



Developed By:

**PCAWA**  
PEEL COMMITTEE AGAINST WOMAN ABUSE

**WORKING TOGETHER TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

**April 2019**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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[Creating a Safety Plan.](#) ©Peel Committee Against Woman Abuse.

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## INTRODUCTION

This booklet is designed to provide women<sup>1</sup> with strategies for when they have experienced or are at risk of experiencing violence.

Violence against women must be recognized as a societal problem rooted in gender inequality. Women's experiences of violence differ greatly based on their lived experiences of racism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, ageism, ableism, colonialism, and islamophobia, etc. Many women experience gender-based violence and are not to be blamed for the violence they experience. If you are a woman who has experienced violence, remember that you are not alone and PCAWA member organizations believe you and will support you in ways that meet your individual needs.

Whether you are currently experiencing violence, thinking about leaving a violent situation/relationship, or have already left a violent situation/relationship, this booklet will provide you with some strategies you could implement for you and any children, if you have them.

Since violent situations/relationships and risk factors can change quickly, it is important to acknowledge that your safety plan may need to evolve and change over time.

**In creating a safety plan, it is important to remember that:**

- You are not to blame for the violence or for your children's exposure to it;
- You are not responsible for causing the violence;
- You are not alone. There are resources available in the community to provide support in a number of ways (counselling, housing, financial assistance, etc.).

Violence against women can take many forms. Other commonly used terms for violence against women include: domestic violence, sexual violence, sexual abuse, woman abuse, gender-based violence or intimate partner violence. Women can experience violence in any relationship including in an intimate relationship (whether it is a heterosexual or a 2SLGBTQ + relationship), from family member(s), or at work/school. Women can also experience violence from a stranger or from multiple people simultaneously. Throughout this booklet the person(s) you are experiencing violence from are referred to as the person(s).

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<sup>1</sup> The terms 'woman' and 'women' are used throughout this booklet as an umbrella term, meant to encompass a wide range of identities including, but not limited to: cisgender women, transwomen, genderqueer, nonbinary, and two-spirit folks.

**Violence Against Women can take many forms, such as:**

- Physical (for example: hitting, pushing, choking, confining, or grabbing)
- Psychological or emotional (for example: put-downs, name-calling, threats, manipulative or frightening actions)
- Sexual (for example: sexual assault, sexual coercion, forcing her to engage in degrading or harmful sexual activity, making her watch or engage in sexual acts that she does not agree to)
- Economic (for example: taking or withholding her income, or not letting her take part in financial decisions; keeping her from taking on paid work or disrupting her paid work)
- Spiritual (for example: belittling or limiting her ability to take part in spiritual activities).
- Stalking/harassment (for example: following her, showing up uninvited to work, constant emails/phone calls)
- Cyber (for example: posting demeaning messages, sharing explicit photos without permission, spreading gossip/rumors online)

## TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

One of the most crucial, yet frequently overlooked, aspects of women's safety and safety planning is taking care of yourself.

Experiencing violence can be exhausting and emotionally draining. As such it is important to take time to practice self-care. These are just a few suggestions:

- If you are in need of support, give yourself the time to call a supportive friend, relative, counsellor, etc.
- Get connected to community resources. There are lots of organizations that can support you and can assist in finding services and supports that will meet your needs (See page 29)
- If you want/have to communicate with the person(s) you experienced violence from, in person or by telephone, arrange to have a supportive friend/relative present. When possible communicate in writing
- Become involved in community activities to reduce feeling isolated
- Join a peer support group to gain support and strengthen your relationships with other people
- Take time for yourself (read, meditate, play music, etc.)
- Fulfill your spiritual needs in whatever way feels good for you
- Give yourself permission to feel angry and find ways to express it
- Spend time with people who make you feel good and are supportive
- Try to get adequate sleep and rest
- Write or talk about your feelings
- Take time to prepare yourself emotionally before entering stressful situations like talking with the person(s) you experienced violence from, meeting with lawyers, or attending court, etc.
- Try not to overbook yourself - limit yourself to one appointment per day to reduce stress, if possible. Write down the dates, times, and locations of your appointments

