

## **SAFETY CONCERNS AND PROTECTION PLANS**

**Listed below are signs that may predict future dangerous behavior:**

- Obsession over you; the abuser says he/she cannot live without you
- Threats or attempts to kill you, your children, your relatives, or your pets
- Threats or attempts to kidnap you or your children
- Violence or severe incidents of abuse towards you, your children, your relatives or your pets. Strangulation is a particular risk factor.
- Depression and talk of suicide
- Fantasies of homicide or suicide
- Possession of weapons or threats to use them
- Increased use of drugs or alcohol
- Unpredictable changes in behavior
- Destruction of property

If you recognize any of these behaviors, take them seriously. Reach out for help and make a confidential call to Sojourner at 414-276-1911. You may also call Sojourner's 24-hour hotline at 414-933-2722.

Remember — if your abuser cannot find you, he/she cannot kill or hurt you. Careful safety planning is necessary for avoiding surprise attacks. Consider the suggestions listed on the following pages that make sense for your situation. Take extra precautions when weapons are present and always be prepared and alert.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PROTECT YOURSELF

### When the abuser is not around:

- Walk through your residence, room by room. Identify the best escape routes (doors, windows, elevator, stairwell, etc.). Practice and time how long it takes to get out of your home safely. Rehearse your escape plan and practice it with your children. Review your plan often.
- Pack a bag with extra keys, money, medications, legal documents and other important items. Keep it hidden and readily accessible. Or, leave the bag with a trusted friend or family member, in a locker, at work, etc. in case your abuser searches the house or you need to leave unexpectedly.
- Keep your purse, phone and keys ready in order to leave quickly.
- Think of a code word to use with your children and others to communicate that you need the police immediately. Tell your children, neighbors, friends and family what they should do if you use your code word (call 911, get out of the house, run to the neighbor's, etc.).
- Make a safety plan with your children. Tell them that it is not safe to get in the middle of a fight and instruct them where to go during an incident. Teach them to call 911.
- Decide where you will go if you have to leave home, even if you hope you won't have to. Stay with someone you trust, preferably someone your abuser does not know. Consider going to a shelter. In Milwaukee, you can reach Sojourner Truth House at 414-933-2722 and the Milwaukee Women's Center Emergency Shelter at 414-671-6140.
- Memorize important phone numbers.
- Open a bank account to increase your independence and to have access to funds should you decide to leave your abuser.
- Think about what to say to the abuser if you see any warning signs that he/she is going to become violent.
- If you are injured, get medical attention as soon as possible and report the abuse.
- Take photographs of your injuries, torn clothing, broken property and furniture in disarray when it is safe to do so. Leave copies of the photos, negatives, or a flashdrive with the photos with a trusted family member, friend or at work.
- Keep evidence of the abuse in a safe place, away from your abuser.
- Do not tell your abuser about your plans to leave, call the police or obtain a restraining order.
- If you need help with enforcing your restraining order outside of Wisconsin, call the "Full Faith and Credit Project" at 1-800-256-5883. Law enforcement can also call the "International Association of Chiefs of Police" at 1-800-843-4227 for more information about enforcing orders outside the state that issued the order.

**Safety during an abusive incident:**

- If an argument escalates, try to go to an area near an exit. Stay away from the bathroom (hard surfaces), kitchen (knives) or any room with weapons.
- Stay in a room with a phone so you can call 911, a family member, friend or neighbor.
- Use the code word that signals to your children and others that you need them to call 911.
- If you have to leave, take the children with you if at all possible.

