



Leaving an Abusive Partner or Family



0800 999 5428
www.galop.org.uk

Contains information about:

Domestic Abuse

This information sheet offers some advice on what to do if you decide to leave an abusive partner or family. Your safety should always be your first priority and if you are ever in immediate danger, call the police on 999.

Local domestic abuse services should be able to provide support. If you need confidential advice from an LGBT+ specific service, you can contact the National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0800 999 5428.

Safety planning

Having a plan in place can help you to remain safe while planning to leave and after you leave. Please note that these are advisory safety tips. Every domestic abuse situation is different and some of these tips may not be appropriate for your circumstances. A domestic abuse support specialist will be able to advise you about keeping safe and safety planning more effectively.

Letting someone know

If you have a trusted friend who is not in touch with the person abusing you, consider letting them know that you are planning to leave. Having someone to talk to can be important and they may be able to provide support. Alternatively, if you are in touch with a support service, let them know your plans. They will be able to provide personalised advice to keep you safe and will be able to refer you on to other local organisations who can help.

Consider developing a code word with anyone who might need to know that you are leaving (including your children), so you can communicate without alerting the person who is abusing you.

Using your mobile phone safely

Mobile phones can be very useful when trying to get help or leave an abusive situation. However, your phone could be used by your abuser to further control, track or isolate you. Before you pair your phone with anyone, think about this very carefully. Think about whether you use a password or fingerprint to gain access, and which one would be safer for you to use. Think about what settings you have on your phone and who can track you using it. Make sure you keep your phone on your person at all times.

Passwords

Think about all of your passwords and whether or not your abuser knows them or can guess them. Changing your passwords regularly is a good safety measure to put in place in general. If you are being abused, make sure you change your passwords to something your abuser cannot guess, and think carefully about what passwords will need changing.

This can include (but isn't limited to):

- Social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc.)
- Work and personal email.
- Online document storage sites (e.g. Dropbox etc.)
- Online banking and other financially-related sites (e.g. credit card, pension, national insurance and other insurance providers etc.)
- Utility bill accounts, council tax etc.
- Computer and phone passcodes.

Online safety

Think about who you are connected to on social media, who has access to your profiles and pictures, and what they can see. Make sure you update your privacy settings regularly. Delete and block anyone who is threatening or abusive towards you.

Do not 'check in' your location via social media, as this will alert anyone looking for you exactly where you are and when. If you are on a dating app, think about what pictures and information you present. Be careful about giving out personal information to hook ups or people you've just met. Consider what information you have about your location, and use a more vague location, e.g. London.

You can look up online safety tips here:
www.getsafeonline.org



Planning a route and time to leave

If you need to physically leave your home or a space you share with the person who is abusing you, think about how you can do so safely:

- What routes can you take to avoid a possible incident?
- Is there anywhere you will need to avoid (such as their work place or anywhere they might be spending time)?
- If you have to leave in a moment of crisis, how can you get to a safer place?
- Is there a regular time when you or your abuser are out of the house? Can you use this time to leave safely?

Evidence

Creating a log of abusive incidents can often be helpful when trying to demonstrate the nature of the abuse. If you receive abusive messages, voicemails, calls or emails, save them as evidence. You can print screen images on your phone, and you can also use photo evidence (e.g. pictures of injuries or broken possession, damaged property etc.) and witness statements from anyone who has witnessed abusive incidents.

Emergency bag

Packing an emergency bag to take with you, if you have to leave your home, can make things much easier and less risky. You can leave the bag with a safe friend or family member, or you can hide the bag in the home somewhere where the person abusing you won't find it. Please remember though, that you should prioritise your own personal safety, which means you may need to leave behind personal possessions if you're leaving the relationship.

Some things to include in the emergency bag are:

- ID for yourself (and your children), including birth certificates, passports, driving licenses etc.
- Money, bank books, cheque books, credit and debit cards.
- Visas, work permits and benefits paperwork.
- Keys for your house, car and work.
- Car registration and ownership documents.
- Any prescribed medication you may need.
- Housing documents relating to ownership, tenancy, council tax and utility documents, mortgage details and rental agreements.
- Insurance documents, including national insurance number.
- Personal organisation aids including your address book, diary, calendar etc.
- Items of personal value including family photographs, jewellery, small items of sentimental value and your children's favourite toys.
- Clothing, toiletries and general necessary items for yourself and your children.
- You should also take any documentation relating to the abuse, e.g. police reports, court orders such as injunctions and restraining orders, and copies of medical records if you have them (see the section regarding Evidence)

Retrieving your possessions

If you've left your home and it is not safe for you to return to collect your belongings, you can arrange for a police escort to support you. If you have a support worker or advocate, ask them to help you with this.



Here are the steps you will need to take:

Call the Criminal Justice Unit (CJU) department of the local police service and explain the situation:

State that there is “a history of domestic violence or abuse and you believe there will be a breach of the peace if you go alone to collect your possessions”.

- Prepare any crime reference or incident numbers you have been given by the police.
- The police have a duty to be there since you are entitled to your belongings and to have an escort to the house, so you can collect your belongings safely.
- You can state that this is commonly done to ‘prevent a reasonably anticipated breach of the peace’, and **doing so will help you to:**
 - access vital documents, ID, passports, bank docs etc.
 - acquire economic resources to function independently.
 - break dependence on the abuser.
 - lessen the likelihood of returning to the abuser or home.
 - manage a high-risk meeting, as ending a violent relationship is strongly linked to homicide.

It is likely they will give you a day that you can get your belongings, but an exact time may not be allocated until the day.

Protection Orders

To keep yourself safe when leaving an abusive relationship, you may consider obtaining a Protection Order. These are issued by a court and place legal restrictions on a person to prevent them causing you harm or annoyance.

If you’re considering a Protection Order, we recommend contacting Domestic Violence Assist. They are a registered UK charity who arrange Non-molestation Orders, Prohibited Steps Orders and Occupation Orders. They can help prepare the paperwork and necessary forms, and can confirm your eligibility for public funding, if applicable.

Domestic Violence Assist
 Tel: 0800 195 8699
 Email: support@dvassist.org.uk
 Online: www.dvassist.org.uk

The following information on Protection Orders is taken from the Domestic Violence Assist website:

Non-molestation Order

A Non-molestation Order is aimed at preventing your partner or ex-partner from using or threatening violence against you or your child, or intimidating, harassing or pestering you, in order to ensure the health, safety and well-being of yourself and your children. A Non-molestation Order normally carries a power of arrest with it. Breaching an order is a criminal offence. This means that if the respondent breaches the order he/she will be arrested and put before the next available court.

Prohibited Steps Order

Prohibited Steps Orders relate to restricting parental responsibility. If a parent has parental responsibility, then he or she has the right to independently take decisions about matters such as schooling, medical treatment and religion. A Prohibited Steps Order can remove a parent’s right to make such decisions about their child’s life.

This type of order may also be used to prevent a parent from removing their children from the jurisdiction of the Court (England and Wales). In these circumstances, and if you are worried your ex-partner may seek to unlawfully take the children abroad, you should ask for the child’s passport to be seized when you make your application for a Prohibited Steps Order.

Occupation Order

An Occupation Order is one of the court’s key powers in cases involving domestic abuse. The order controls who lives in a home, and can be used to exclude those who use or threaten violence, as well as perpetrators of sexual or psychological abuse. If a person breaches an Occupation Order, it is contempt of court.

Services to contact

If you can, get in touch with support organisations. Saving phone numbers to be able to get in touch will make it easier for you to receive support.