- Seek support in gathering and preparing your documents
- Be creative and do what makes you feel good
- Focus on your strengths
- Remember that you are the most important person to take care of right now

## EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE AND/OR PLANNING TO LEAVE

If you are experiencing ongoing violence and/or are planning to leave a violent situation/relationship, here are some things you can do:

### A) Important documents

**Make a photocopy of the following items and store in a safe place, away from the originals. Hide the originals someplace else, if you can.**

- Passports, birth certificates, First Nations status cards, citizenship papers, immigration papers, permanent resident or citizenship cards, etc. for all family members
- Driver's license, registration, insurance papers
- Health cards for yourself and family members
- Prescriptions, medical and vaccination records for all family members
- School records
- All social assistance (Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Plan) documentation
- Work permits
- Marriage certificate, divorce papers, custody documentation, court orders, restraining orders, or other legal documents
- Lease/rental agreement, house deed, mortgage payment book
- Last Canada Income Tax Return
- Bank statements
- Address/telephone book
- Picture of person you are experiencing violence from
- All cards you normally use e.g. credit cards, bank cards, phone card, Social Insurance Number (SIN) card

### B) Important Cards

**Try to keep all the cards you normally use in your wallet:**

- Credit cards
- Phone card
- Bank cards
- Health cards
- Identification (e.g. driver's license, age of majority card, First Nations status card etc.)



### **C) What to pre-pack?**

**Try to keep your wallet and a bag handy, which contains the following:**

- Keys for your home, car, workplace, safety deposit box, etc.
- Cheque book, bank books/statements
- Driver's license, registration, insurance
- Address/telephone book
- Picture of the person you experienced violence from
- Emergency money (in cash) hidden away
- Cell Phone

### **D) Quick Grabs**

**Keep the following items handy, so you can grab them quickly:**

- Emergency bag containing immediate needs or a bag that you can pack quickly
- Special toys and/or comforts for your children
- Medications
- Items of special sentimental value
- A list of other items you would like to take if you get a chance to return to your home to collect more belongings later

### **E) Other Considerations:**

- Open a bank account in your own name and arrange that no bank statements or other calls be made to you. Or, arrange that mail be sent to a trusted friend or family member. Or, set up an online banking account
- Plan your emergency exits, taking into consideration mobility and accessibility needs, as well as appropriate modes of transportation and how to arrange it (e.g. taxi, bus, TransHelp, Wheel-Trans, etc.)
- Plan and rehearse the steps you will take if you have to leave quickly and learn them well.
- Know the numbers of emergency shelters/organizations you can call/go to for support if you need to (see page 19)
- Make arrangements with friends or family so that you can stay with them if necessary
- When you leave your home, take the children if you can. If you try to get them later, the

police cannot help you remove them from their other parent unless you have a valid court order

- Consider and take note of what triggers the person's violence and abuse. This could help you predict the next likely violent incident and give you a chance to prepare
- Document abuse patterns and the date time of abusive incidents and all contact with the abuser (examples: photos, medical records, screenshots of messages or texts, etc.)
- Provide resources (see page 19) to other family members who may be impacted or at risk of violence as well

**F) If police become involved or you would like police involvement:**

- It will likely result in the involvement of Child Protection Services (e.g., Children's Aid Society), if you have children
- It can result in arrest, detainment and/or deportation if you are a woman without legal status in Canada
- There is a chance that you may be charged. This often occurs if the person(s) you experience violence from claims you have assaulted them, even if you acted in self-defence
- The police officer will provide you their name, badge number and telephone number for future contact and reference, upon request
- The police can escort you back to the home later to remove additional personal belongings, if it is arranged through the local police division. At this time, you can take the items listed above as well as anything else that is important to you or your children
- Police may charge the person(s). If this happens, find out if they will be held in custody or released. You can provide input into release conditions to the investigating officer. Ask for a copy of the conditions of their release.
- Keep a copy of your protection order near you at all times. Give a copy to the police in the community where you live, work and visit. Inform your friends, colleagues, family that you have a protection order in place.
- Should your protection order be lost or destroyed, you can obtain another copy from the Victim Witness Assistance Program, who can also assist you in preparing for court.
- When the person(s) violate the protection order or if they threaten you in any way, you can call the police to report the violation.
- Key things to identify to the police are: whether there has been a pattern of abuse,

