

COVID-19 Safety planning for domestic violence survivors

IN-HOME STRATEGIES

1. “Safest Room”

Identify a room or area in your home that is safest for you to go to in an argument. Think about a space where:

- There are no weapons or more difficult access to “weapons.”
- Exits to the outside – like a window on the ground floor or to a fire escape ladder if there isn’t a door to the outside.
- Make “safer rooms” where you can, by locking up, hiding, or putting weapons into harder-to-reach places.

2. Cell Phone Access

Keep your cell phone on you at all times in case you need to call for help. Think about:

- Keeping your charger nearby or having a backup charger.
- Wearing clothing with pockets so you can easily carry your phone with you.

3. Important Documents

Identify which documents are essential to you if you were to leave or not have access to them.

- Take photos on your phone or make copies, saving them in a place that is safe and accessible to you.
- Consider keeping a set of documents at a friend or family member’s home for safe keeping if that is available to you.

4. Medication and Food

Keep essential medication in a safe and secure location. If you have children who have essential medication keep it as well.

- If you had to leave quickly – is it in a place where you could easily grab it?
- Is it in a place where your partner couldn’t find it to tamper with it or take it?
- Do you have enough food for yourself and your family? Check your supplies.
- If your partner controls or takes food from you, can you hide small amounts of food somewhere in the home that would be accessible to you?
- If you lost access to money or your partner left, would you be able to get food? Many food pantries, community organizations or religious homes are still giving out food.

5. To-Go Bag

If you can, set aside a bag with a few changes of clothes, your medications, copies or original documents, and extra keys in case you needed to leave quickly.

- If you have access to an extra or pay-as-you-go cell phone, this is also helpful to have a to-go bag. And remember a charger!
- If you’re concerned your partner will find this bag, can you keep this bag at a neighbor’s, friend’s, or family member’s home?

6. Take Breaks

If you can, take walks outside, spend time in a yard or park. It is very difficult to remain inside all the time, especially if this is building pressure in your relationship. Stay safe outside by avoiding crowded areas,

keeping 6 feet of distance between you and others, and take advantage of opportunities to run errands or just get out of your home.

WITH CHILDREN

1. Code Words

Set code words or signals with your kids so you can communicate with them discretely, whether that's for them to go into another room or call for help.

2. Calming Practices

Talk to your kids about things that make them feel safe when they're stressed out. Create a set of activities or practices they can do if they're feeling stressed, scared, or overwhelmed.

- Take your kids out with you for breaks, walking on sidewalks, through parks, or anywhere that is safe and not crowded. It's helpful to get out of the house for even short periods if you can.

HELP-SEEKING STRATEGIES

1. Notify the Police Before an Emergency

You can call your local police district to make a "Roll Call Complaint" letting officers know that there may be issues coming from your home, such as need for emergency response or that an ex-partner may try to break in, and they will read off this information at every shift change for 2 weeks.

2. Call 9-11 in an Emergency

As always, if you're experiencing a true emergency, you can call 9-11 for help.

3. Identify Emergency Contacts & Code Words

If you have people you can contact in an emergency, think about setting "code words" or phrases that could let them discretely know that you need help if you're unable to call 9-11.

- Are there any contacts you have that could help diffuse a high-pressure situation over the phone? Sometimes having a friend or family member on the phone with you during an argument can help an abusive partner calm down or modify their behavior.
- Do you have any neighbors who could be on alert to call 9-11 if you needed assistance and couldn't call yourself?
- Many smartphones let you set shortcuts to access emergency contacts easily, so look at your phone settings and update your contacts.

4. Familiarize Yourself with Available Resources

Courts remain open for essential services, such as filing for a Protection From Abuse Order though the hours and procedures are likely modified due to Covid-19. Many social service agencies and legal centers are operating remotely and can provide some services over the phone. If you can, call before a problem occurs to find out what their availability for help is and what their processes are.

- If you're not able to call – do you have a trusted friend or family member who could find out and collect information for you so that you can access it if you need it?

5. Distance

If you have to spend time inside with a partner who is acting abusively, think about what distancing techniques may be available and safe for you. Can you spend time in a different area of the home? Can you go out for walks? Are there things (for example, movies or TV shows) that can distract your partner and let you have some space?

6. Deny or Delay

This could be a difficult time to discuss problems in your relationship or ending your relationship. Though lying about something you feel can be difficult, it may be easier to “play along” or lie about difficult feelings so that you can avoid these kinds of conversations when you’re in close quarters to someone else.

7. Avoid Triggers

Think about your partner’s triggers – what usually sets them off or causes an argument? Think about strategies you’ve used in the past to safely avoid these triggers or diffuse them if your partner is showing signs of becoming set off.

- Are you able to do any of these strategies now?
- If not, are there some modified strategies you can use if you need them?

8. Promote Calm

Think about what keeps your partner (and you) calm. Are there strategies you’ve used in the past to maintain a sense of calm in your home or keep your partner from getting angry or violent?

- Are you able to do any of these strategies safely now?
- If not, are there some modified strategies you can use to keep your partner calm and avoid problems?

RESOURCES FOR HELP IN STAYING SAFE DURING THIS TIME

Find your local domestic violence program through the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence. <https://www.pcadv.org/find-help/find-your-local-domestic-violence-program/>