



Safety Planning for People with Disabilities Preparing to Leave an Abusive Situation

A safety plan is a unique strategy to reduce the risks of abuse or violence which may include escaping a dangerous situation. Each person's plan is individualized for her/his situation and may be altered at any time. The following are ideas to consider for women or men with disabilities, but are not in any particular order of importance.

- If you are thinking about leaving, do not let your abuser know of your plans to escape. Be careful not to leave clues regarding your destination (i.e., long distance or cellular phone bills or literature about domestic violence services).
- Change your payee (if you have one) on your SSI/SSDI benefits to someone you trust other than the batterer. You (or a caseworker from a domestic violence, disability service agency or Adult Protective Services) will need to contact the Social Security Administration to change the payee name. Be aware that the abuser may notice when the SSI/SSDI benefits are redirected and this may be dangerous.
- Get a post office box in your own name and hide the key or give it to a trusted friend or relative.
- Open a savings account in your name only and have bank statements sent to a P.O. Box or other address that is not known to the abuser, if possible. Have your benefit checks direct deposited into that account. If possible, try to set aside as much money as you can. If you have joint accounts with your spouse or partner, try to take all of your money out and put it in your own account (if this feels safe to do). It may seem sneaky or it may even be risky for you, but it may mean your survival.
- Think about applying for a credit card in your name only and having statements sent to an address that is not known to the abuser, if possible. If you use a credit card after leaving, make sure that the bill will not be sent to the residence where the abuser lives or has access.
- Plan for assistance with personal care tasks. Prepare to receive this assistance from someone else besides the batterer. Ask several friends, family members or faith community members for help if possible so that one person is not over-taxed.
- If you receive Medicaid/Medicare and are low income and living in Texas, you may be entitled to services from the Texas Health and Human Services/Community Care Programs. Some home health care agencies have rates based on income. Contact a caseworker or an intake worker and let them know about your service needs. If at first she/he does not respond or assist, call again and ask for a status report or for an explanation about why services have not been initiated. If they still do not respond, ask to speak to their supervisor.
- Gather money, extra set of keys, medications, spare adaptive aids or medical supplies, a packed bag with a few changes of clothes for you and your child(ren) and leave those items at the home of a trusted friend or relative.
- Assess your own resources. Figure out if you have people (i.e., friends, family, church or synagogue members, etc.) who would be able to let you stay with them or lend you some money to make the transition.
- Rehearse your escape plan and practice it with your children.
- Make arrangements for your service animals or pets.

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- Make sure if you drive an adapted vehicle that the adaptations are in good repair and the vehicle itself is in reasonable, working order. Have your vehicle checked often in case the abuser has tampered with it in any way. Never leave your vehicle with less than half a tank of gas. This is so that if you need to leave in a hurry, you have a reasonable amount of gas available.
- If you live in a major metropolitan area, consider applying for special or para transit services. A doctor or caseworker can certify your disability if you have seen them for services before. This may be done by mail. Know the policies and regulations of the para transit system. Para transit services may not be a viable option for leaving an abusive relationship if you have children or a large family & pets. Many cities do not provide emergency para transit rides & some systems mandate that only one or two persons may travel with the person with the disability.
- Be aware of ways in which the abuser may be able to use technology to monitor you and learn of your plans to leave. If the abuser is technologically savvy, you may want to talk to someone specifically trained in safety planning related to technology (e.g., domestic violence program, police/sheriff).
- Call the domestic violence shelter in your area (or the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1.800.799.SAFE; 1.800.787.3224 TTY) to discuss safety planning. Let them know what your needs are and that you have a disability. Inquire about accessibility. Be aware that shelters are often full. More than likely, the shelter is not turning you away because of your disability. Ask to be put on the waiting list and check back with them daily to inquire about their status. Remember, safety planning is very, very important at this stage of the process. Stay in touch with your local hotline. Ask them for help to strategize with safety planning. A person is much more likely to be in extreme danger or killed upon leaving a relationship than at any other time. Consider attending a domestic violence support group if one available in your community.
- Keep the domestic violence or other crisis hotline telephone number with you. Better yet, memorize it! Keep some extra change with you for phone calls or purchase a pay-as-you-talk or prepaid cell phone for emergencies. Most shelter hotlines will take collect calls.
- Obtain information from the Police, Sheriff's Department, or County Attorney's Office about your legal options as well as the process to apply for a protective order.
- Call and talk with other disability related service providers and disability rights organizations listed in the phone book (i.e., support groups, coalitions, independent living centers, etc.) and ask for assistance with locating accessible housing or other support services.
- Call Adult Protective Services (APS) and report the abuse. Let them know if your health and safety are at stake. The telephone number in Texas is 1.800.252.5400 (voice and TTY). They will take self reports. Ask APS what the process will be for investigation and services. Not all APS reports end in a nursing home placement. If you are not willing to tolerate a nursing home placement, then let the social worker know that. There are emergency options other than an institutional setting and APS may be able to set up other temporary emergency services.
- When you leave, consider writing a note to the abuser that says you went to a doctor's appointment or another place that will not make the abuser suspicious. This will give you a head start.

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Disability Services ASAP
(A Safety Awareness Program)

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- If after you leave, you need to telephone anyone who knows the abuser, be careful that your location cannot be traced through caller ID or call return.
- Leaving an abusive relationship is a process for people with disabilities just like it is for people without disabilities. For individuals with disabilities, this process can be longer because of all the logistics. Leaving an abusive relationship is one of the bravest, most frightening experiences a person can go through. Being abused is not your fault and neither is having a disability.
- Only you know your batterer best. Use the steps that make sense for your personal situation. If something does not feel safe and might put you or your children in further danger - don't do it!
- Remember there is hope. There are options. There is a way out.

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