



Lorain County Safe Harbor

a collaborative community effort to provide a responsive system of care for victims while also raising awareness about domestic violence

Help a Survivor Safety Plan

(with a Survivor actively involved in the relationship)

Ensuring the safety of survivors is our top priority. This safety plan provides essential guidance on utilizing hotlines effectively for crisis support, emergency assistance, and long-term safety planning. Whether seeking immediate help or resources for ongoing protection, this guide outlines key steps to stay secure while reaching out for support.

DETAILED PLAN INSIDE

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Tell me about your situation:

Do you live together/apart? _____

***If they live together, safety plan around that. Dangers within the home, staying away from rooms with no escape, rooms with hard countertops or things that could be used as weapons, doing what they can to “keep the peace” until they can plan safely to leave.*

Plan for safety whether they are living together or separately:

***Do you have a support network that you can talk with about this? Who? _____*

***Is there a neighbor you feel comfortable telling about the violence? Could you ask them to call the police if they hear a disturbance coming from your home? _____*

***Can you think of some ways to increase your circle of support? _____*

**Some suggestions may include: faith group, library events, take classes, Facebook support groups, LCSH Support Group (Thursdays from 6:30-8:00 2929 W. River Rd. N., Elyria, OH 44035)*

***Come up with a code word to alert your children, family, friends, and neighbors to the need for police intervention.*

***Keep your phone charged at all times.*

***Document all incidents of abuse. Take pictures of any injuries or destroyed property caused by the abuse.*

***Practice getting out of your home safely. Identify the best doors, windows, elevators, or stairwells to use.*

***Keep our hotline phone number close and reach out when you need to. 440-244-1853, option 1*

***Apply for LMHA – myportal.lmha.org*

Do you work? _____

***How do you think you can use work to your advantage given your situation? _____*

***Who could you tell at work about your situation? _____*

***Work could be an escape route – you can inform someone at work about your situation, plan to “leave for work” and not return, slowly take important things to work to stash away, work extra hours to be away from your abuser, etc.*

***If they don't work) Are you able to work? _____ What skills do you have? _____*

Is going back to school a possibility? _____ Would a job coach be helpful? _____

***Goodwill – Financial Freedom Bootcamp/Life Coach 440-244-3174, ext. 550*

Employment Specialist - 440-244-3174, ext. 510

Job readiness / re-entry – 440-244-3174 (Rick Hernandez)

Job Club - 440-244-3174, ext. 540

***Temp Agencies – Google temp agencies in their area*

***Ohio Means Jobs – ohiojobs.ohio.gov*

***Lorain County Community College 1-800-995-LCCC (5222) has free GED classes, and Adult Diploma Program, and English as a Second Language Classes 440-366-4530.*

***Food pantries, organizations that offer clothes/diapers/etc*

***I need a driver's license: _____*

**First Lutheran Church – Tuesdays from 9:30-11:30 – provides assistance 1019 West 5th Street | Lorain, OH 44052 | (440) 244-6286 (also gas vouchers, bus tickets, birth certificates, etc)*

Does he/she work? _____

*****Abuser being unemployed is a high lethality factor due to the possible stress of being unemployed plus the time to overthink, plan, and show up in places they wouldn't normally be*****

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***If the abuser works, during their work hours would be a good time to plan to escape. If you are not planning to leave right away, you can collect items needed to leave and hide them away (a bag hidden in closet near the door, trunk of a car, neighbors or friend's house, etc.)*

***You can also use this time to call hotlines or friends/family to talk about your situation.*

Are there children involved? _____

****Having a child that is not the biological child of the abuser is a high-risk factor****

**What can you teach your child(ren) so that they can stay safe? _____

***Depending on the age of the child (and the child themselves), they can be taught what to do during an incident – whether that's run to another room and hide or run to a neighbor's to call the police, code word, etc. Teach them to stay out of the altercation to keep themselves safe.*

***If they are planning to eventually leave, they can start collecting important documents related to the kids – birth certificates, social security cards, etc. If they need to order those items, they can have them sent to a P.O. box or a family/friend's house.*

**I need to collect these items: _____*

**Birth certificates – from the health department. There's an online application. First Lutheran Church (440) 244-6286 and Catholic Charities (440-242-0056) provides assistance with paying for it if needed.*

**Social security cards are free. Go online: <https://www.ssa.gov/number-card/replace-card>*

***If they have a baby or toddler, ask: What can you do if an altercation starts, and the baby is nearby? _____*

What is the abusive behavior typically like? _____

Do you feel the abuse has gotten worse or more frequent over the past few months/year? _____

**You may need to explain that this could mean (examples):*

-that they went from verbal abuse to physical abuse

-the abuse used to be once a week and now it's several days a week

-he/she used to just slap you and now they are leaving bruises

-he/she used to start a fight when you refused sex but now, they force you to have sex even after you said no