whether the person owns weapons or has access to them. If the police do not assist you, you can report the violation to the detachment commander of the local OPP or to the Chief of Police of the Police Service in the jurisdiction where the violation occurred.

- Make sure that the school, day care, and police have a copy of all court orders, including restraining orders, custody and access orders, as well as a picture of the violent person.
- Request the police to put a “premise history” on your address on file. This will provide additional information and security for officers responding to your call and alert them of a potentially hazardous history at the location.
- Tell your neighbors if you would like them to call the police if they hear a fight or screaming in your home.
- Teach your children how to contact the police by dialing 911.

**For example:**

Dial 911.

*An operator will answer and say: “Police, Fire, Ambulance.”*

*Your child should say: Police.*

*Then your child should say:*

My name is \_\_\_\_\_.

I need help. Send the police.

Someone is hurting my mom.

The address here is \_\_\_\_\_.

The phone number here is \_\_\_\_\_.

*It is important for children to leave the phone line open or phone off the hook after they are done talking. The police may call the number back if they hang up, which could create a dangerous situation for yourself and your children.*

## SAFETY PLANNING

Here are a few suggestions for safety planning for different situations you may experience:

### **A) ESCAPING A VIOLENT INCIDENT:**

- Try to notice if there are any triggers for the violence. This can help you try to predict the next likely incident and give you a chance to prepare (i.e. by making plans for the children to be sent to friends/family in advance).
- Use your judgment and intuition. If verbal self-defense is a possibility, you may consider pretending to agree with the person in order to calm them down so that you can buy yourself time to escape.
- Try to move to a space where you think the risk is the lowest. Avoid areas without a clear exit path or where there could be a weapon at hand (i.e. kitchen, garage).
- Start to position yourself to get out quickly or near a phone so you can call a trusted friend or family member, or 911 if necessary.
- Make as much noise as possible (set off the fire alarm, yell “FIRE”, break things, break a window) – to draw attention to the situation.
- Use your code word with your children so they can call for help.
- Remind yourself that you have a list of items you have planned for and set aside. If you choose to call the police at 911 (it is your choice), tell them you are being assaulted or that you have been assaulted and that it is an emergency. Do not hang up the phone if violence is happening and you can no longer speak. Leave the phone line open or phone off the hook.
- Once you are in a safe place you may want to consider seeking medical attention for any physical injuries.
- If you have been sexually assaulted, and if you choose to seek medical assistance, you may want to choose not to bathe or shower. Go directly to Trillium Health Partners Sexual Assault & Domestic Violence Services (see page 19) where a trained professional will examine you and can collect evidence, if you choose. You do not have to decide right away if you will report to police. Keep the clothes you were wearing during the assault (do not wash them) and you can provide them for use as evidence, if you choose to pursue charges against the person who committed the violence.