**If the abuser does not live with you:**

- Change the locks on your doors as soon as possible. Purchase additional locks and safety devices (bars, bolts) to secure your windows. Consider installing or increasing your outside lighting. If you have been the victim of a crime, there are federal Victims of Crime Act funds available that may help you pay for these security measures. Call a Sojourner Advocate for further assistance at 414-276-1911.
- Find someone who is willing to take the children to see the abuser, bring the children back to your home and talk to the abuser about the children for you. Call a Sojourner Advocate at 414-278-5079 to discuss concerns about your children's safety.
- If you have children, grandchildren or other dependents living with you, prepare a protection plan with them. They should know important phone numbers and escape routes. Teach them not to let strangers or your abuser into the house. Inform teachers, school administration, childcare providers, friends and family members about who has permission to pick up children.
- If the children visit the abuser, give them a code word they can use to let you or someone else know if they are in danger.
- Teach your children how to call the police and how to call you or a trusted person (friend, minister, family member) if they are abducted. Teach them to yell for help if they are abducted in a public place.
- Inform family, friends, neighbors and your landlord that your abuser no longer lives with you and that they should call the police if they see the abuser near your home. Keep a copy of your restraining order with you at all times.
- Consider other ways to limit the abuser's access to you, including staying in a shelter, staying with a friend or moving. If necessary, it is possible to change your name and Social Security number.
- Have your mail forwarded to a post office box, a friend or your lawyer.
- Change your routines so that your abuser cannot easily find you.
- Keep a detailed account of your interactions with the abuser, including telephone calls, emails, letters or other electronic communications.
- Do not initiate contact with the abuser if he/she is under a court order not to have contact with you. If you have contact, you might not be safe, physically or emotionally, and it may affect your credibility in the future if you need assistance from the legal system.

### **At school, work, or recreational activities:**

- Decide who you will tell about your situation, including teachers, coworkers, supervisors or building security. Instruct them to call the police if the abuser violates the restraining order. Provide a copy of your restraining order and description or picture of the abuser. Ask if you can change your work hours, responsibilities, or locations.
- Call Sojourner Advocate at 414-276-1911 and ask for help discussing your situation with your employer.
- Utilize voicemail, or ask a colleague to screen your calls. Ask that information about you is not given out.
- Think ahead and devise a safety plan for public places. Do not walk alone. Ask someone to escort you to the bus, cab or your car. Use a variety of routes to go home.
- Consider changing the hours or location of your activities (work and school) and avoid social situations where the abuser could find you.
- Utilize passwords on your electronic devices (phones, tablets, laptops, etc.) to keep your information safe and to prevent your abuser from installing programs/apps that could monitor your activity without your knowledge.

### **About using the telephone:**

- If you are still living with your abuser and you use your cell phone or landline to call for help or information related to the abuse, be sure to dial another phone number after you are finished in case the abuser uses “redial.” Clear your history.
- Be aware that “automatic callback” will dial the last number that called your phone. If you know that your abuser does this, and a social service agency calls you (Sojourner Family Peace Center, for example), ask them to call you from a line that is not answered using the agency’s name. Most of these agencies will not show up on caller ID.
- If you have left the abuser, do not use a calling card that will show up on the phone bill, as the abuser will be able to discover the numbers that you have called if he/she has access to your phone bill.
- Call your local telephone service to change your phone number. Request an unlisted number. Special program may be available if you are receiving harassing phone calls. If there is any chance someone, including your children, could use your phone to call the abuser, have the number blocked so that it will not show up on caller ID. Ask everyone you give the new number to (including work and school) not to give it to the abuser. You can ask to have all information regarding your phone number and billing given out only to persons who know a particular password that you have chosen. Call a Sojourner Advocate at 414-276-1911 for advocacy with the phone company.
- Consider having the number to your mobile phone blocked so that it does not show up on caller ID. Remember that if you call 911 from a mobile phone, you must tell the operator where you are.

### **Your safety and emotional health:**

- If you are considering returning to a potentially abusive situation, call 414-276-1911 to discuss your safety strategies with a Sojourner Advocate.
- If you have to communicate with your abuser, arrange to do so in the way that makes you feel most safe — by phone, mail or in the company of another person.

- Think positive thoughts about yourself and be assertive with others about your needs.
- Decide who you can call to talk freely and openly about your situation, and who can give you the support you need. Consider calling a domestic violence hotline. In Milwaukee, you can reach Sojourner Truth House at 414-933-2722 and the Milwaukee Women's Center Emergency Shelter at 414-671-6140.
- Attend a support group to gain support from others and learn more about yourself and your relationship. There are also support groups for children affected by domestic abuse. Call Sojourner at 414-276-1911 to find support groups for you and your children.
- If your employer provides an Employee Assistance Program, call and make an appointment. Most are confidential and have crisis services.
- Trust your instinct and judgment. If your situation is dangerous, consider any action that might calm things down and give you time to ensure your safety.
- Always remember that you do not deserve to be hit or threatened.