NOTES

CHECKLIST LEAVING HOME

If you are preparing to leave your partner, it is a good idea to make a plan of what can be done before you leave and what you are going to take with you when you go. If it is safe to do so, you should take anything you need or think you may need when you go because you may not be able to return to your home safely, and your ex-partner may destroy or hide items that he knows you will want.

Create a 72-hour kit and put it in a safe location from which it will be easy to retrieve. Your kit should contain essential items (copies of identification and health cards for you and your children, changes of clothing for all of you, medication, etc.) to get you through a few days if you have to leave in a hurry.

We have developed a checklist that includes suggestions for safe ways to remove these items from the family home. You can use the column on the left to keep track of what you have done/plan to do with each item in the list.

Of course, if you leave in a hurry because it is not safe for you to stay, you won't take these steps, and that is okay. Everything can be sorted out later, when you and the children are in a safe place.

FINANCIAL

YOUR OWN BANK ACCOUNT

- Open a new bank account, at a different financial institution, in your name only. Use a new PIN that your partner will not guess.
- If you have direct deposit, inform your employer about your new account once it is safe to do so.

UTILITY BILLS

- Photocopy utility bills for the previous several months and keep them somewhere safe.

RESPs

- Talk to your financial institution about whether you can move any RESPs to a new bank. This may not be possible if both your and your partner's names are on the RESP.

YOUR FINANCIAL INFORMATION

- Take your tax returns, pay stubs and other financial documents from the past several years and store in a safe place: at work, with a trusted friend or family member or in a safety deposit box at your new bank.

ALWAYS REMEMBER

Your safety and the safety of your children is more important than any document or possession, no matter how treasured it may be.

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YOUR PARTNER'S FINANCIAL INFORMATION

- If you can do this safely, look through your partner's financial documents (bank statements, pay stubs, tax returns, mortgage documents, investment reports, etc.) and make photocopies.
- Put the photocopies in a safe place away from home: at work, with a trusted friend or family member or in a safety deposit box at your new bank.

MORTGAGE/LINE OF CREDIT

- Talk to your bank or mortgage broker to ensure your partner cannot add to the mortgage/line of credit without your in-person consent.

CREDIT CARDS

- Get a new credit card in your name only from a different credit card company than any cards you have now. Use a new PIN that your partner will not guess.

REVENUE CANADA (FEDERAL TAXES)

- Contact Revenue Canada as soon as you have a new address. Complete and submit change of information form with Revenue Canada.

MONEY IN JOINT ACCOUNTS

- You have a legal right to half the money in any joint accounts, so you should remove that money and put it in an account in your own name. Do this as soon as possible after you leave so your partner does not take all of the money, but do not do it before you leave in case he checks the bank balance and sees that half the money is gone.

BANKING

- Tell your bank once you have left the relationship and discuss financial considerations.

NOTES

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NOTES

HOUSING

SHELTER

- Contact the women's shelter in your community for support, information and to learn about the shelter's services. You can also call to make arrangements for beds for you and your children.

APARTMENT/HOUSE

- If you plan to move into your own place right away, find something appropriate, sign a lease and get the key before your planned departure date.
- Begin acquiring and moving household items and furniture into your new apartment/house.
- Use your new accommodation as a safe place to store documents and other items in this list.

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

- Contact a Transitional Housing and Support Worker at your local shelter if you need subsidized or other supportive housing. Make an application and get on the waiting list as early as possible. In most communities, you need to apply for housing within three months of leaving your relationship in order to get on the priority list. Ask your counsellor to provide you with a proof of cohabitation letter to support your application.
- Ask family or friends if you can stay with them while you sort out your next steps.

LEGAL

LAWYER/LEGAL ADVICE

- Make an appointment to meet with a family law lawyer to review your rights and responsibilities before you leave your relationship. (You can get a two-hour free legal advice form from your local women's shelter.)
- If you have been sponsored to come to Canada by your partner, meet with an immigration lawyer to find out how leaving your partner will affect your immigration status. (You can get a two-hour free legal advice form from your local women's shelter.)
- If you think you might qualify, apply for a legal aid certificate.

EVIDENCE

- If you have a safe place to keep it where your partner won't find it, begin making a list of the history of abuse in your relationship.

COURT ORDERS

- If any court orders – family, criminal, immigration – are in place, either remove the originals or make photocopies and keep them in one of the safe places we have suggested in this checklist.

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WORK

TRANSPORTATION

After you leave:

- If you drive to work, consider using a new route that your partner will not be familiar with. Talk to your employer about safe parking.
- If you use public transit to get to work, find an alternate route that your partner won't expect you to use.
- If you have a car and are concerned about your partner stalking you, get it checked for a GPS tracking device. Learn more about technology abuse in the section "Managing electronic communication with an abusive ex-partner."

SAFETY AT WORK

- Let your employer and key co-workers, as well as security staff, know that you are planning to leave your partner and are concerned that he may visit your workplace.
- Develop a workplace safety plan.

CHILDREN

COUNSELLING

- Consider setting up counselling for your children so they will have emotional support when you leave. You may need to get their father's consent or a court order for this.

TOYS AND OTHER IMPORTANT POSSESSIONS

- Talk to your children about their most prized possessions and encourage them to keep them all in one place in case of an emergency.