## **B) REMAINING IN A RELATIONSHIP AND SHARED LIVING SITUATION:**

- Try to notice if there any triggers for the violence. This can help you try to predict the next likely incident and give you a chance to prepare.
- Be aware of resources for support such as the nearest women’s shelter, Assaulted Women’s Help Line, family members, friends, counsellors, children’s friends, etc.
- If you have call display on your phone, be careful about who can get access to stored numbers such as the last number you dialed or received a call from.
- Check your vehicle for a Global Positioning System (GPS) which the person may have installed in or under your car to track your movements. If you find a device, consider seeking support to remove it or taking alternate forms of transportation.
- Teach your children to use the telephone (and cell phone, if you have one) to call a safe person.
- Teach your children how to make a collect call to you and to your safe person in case the violent person takes the children.
- Create a code word with your children and/or family/ friends so they know when to call for help.
- Plan your emergency exits and teach them to your children.
- Teach your children their own Safety Plan (See page 18).
- Consider a plan for the safety and wellbeing of your pet(s) such as making arrangements with friends or family to care for them if need be.
- Be aware of any weapons in the home or the person’s access to weapons.
- When using the computer, be aware that the person may track the websites you have visited. For information on hiding your tracks, see Technology (page 20)
- Remind yourself that you have a list of items set aside and a plan.

## **C) IF YOU DO NOT LIVE WITH THE PERSON YOU ARE EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE FROM:**

- Have a pre-recorded anonymous message on your telephone answering service rather than your own voice and do not identify yourself by name.
- Consider installing a lighting system outside your home that lights up when a person is coming close to your house.
- Meet in a public place to limit your isolation, if you have agreed to meet with the

person(s). Make sure someone knows where you are and when to expect you to return.

- Talk to a lawyer about getting supervised access or having access denied, if the person(s) have legal access to your children.
- Arrange for transportation for your children so that you do not have to have contact with the person(s), if they have visitations with your children.
- Use different grocery stores and shopping malls, and shop at hours that are different from when you were living with the violent person.
- Do not put your name in your apartment building directory or mailbox.

#### **D) OUTSIDE OF THE HOME:**

You must decide for yourself if and/or when you will tell others that you are experiencing violence and that you may be at risk. Friends, family and co-workers may be able to support you. However, each woman should consider carefully which people to ask for help. If you are comfortable, you may choose to do any or all of the following:

- Show a picture of the person(s) and provide a description of their car to colleagues, neighbors, and building security personnel to make them aware and alert to your safety needs.
- Talk to your employer about Bill 168 Workplace Violence and Harassment legislation to determine what supports can be put in place to reduce your risk at work.
- Ask to have your calls screened at work or use voicemail to screen your calls. Document any unwanted calls from the person(s).
- Block unwanted emails or document them by sending them to a folder where you do not have to read them.
- Alert a trusted neighbor about your situation and how they can support you in case of a violent incident.
- Tell people who take care of your children, including schools and daycares, which people have permission to pick up your children.
- Tell the school, daycare, babysitter, and people who have permission to pick up your children that the person(s) are not permitted to do so and ask that they not give your contact information to anyone.
- Ask your neighbors to look after your children in an emergency.

**When arriving at or leaving work:**

- Let someone know when you'll be home and when to expect you to arrive at work, and that you will call them when you have safely arrived.
- Consider carrying your keys in your hands so you are prepared to leave quickly or so that you can press the panic button to draw attention to yourself if you are in danger.
- Walk with someone to your vehicle, if you have one.
- Scan the parking lot when walking to your vehicle.
- If the person(s) are following you, drive to a place where there are people who may support you, e.g. safe person, gas station, the police, etc.
- If problems occur while you are driving, use your cell phone, honk your horn continuously, and drive directly to a well-lit, open, populated place or your identified safe place.
- Plan to take a route that is populated and well-lit.
- Change the patterns of when you arrive and leave work and the routes you take.
- If you see the person(s) on the street, try to get to a public place such as a store or call attention to yourself and ask for help.
- If you use public transit, you can choose to sit close to the front near the driver and have someone you know meet you at the bus stop to walk home with you. Consider changing your transit route if possible.
- Once you have arrived home/at work, call a friend or relative to let them know you have arrived safely.

## A CHILD'S SAFETY PLAN

This plan was developed to help women teach their children some basic safety planning.

The most important thing for children is to get away from where the violence is happening. Although children often try to help stop the violence, it is important to tell children that the best and most important thing for them to do is to keep themselves safe.