*****Abuse that is escalating is more likely to reach lethality*****

*****65-80% of women killed by an intimate partner experienced prior physical abuse*****

*****Men who sexually assault their partners are more likely to use other forms of violence against them*****

*****Research has shown that intimate partner sexual violence is the strongest indicator of escalating frequency and severity of violence*****

Plan for safety:

- *What are some signs and clues that he or she is getting upset? _____*
- *Stay away from the bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, garage or any other room likely to contain a weapon or dangerous or sharp objects.*

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- What are some rooms in your house that don't have access to an outside door or window? _____

- Try to stay out of those rooms during an argument.
- Use instincts and judgment. If the situation is very dangerous, consider giving the abuser whatever they want to help calm them down.
- Come up with a believable reason you can leave the house, both day and night (library/urgent care/friend needs help/etc) What's an excuse you think you could use? _____
- Identify windows or doors you can use to escape quickly and safely. _____

Has he/she used any kind of weapon to threaten you or hurt you? _____

If yes, what kind of weapon was it? _____

Does he/she have easy access to this weapon? _____

****An abuser's access to a firearm increases the risk of femicide by 500%****

****Women who were threatened or assaulted with a gun or other weapon were 20 times more likely than other women to be murdered****

Plan for safety:

- Try to familiarize yourself as much as possible with your partner's firearms. This includes showing an interest in them, taking a gun safety course, practicing shooting at a gun range and learning what caliber the ammunition is and how many bullets they hold at a time could be lifesaving information later on.
- Do you have trigger locks? _____ Trigger locks keep guns from being fired immediately and can buy you precious seconds. You can often get these for free through the police department or search free trigger locks online.
- If there are kids in the house, insist that for their safety and so Child Protective Services won't be involved, the gun(s) and ammunition should be stored separately.
- If your partner is a convicted felon, consider anonymously let your partner's parole/probation officer know they have a gun (one way to do this if they keep a gun on them at all times is to call 911 and report their car/license plate for suspected drunk driving when they are alone driving somewhere). Do not use your own phone or cell phone to make this call, as your abusive partner might gain access to your phone records or call history. **KEEP YOUR OWN SAFETY IN YOUR MIND. IF THIS WILL MAKE THINGS WORSE FOR YOU, DON'T DO IT!**

Have you left before or tried to leave before? _____

If so, how did they react? _____

What made you return? _____

****More victims are killed in the process of leaving than any other time due to the abuser possibly losing power and control over the victim****

****The first 3 months after leaving are the most dangerous but the risk is still high within the first year****

****3/4ths of homicide victims and 85% of women who experienced severe but nonfatal violence had left or tried to leave in the past year****

Plan for safety when leaving:

- Decide when it is the best time to leave. Every situation is different. Some options might include:
 - When they are at work or away for an extended period
 - When you need to leave the house for another reason (doctor/work/taking children to school) and then go to your predetermined safe place to let someone know you need help.
 - Find a reason to go to the emergency room and tell them what's going on
- What are some important numbers that you need to memorize in case your phone gets taken or destroyed? _____ You may want to write them down somewhere safe or email them to yourself so you can access them anywhere.
- Every chance possible, hide money away. What are some ways you can hide money away? _____

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- You know your partner best. What kind of abusive tactics does he/she use when in an altercation? _____

 - Make sure you think about that as you get ready to leave. Prepare for this by thinking out different scenarios that could happen and what you will do.
 - For example, if an abuser always shuts the bedroom door to close you in before he or she becomes violent, can you unlock a window ahead of time so you have a way out if you get locked in?
 - If an abuser threatens to keep or harm your children or pets if you leave, can you make sure they're in a safe place before you leave, such as taking them to a trusted relative's house?

Has he/she ever strangled you or attempted to strangle you? _____

If yes, did you lose consciousness? _____

***Many people use the term "choking" or "choked" when they really mean "strangled." You may want/need to explain that choking is different than strangling in that "choking" means something is stuck in your airway (example: food), which blocks your breathing. Strangling is when something presses or squeezes on your neck. The squeezing may stop the blood supply going to your brain, or it may stop the air going to your lungs*

****Strangulation is a felony in the state of Ohio****

****Attempted strangulation should be considered an attempt to kill****

****Victims of prior strangulation are 750% more likely to be killed by their abuser****

****Nonfatal strangulation is one of the most lethal forms of intimate partner violence and is a strong indicator of future lethality****

****Strangulation is often treated as something minor due to the lack of visible trauma but it can cause life threatening internal injuries with an increased risk of death within the first 24-48 hours****

Plan for safety:

Before strangulation:

- Educate yourself on the seriousness of strangulation.
- Has he/she threatened to strangle, choke or suffocate you in the past? _____ Take that threat seriously, even if he/she talks about using strangulation/choking during sex or as "play,"
- If you think he/she might try to strangle, try to remove scarves, jewelry, loose strings or cords that could be easily used to strangle you.
- If possible, avoid rooms like the bedroom and bathroom where the risk for suffocation by pillow or drowning may increase.
- If comfortable, learn self-defense strategies to try to stop your abuser/ perpetrator from strangling, like pressing your chin to your chest to block hands/arms from tightening and kneeling the abuser/perpetrator in the groin.
- If you can sense abuse coming, try to leave the home, tell someone you trust, ask someone to check on you, or leave the room.
- Remain calm and trust your judgment

During strangulation:

- Comply with abuser/perpetrator if necessary to stay alive.
- Keep pressure off at least one side of your neck in order to keep from losing consciousness.
- If the abuser/perpetrator relaxes their hold, try to escape if you can.
- Trust your instincts, whether fighting back or not is most effective.

