

Safe Spaces in my HOME.

The first step to ensuring your safety and that of your children in an abusive relationship is to **become educated about your situation**. Domestic Violence is incredibly complex and can vary drastically between different relationships. It is important to identify the type of abuse you are experiencing- This can be done by identifying the red flags in your relationship. Please see the resource tab for Identifying red flags. If you suspect that you are being abused, become informed about domestic violence, all its forms, how it shows up, its effects on you, your children, family and friends. Once you are informed about your situation, you are in a better place to make an informed decision to change or better your circumstance.

If violence against you or your children escalates, develop a safety plan, this plan includes the following:

- Identifying a neighbour, friend, relative, colleague, or shelter to go to in case you need to leave the house immediately for safety.
- Have a plan for how you will exit the house safely and how you will reach there. This includes planning exit routes out of the house like the back door or a wide window if need be. Plan the use of safe, reliable transport.
- Keep a few essential items in an “emergency bag” (e.g. identification documents, phone, money, medicines, and clothes) available, and a list of telephone numbers in case of an emergency. Print or write these numbers out in case you do not have them on your phone. Keep this essential item pack in a safe place out of sight.
- If possible, develop a code with a trusted neighbour so they can come to your aid in case of an emergency. This code cannot be an obvious one in case your abuser may pick up on it.
- Speak to a trusted friend, colleague, neighbor or family member often- Tell them about the abuse- do not keep the abuse a secret- this is more common than many womxn think. By having someone to speak to, your feelings of pain, confusion and hurt are often validated. Having to speak to someone about the abuse also reiterates that your abusers gaslighting is untrue.
- Be careful to cover your digital tracks when you are doing research for help. tracks whether you are doing research for help (e.g. visiting a domestic violence organization’s website) Clear your browsing history on your computer, laptop, tablet or phone.
- Always keep help on speed dial. These numbers can be located under the resource tab under emergency contact details. Memorize some emergency numbers should

you be without your phone. Memorize the number of a family member and or friend who will come to you in a case of an emergency- save all of these numbers under innocuous names such as *“Hairdresser”*, *“Banker”* or *“Nail-Artist”*.

- Keep your fully charged cellphone on you at all times. Keep a spare, cheap phone in your “emergency bag” in case your abuser breaks or takes your cellphone. Have all the relevant numbers stored on this phone, written down or printed to be kept in the “emergency bag”. Check from time to time that the spare phone is fully charged, that it works and is loaded with enough airtime to make necessary calls.
- While your abuser is at work or away, take a bit time to mentally list out the safest spaces in your home. These would be rooms where no weapons or potential weapons are kept including guns and knives. These spaces should also include an escape route, like a window or door that is easily accessible. The door of this safe space should have a lock and key and should be lockable from the inside.
- Practice your escape plan. Start practicing leaving home to get to your “Safe Spaces” If you have children, make this “practice outing” an adventure or game. The older your children are, the easier it will be to impress upon them this escape plan is to be kept secret. If you feel that involving your children is too risky, practice while you have childcare available or your children are at school.
- Create plausible reasons / excuses to leave home. Figure out reasons that would be plausible to your abuser should you need to leave the house during the day and at night. Examples are your 7am morning run, going to the grocery store or seeing a relative at night. This way, if you need to leave the house while your abuser is at home, you can do so without suspicion.
- Learn basic self-defense techniques that will afford you the advantage of getting out of a physical altercation like your abuser pinning you down, choking you or attempting you rape you. Self-defense is sometimes the difference between life and death and can give you a 2 or 3 second head start to get away from your abuser. See our resource tab for free videos of self defense techniques and training that you can practice defending yourself.
- When you have finally had enough and cannot take the abuse anymore, be strong willed and remember that leaving does not make you weak, or a failure. You are simply choosing YOUR life over a bad relationship. Follow through with your plan and make sure that you get as far away from your abuser as possible.
- Once you have left, **DO NOT** contact your abuser. Many perpetrators will track and manipulate you into telling them where you are. The abuse will escalate if they are not in control, by staying in a safe space, where your abuser cannot contact you, you take away their element of control.