PHOTOS

- Carry a recent photo of your children with you and/or have one on your phone in case you need emergency assistance to find them.

SAFETY

- Develop a safety plan with your children so they know what to do in an emergency. See the "Safety planning" section for tips.

NOTES

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NOTES

COMMUNICATION

CELL PHONE

- Update your contact information to include the names of your children's school/daycare centre, your doctor, bank manager, lawyer and anyone else you may need to reach quickly after you leave.
- Create or change the password to your phone.
- Back up any important information you keep on your phone to a secure location.
- After you leave, if you can afford it, buy a new phone and plan that are with a different company than the one your partner uses.
- Review our Online Safety Tip Sheet for more information about being safe online

COMPUTERS, LAPTOPS, TABLETS

- Create or change the password to any technology that is yours. Keep it where you can easily grab it when you leave.

DOCUMENTS

PASSPORTS – YOURS AND YOUR CHILDREN'S

- If it is safe to do so, remove passports from the home and leave at work, with a trusted friend or family member or in your safety deposit box.
- If it is not safe to do this before you leave, keep them all together somewhere you can grab them quickly when you leave.

IMMIGRATION /CITIZENSHIP PAPERS

- Photocopy these documents and keep in one of the safe places we have suggested.

MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE

- Photocopy and keep in one of the safe places we have suggested.

VEHICLES

- Find and copy vehicle-related documents (registration, insurance, loan) and store in a safe place.
- After you leave, if you take a car with you, contact the insurance company to change the policy into your name only and to remove your name from policies for any other vehicles.

CHILDREN'S REPORT CARDS

- Remove the originals from the home or, if that is not safe, make photocopies and store in one of the safe places we have suggested.

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DRIVER'S LICENCE, BIRTH CERTIFICATES, SOCIAL INSURANCE NUMBER

- Make photocopies of these documents and keep them in one of the safe places we have suggested. This will be helpful if your partner takes your wallet or you have to flee without it.

HEALTH

HEALTH CARDS – YOURS AND THE CHILDREN'S

- If you don't normally carry these in your wallet, do so now, if you can safely.
- Even if you have the health cards with you, make photocopies of them and keep them in one of the safe places we have suggested. This will be helpful if your partner takes your wallet or you have to flee without it.

DRUG CARD/PARTNER'S WORKPLACE HEALTH BENEFITS INFORMATION

- Photocopy any of these documents and keep them in one of the safe places suggested.

MEDICATIONS

- If you can, buy extra prescription medication so you can keep a supply away from your home in case you are not able to grab medication when you are leaving.
- Let your pharmacy know your new address as soon as you move.

DOCTOR

- Let your doctor know you are planning to leave your partner in case they have any health-care-related suggestions for you.

PERSONAL ITEMS

JEWELLERY

- If you have jewellery that you can put away without your partner noticing, put it in your safety deposit box, or leave it at work or with a trusted friend or family member.

TOILETRY SUPPLIES AND CLOTHES

- Buy extra toiletry supplies for you and your children. Store this and a change of clothes as well as nightwear in a duffel bag or backpack. Keep the bag somewhere your partner won't find it or in one of the safe places we have suggested.

KEYS

- Have copies made of all your keys – house, office, cars, cottage – and keep sets away from the house in safe places that you can access quickly. If your partner has a key to your car, consider having the car rekeyed.

NOTES

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NOTES

TIPS FOR WHEN YOU LEAVE

- If possible, leave when your partner is not at home and, ideally, when he won't be home for several hours.
- Leave a note/letter for him or text/email him as soon as you have left to let him know that the children are with you, that you are all fine and that you will be in touch with him within a day or two to talk about arrangements for him to see the kids. If you already have a lawyer, let your partner know that he can communicate with you through your lawyer. Give him the lawyer's contact information.
- Take along a recent photograph of your partner and of his car (showing the licence plate number). Make sure the photograph is in focus.
- Call the non-emergency police number, tell them who you are and that you have left your partner, taking the children with you, because of his abuse. This will make it harder for your partner to file a missing person's report and will still maintain your privacy.

PROTECTING YOUR ADDRESS

If you leave your partner, there are a number of things you can do to keep your address private:

- Use a post office box or a friend's address for mail.
- Use an alternative address for service of court documents.
- Do banking online.
- Use a post office box or alternate address when applying for credit.
- Separate your credit files with the credit bureau.
- If you are receiving social assistance or are involved with child protection authorities, tell your caseworker about the need to protect your address.
- If you think your ex-partner is also on assistance, tell the worker so together you can develop a safety plan for visits to the office.
- Tell your lawyer not to disclose your address on court documents.
- If you have a job, tell your employer about the importance of not revealing your address to anyone, including co-workers.
- Tell family and friends who visit your home to make sure they are not followed.
- Talk to your children and stress the importance of not giving the new address to their father or their father's family.
- If the children's visits are supervised, advise the person doing the supervision to be alert to the father questioning the children about their address.
- If you and your ex are exchanging the children yourselves, find a safe, public drop-off and pick-up location, ideally one where there are people around.
- Make it part of the children's safety plan not to reveal their address.

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