security as much as possible. Consider deadbolts, door prop guards, external lighting, alarms, etc. Anything that can be done helps. If renting, make sure your landlord changes the locks before you move in.

Do a quick safety check when you get home. Look for anything unusual or signs of entry. Check for broken windows, open doors, fresh footprints, etc. If anything looks unusual, call the police to have them perform a courtesy check.

Protect your new address. 32 States have an Address Confidentiality Program (ACP), which gives victims of domestic violence a confidential mail forwarding service and a legal address for all forms and state agencies. Ask your local courthouse if such a program exists in your state. If this isn't an option, consider a PO box for all mail.

If you feel a need to do so, change up your routes to work, school, daycare, and other frequent destinations

Tell schools and daycare who can and can't pick up your children. If there's a protective order in place, make sure they know about it

Consider which neighbors you can give some details to. They can let you know if they see the abuser or their car in the area.

Computer and mobile security

Refer to the [security guide](#) section for more information on this topic.

Your mobile device may be a significant vulnerability. There are several steps that you can take to help decrease the probability that you are being tracked, but you need to understand that there is absolutely no way to mitigate the risk entirely. Your risk is many times greater if you are using the same device that you left with.

Whenever possible, get a new phone before leaving. Most large retailers will sell prepaid "burner" phones that won't have a connection to your old number. If that's not an option, you can have your phone moved to a new plan and perform a factory wipe to remove any unauthorized apps. Talk with the shelter or safe house about their phone policy.

There are a few steps that you can follow to help keep you safe. The following will work for both iOS and Android devices:

- Disable wifi, bluetooth, and location services anytime that you are not using them. These are some of the most common attack vectors.
- Do not remove your device from the faraday cage unless in a public place. You could compromise the location of the shelter which could not only endanger you, but your peers.
- Use the VPN that the shelter provided to you, and if this service is unavailable to you, it is okay to use a commercial service, but this will require research on your part. We recommend Private Internet Access (PIA).

Android

- Ensure that the storage on your device is encrypted, for devices running android 6.0 or greater this is done by default, for older devices you can do this by going to the security settings and enabling it. It will take a long time to do, but it is necessary.
- Download Signal and set it as your default messaging client. It can send both encrypted messages to other Signal users (Please try to convince everyone to use this, as it only increases your safety, especially those who you talk to frequently) and regular SMS messages.
- Download Brave and set it as your default browser