Children who are exposed to violence against women can be profoundly affected by it. It is very traumatic for them to be faced with violence directed at them or at someone they love. Personal safety and safety planning are extremely important and necessary for children whose families are experiencing violence. Children should learn ways to protect themselves. Tell your children that their only job is to keep themselves safe.

### **There are several ways to help you develop a safety plan with your children:**

- The first step of any plan is for the children to get out of the room where the violence is occurring.
- Have your child pick a safe room/place in the house, preferably with a lock on the door and a phone.
- Stress the importance of being safe, and that it is not the child's responsibility to make sure that their parent is safe.
- Create a code word to use with your children so that they know when to run to safety and to call for help.
- Teach your children how to call for help. It is important that children know they should not use a phone that is in view of the violent person. This puts them at risk. Talk to your children about using a neighbor's phone or pay phone if they are unable to use a phone at home. Remember there is no cost when dialing 911 from a pay phone or cell phone.
- If you have a cell phone, teach your children how to use it.
- Ensure that the children know their full name and address (children living in rural areas need to know their Concession and Lot #).
- Rehearse what your child/children will say when they call for help.
- Pick a safe place to meet your children, out of the home, so you can easily find each other after the situation is safe.
- Teach your children the safest route for them to take to the planned place of safety.



- Practice and role-play this safety plan with your children including what to do and where to go if violence happens.
- Have a discussion with your children about safety and their technological devices and social media accounts (see page 17 for more information)

## TECHNOLOGY & CYBER VIOLENCE

### A) TECHNOLOGICAL DEVICES

There are steps you can take to make it more difficult for someone to track your activities, however, the person(s) may still find ways of tracking your activities on technological devices that are hard to prevent.

If you are concerned about the safety of using your home computer, it would be better to use a computer they cannot access – for example at a public library, a school, an internet café, or at the home of a trusted friend.

**Here are some general safety tips regarding technology:**

- Change your passwords regularly and avoid writing them down.
- Log out of computer profiles and social media accounts before leaving electronics unattended.
- Be aware of which social media interactions and settings are public and not private.
- Check whether the violent person can access your phone's incoming and outgoing call lists.
- Check to see if any of your devices and social media accounts have a tracking application or location services enabled and see websites below for information on how to remove or disable them.

**There are a few easy ways for someone to find out what websites you have visited:**

Computers have what is called a *cache file*. The cache automatically saves web pages and graphics. Anyone who looks at the cache file on your computer can see what information you have viewed recently on the internet.

Also, most web browsers (the software on your computer that lets you search the internet and display internet pages – like Internet Explorer and Google Chrome) keep a list of the most recent web sites and links that you have visited in a history file. You can look at your own history by clicking on the history button on your toolbar.

While it is possible to clear the cache and history files so that your computer doesn't keep a list of the sites you have visited, **you may want to be cautious about doing this.**

If the person(s) are comfortable with computers and sees that you have cleared all the cache and history files on your computer (including the sites they have visited), they could become suspicious or angry.

If you do decide to clear your browser history, visit the following website for detailed instructions.

<https://www.sheltersafe.ca/staysafe/#stay>

For more detailed instructions, to help you hide your digital activities, visit:

<http://nnedv.org/resources/safetynetdocs.html>

## **B) SOCIAL MEDIA**

There are steps you can take to make it more difficult for someone to track your social media activities, however the person(s) may still find ways of tracking your activities through your social media accounts that are difficult to prevent. If the violent person knows a lot about social media platforms, it might be better for you to use an anonymous account/name and change all of your social media passwords and security answers.

Cyber violence has been an increasing form of violence that women are experiencing. Types of cyber violence that you may experience could include: hacking, surveillance/tracking, impersonating, spamming, malicious distribution, etc.

For various social media platforms visit their privacy settings for ways to limit who sees your posts, photos, etc. or to block/remove and report someone.

