

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SAFETY PLANNING

during the time of COVID-19

While South Africa is in lockdown to curb the spread of the coronavirus, for some, isolating at home presents additional risks. Know that help is available during the lockdown – for anyone at risk of domestic and gender-based violence. The following are a few suggestions for developing a personalized and practical Safety Plan – for staying safe while enduring an abusive relationship, or when planning to leave, and after leaving – during the lockdown. While every situation is unique, these tips are meant to help you think of actions that work for your own situation.

BE PREPARED



Have emergency helpline numbers/numbers of organisations at hand (such as those listed below). Save these to your phone or write them down on a piece of paper that you keep with you at all times.

Important contact information

GBV Command Centre

- Call 0800 428 428
- Send a "Please Call Me" by dialing *120*7867#
- SMS 'help' to 31531
- 'Helpme GBV' via skype

LifeLine's Domestic Violence helpline

- Call 0800 150 150

MOSAIC

Telephone counselling & referrals for survivors of abuse

- Call 021 761 7585 (08:30 – 16:00)

Rape Crisis

24-hour support including how to access Thuthuzela Care Centres for medical and forensic assistance to rape survivors

- Afrikaans: 021 633 9229
- isiXhosa: 021 361 9085
- English: 021 447 9762
- WhatsApp 083 222 5164

National Shelter Movement of SA

- Eastern Cape: Chrislynn Moonieyan/Masimanyane shelter, 081 247 6056,
- Free State: Sarah Lekale, 072 144 7171
- Gauteng: Rudo Muhasa, 083 684 7737/
- KwaZulu-Natal: Sabera Timol, 072 446 3337
- Mpumalanga: Fisani Mahlangu, 079 310 9633
- North West: Rina van der Berg, 072 348 6526
- Northern Cape: Clair Adriaanse/Rose Bailey, 080 021 2321 or 073 888 8738
- Western Cape: Bernadine Bachar, 082 903 8739 or Joy Lange on 071 906 3949
- General information: Zubeda Dangor, 083 289 9818

Triangle Project

Specific support to LGBTQI community including referrals to shelters. Triangle offers a call back service.

- For information call 066 076 8845 or 021 422 0255
- Helpline, 021 712 6699 (applicable nationally)

REACHING OUT



Do you have a friend, colleague, family member or local organization that you trust and can call on for support/help? If so, make contact with that trusted person/organisation and let them know that you may need help during this time. Secure their support to do so. If they are not comfortable, reach out to others. Delete the WhatsApp/SMS if the abuser regularly accesses or has access to your phone.

You can reach out to multiple people if need be by developing a WhatsApp group. This helps in case some people are not reachable at the time that you may need support. Give that group a "safe" name so that it does not alert suspicion should the abuser readily access your phone. Try to name the group something that reflects what you would ordinarily do in your day-to-day life, for example, "church/mosque group" or "book club".

SIGNALLING FOR HELP



Create a code word with your trust person/group so that people are aware when you are needing help.

If you have neighbours that can help, you can also develop a visual signal that will alert them should you be in distress. Examples of visual signals could be switching an outside light on and off several times, or tying a piece of material around the railing of a fence or a tree or around/on anything that is visible from the outside of your house. Agree with your neighbor about what type of assistance is needed depending on the visual signal. For example, a piece of red material could signal that you need your neighbor to contact the police. White material could signal that you need your neighbor to create a diversion such as ringing your doorbell or calling your cellphone/landline.

If you have children, and they are old enough to understand, discuss this plan with them too.

DELETE SEARCHES/REQUESTS FOR HELP



If the abuser tends to look through your phone or you share the use of a computer at home, do be careful when reaching out for help. Delete your Internet browsing history, websites visited for resource, e-mails and/or WhatsApps/smses sent to friends and family asking for help.

If you called for help, dial another number immediately after, in case the abuser hits redial.

PLANNING TO LEAVE



Pack a bag. If you have children, include items for them too. Items to pack includes your documents (ID, Passport, Children's Birth Certificates, marriage certificate, protection order etc), medication, spare cellphone if you have one, money/bank cards, change of clothing, toiletries, small toys/teddy bear for children and anything else that is important to you. Note that if this is not possible, shelters do having clothing and toiletries that you will be provided with if you need them.

Place this bag in a safe place where you can access it easily. Before you leave, ensure that you have airtime/data. If you do not, reach out to your trusted contact for help with sending you airtime/data.

LEGALLY SPEAKING



Ensure that you have copies or have taken photographs on your phone of any important documents in case you are not able to get hold of the documents before you leave. This includes a protection order if you have one.

If you can, keep a record of the abuse noting dates, events and threats made this will be useful when seeking legal support or protective mechanism like when applying for a protection order. Keep any evidence of physical abuse, such as pictures if you have these.

LEAVING



First, try to determine when is the best time to leave. Can you wait until the abuser is asleep or occupied with something? If this is not possible, create a reason for going out. For example, say you need to go to the shop to buy some essential goods, or, if you have a family member living elsewhere, pretend that they are in a situation that requires your help immediately. You could also pretend to be ill and say you need to go to a doctor. Only do this if you know it is safe to do so.

Know ahead of time where you want to go to. This could be to a friend or family member's house (but, let them know beforehand, if possible), a shelter, a hospital or a police station. Police officers can refer you to shelter too. If you cannot leave on your own, please contact any of the help numbers for assistance.

STAYING SAFE



Apply for a protection order if you don't have one already. Shelters can assist as well as organisations like Mosaic. Magistrates courts also remain open during this time.

Be careful to whom you give your new address and phone number.

After the lockdown is lifted, make sure that your children's schools are aware of the situation and inform them that only you or a person designated by you is authorized to collect your child/children from school. Consider changing your child/children's school if this is possible.

If you work, please ensure that your place of work is aware of the situation. If possible, have your calls screened. Reschedule appointments if the abuser is aware of them. Try to use different stores and frequent different areas that are not known to the abuser.

If you remain home, try to change the locks and think of ways to further secure your house. Let friends and neighbours also know that the abuser no longer lives with you. Ask them to call the police if they see the abuser near your home or children.

Continue to talk to trusted people about your situation, seek trauma counselling and legal assistance.