After strangulation:

- Get away immediately, call for help, and go to a safe place.
- Seek immediate medical attention.....IT MAY SAVE YOUR LIFE!
- If you go to the hospital, tell the doctor/nurse you were strangled and request a CT scan.
- Do not be left alone for at least 48 to 72 hours after a strangulation assault.
- Take photos of your injuries immediately and/or few days afterwards.

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- Do not be embarrassed if there was involuntary urination or defecation, as this is a symptom of strangulation.
- Do not wash your clothes (which could be evidence).
- It is important to FULLY explain to your medical provider everything that happened to you, and to follow up after your initial appointment.

Does he/she stalk you? _____

*Stalking may happen in many forms and can often look “innocent.”

*You may need to ask:

*Does he/she show up at your job/school/childrens’ school/around the neighborhood?

*Does he/she track your location, whether by phone/GPS/have someone report your location to them?

*Does he/she persistently call/text you when you’re away from them?

*Does he/she violate protection orders?

****In one study, 76% of femicide victims murdered by an intimate partner were stalked prior to being killed****

****Stalking, especially if there is a history of physical abuse, is strongly connected to murder or attempted murder****

Plan for safety:

While in the relationship:

- *It is important to save text messages, emails, voicemails, or letters for documentation. Create a secret email account, unknown to your abuser. You can send evidence to yourself via email, or save in the cloud or google drive.*
- *Blocking or attempting to block the stalker’s access to you could cause them to retaliate further. Do what you need to do to stay safe.*
- *If a recording or tracking device is found, consider your safety before removing it. If you’re still in the relationship with the abuser, removing it or letting it be known that it was discovered may put you in further danger. You may choose to leave it for the time being to collect your own evidence and remove it at a time that is safer for you.*

After they have left:

- *Change your routine by using a different bank or grocery store, and taking a different route to work or school.*
- *Do not travel alone; use the buddy system as much as possible.*
- *Stay in public areas as much as possible.*
- *Notify people in your life such as your friends, family, coworkers, or supervisors, about your stalking concerns*
- *Develop a code word to use when a stalker is present or when you may be in danger. When you text a friend or family member the code word, they know you need help.*
- *Install a home security system such as deadbolts, window locks or gates, visible security cameras, and motion-activated outdoor lights.*
- *Be aware that your location can be tracked in several ways. These include:*
 - *Your cell phone location*
 - *Your child’s cell phone location*
 - *Social media locations and check-ins*
 - *Apps that you and/or your child use on your phone*
 - *Tracking devices on your vehicle*
- *Turn off your location permissions on your apps and your location on your phone.*
- *Consider purchasing a burner phone to use for the time being or open a new cell phone account, separate from your abuser.*
- *Sign out of your email on all devices and change your password so that your abuser can not access your email and all your accounts connected to that email.*

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- Consider opening a new email account and either close or stop using your previous email account.
- Sign out of all your social media accounts on all devices and change your passwords.
- Block your abuser. You may also want to block their friends and family.
- Change privacy settings on social media accounts.
- A toolkit is available at techsafety.org that can help you further with technology safety.
- Document everything!

Do you believe he/she is capable of killing you? _____

Have they made that threat? _____

Have they threatened suicide? _____

****Women whose partners threatened them with murder were 15 times more likely than others to be killed****

****A victim's perception of their own risk is possibly the most important factor. A victim is more likely to minimize their risk than exaggerate****

Plan for safety: Encourage them to trust their instinct and plan accordingly. Reiterate safety tips mentioned in the conversation.

Some other factors to consider that increase the risk of lethality:

- Extreme jealousy or controlling behavior _____
- Isolation from family/friends _____
- Use of alcohol/drugs _____
- Hurting pets _____
- Assault during pregnancy _____
- Abuser's mental health _____

Sources:

https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/sites/default/files/publications/css_straginfo14.pdf

<https://www.thehotline.org/plan-for-safety/>

<https://www.dangerassessment.org/>

<https://vawnet.org/material/what-connection-between-firearms-and-domestic-violence-homicides>

Explanation of High Risk Factors in Family and Domestic Violence: https://www.kemh.health.wa.gov.au/for-health-professionals/family-and-domestic-violence/~/_media/ce6fc07468334ef48f5ff92e1308e47f.ashx