To learn more information on cyber violence and harassment and ways to increase your online safety visit:

[http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/sites/vawlearningnetwork.ca/files/LN\\_Newsletter\\_Issue\\_4\\_2013.pdf](http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/sites/vawlearningnetwork.ca/files/LN_Newsletter_Issue_4_2013.pdf)

<https://www.techsafety.org/documentationtips>

### **Additional notes:**

If you are experiencing cyber violence and online harassment, keep a record of harassing or unwanted contact to you or anyone you know. Document any content found online by taking screenshots to capture all images and information posted with it. Also, keep a record of the URL of the sites, as well save all original emails or messages.

## RESOURCES FOR WOMEN

### 24 HOUR CRISIS LINES

Assaulted Women's Helpline ( <a href="http://www.awhl.org">www.awhl.org</a> )	1 (866) 863-0511
(TTY)	1 (866) 863-7868
On your Bell, Rogers, Fido or Telus mobile phone	#SAFE (#7233)
Caledon/Dufferin Victim Services	905-951-3838
	1-888-743-6496
Family Transition Place	1-800-265-9178
Fem'aide (Francophone helpline)	1-877-336-2433
(TTY)	1-866-860-7082
Interim Place South	905-403-0864
(TTY)	905-403-0453
Interim Place North	905-676-8515
(TTY)	905-676-0284
La Maison (Francophone Shelter in Toronto)	647-777-6433
Salvation Army Family Life Resource Centre	905-451-6108
Trans Lifeline	1-877-330-6366
Talk4Healing- A Help Line for Aboriginal Women (Services offered in Ojibway, Oji-Cree and Cree)	1-855-554-4325
Victim Services of Peel	905- 568-1068

### SHELTERS

Family Transition Place (Orangeville)	1-800-265-9178
Interim Place South	905-403-0864
Interim Place North	905-676-8515
Salvation Army Family Life Resource Centre	905-451-4115
Armagh (Second Stage Housing)	905-855-0299

## FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ontario Works / Social Assistance	905-793-9200
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## HOUSING SERVICES

Peel Access to Housing (PATH)	905-453-1300
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## LEGAL SERVICES

North Peel & Dufferin Community Legal Services	905-455-0160
Mississauga Community Legal Services	905-896-2052
Legal Aid Ontario	905-453-1723
Peel Victim Witness Assistance Program (Criminal Court Support Services)	905-456-4797
Indus Community Services of Peel (Legal Clinic)	905-275-2369
Victim Services of Peel (Criminal Court Support at Bail Hearing)	905-568-1068

## SUPPORT SERVICES FOR WOMEN

African Community Services of Peel	905-460-9514	
Catholic Cross-Cultural Services Brampton/ Mississauga	905-272-1703	
Victim Services of Dufferin (Criminal Court Support at Bail Hearing)	905-951-3838	
Family Services of Peel		
Centralized Intake	905-453-5775	
( TTY )	905-270-7357	
Brampton	905-453-7890	
Mississauga	905-270-2250	
Family Transition Place		

Caledon/Bolton	519-584-4357	
Indus Community Services of Peel		
Brampton	905-454-2598	
Mississauga	905-275-2369	
Interim Place		
South	905-403-0864	
North	905-676-8515	
CSO Intake Line	905-676-0257	
Malton Neighborhood Services	905-677-6270	
Muslim Community Services		
Brampton	905-790-1910	
Mississauga	905-828-1328	
OASIS Centre des Femmes	905-454-3332	
Punjabi Community Health Centre		
Brampton	416-995-3920	
Mississauga	273-4884 ext.222	
Safe Centre of Peel	905-450-4650	
Salvation Army Women's Counselling Centre	905-820-8984	
Trillium Health Partners Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Services – Chantel's Place	905-848-7600	
United Achievers Community Services	905-455-6789	

#### EMERGENCY SERVICES

Police	911
OPP Caledon	905-584-2241



More copies of this booklet can be ordered (subject to availability) by contacting:

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An earlier version of this safety plan is available on our website in the following languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Hindi, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Spanish, Tagalog, Tamil, Urdu, Vietnamese

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