

*Dr. Marci Batiste*

MAKING

A

SAFE

EXIT

SAFETY PLANNING TIPS  
FOR EXITING AN  
ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

Sponsored by: **9Seconds**  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE  
RECOVERY FOUNDATION

**Every 9 Seconds  
a woman is  
either abused or  
assaulted in this  
country.**

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**DISCLAIMER** This book is intended to be used as a practical guidance tool to provide points of consideration to individuals who desire to leave an abusive relationship or for those wishing to help loved ones experiencing abuse.

**THIS IS NOT INTENDED TO BE VIEWED AS OR REPLACE LEGAL ADVICE.** This book is based on a combination of my own personal experiences, many years of subject matter research, and more than a decade of frontline work with victims, survivors, and families who have experienced Domestic Assault and Intimate Partner Violence.

I am not an attorney. It is not intended as a legal advice or to replace counsel by licensed legal representation. While there are common characteristics among abusers this book does not reference any specific individuals.

Additionally, there is no implication of guilt or innocence, merely my personal experience and observations of various situations. I have made every effort to be thorough and provide accurate information. However, since I am not an attorney, all references to laws, legal remedies and the court systems are generalizations based on my own personal experience and research.

Escaping abuse is a very personal matter and should be pursued with the utmost of caution. What follows are a series of tips and recommendations that may be used when implementing an escape and safety plan.

Specific questions related to the state and federal laws for your situation should be directed to licensed legal professionals in your state.

**The National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800- 799-7233 (SAFE)** can assist you in identifying legal and other resources in your local area. They may also be reached online at **Thehotline.org**.

# Contents

	Introduction	1
CH. 1	Where will you go?	5
CH. 2	Before You Go... Packing your Safety Bag	14
CH. 3	Making It Out Alive	24
CH. 4	Mobile Safety	38
CH. 5	Protecting your Digital Identity	45
CH. 6	National Resources	54

# Introduction

Nine Seconds Corporation is a progressive nonprofit organization with a heart centered mission for the prevention of domestic and relational violence prevention.

Our groups and programs are developed for domestic and relational violence survivors by survivors. Every person on the team, including all of our advocates, and many of our volunteers either have either first person experience with being abused or have been directly impacted by domestic violence, such as being a firsthand witness to abuse in the home or who have lost a loved one to domestic homicide.

Each person has a different experience, a different story, but share one thing in common, which is our commitment and our dedication to ensuring that that doesn't continue to happen. Our mission is to foster freedom from abuse by ending the cycle.

One of the most commonly asked questions and one of the largest sources of embarrassment surrounds the question, “Why don’t you just leave?” At 9 Seconds, we know it is not as simple as just waking up one day and freely being able to walk out the door and into a whole new life.

As stated on the previous page, this book is *NOT INTENDED TO BE INTERPRETED AS OR REPLACE LEGAL ADVICE, FROM A LICENSED LEGAL PROFESSIONAL*. This book is a tool provided help victims and their children break free from abusive homes.

## *Making a Safe Exit*

We recognize that domestic and relational violence impacts the heterosexual and LGBTQ+ communities at nearly equally alarming rates.

The tips and advice in this book can be applied to anyone who finds himself/herself/themselves in a position where they feel threatened and need to establish a plan to exit the relationship safely.

Any reference to her or him is not intended to be considered exclusive, gender references are merely used for simplification of terms and the subject matter.

As the author I am a heterosexual woman and domestic violence survivor. I am writing from that vantage point because those were the shoes that I walked in.

Despite the best efforts of Domestic Abuse Advocates around the world continually shining a light on domestic violence, the numbers continue to rise. When you pile the normal everyday stressors of work, family, and finances on top of a global pandemic, add record breaking inflation with staggering increases to the costs of basic necessities like food and housing, then throw in substance abuse and mental health issues, are we really surprised?

What this tells me is that the work, is more important than ever.

For many people, once they are in the grasp of abuse, it is hard to get out. But we must also be brutally honest, that the decision to leave and how you go about it may mean the difference between life and death.

## *Making a Safe Exit*

This book focuses on providing you with some points of consideration as you begin to formulate your exit strategy.

The information, tools and resources contained in here are provided to give you an advantage and allow you to have a head start so that you can successfully leave the situation in a way that protects you as well as your friends and family who are attempting to support your exit.

This book was created TO SAVE LIVES.

The people who love you, as well meaning as they will continue to say things like “Just Go.” Or “You can come stay with me.” But I know IT’S JUST NOT THAT SIMPLE! No one tells you HOW TO GO SAFELY. It’s more than having a place to go. Even if they offer you a place to stay, often that is not the best or safest solution.

Sadly, statistics show that most women will leave an abusive relationship an average of seven times before they stay gone for good. That only accounts for the lucky ones who get out alive. The other troubling truth is that hundreds of women die every year single year trying to exit an abusive relationship.

While we know that ultimately prevention is key, increasing awareness is important we must go deeper and really talk about if you are in it, how do you get out and stay out safely.

Making a safe exit, begins with making a safety plan.

The following steps are designed to give you the knowledge you need to develop a plan that is customized to your situation and circumstances. Just like no two abuse



## *Making a Safe Exit*

experiences are the same, neither are any two Exit Safety Plans.

But all safety plans should include a review and response for the following 5 points of consideration.

# 1

## Where Will You Go?

## *Making a Safe Exit*

It's not that simple, in fact everything about Domestic Violence and Relational Abuse is complex. Probably the most complex part about it is the decision to make an exit, leave the relationship, and permanently exit the home and no longer associate with your partner. One of the most sobering statistics and strongest case for having a safety plan and exit strategy is the fact that 75% of women who are murdered are as a result of domestic homicide with the majority of those occurrences happening either after they have ended the relationship or in the midst of attempting to end it. Based on that alone, the decision to leave definitely requires planning.

Admittedly however, the caveat to that is sometimes getting out with only the clothes on your back is the only choice you have, and if that's the case, take it. This book is about preparation so that hopefully, if it comes to a situation where you must leave in a rush some of the groundwork has at least been done. No one knows your situation better than you, trust your instincts and trust your judgment.

You know and recognize when abuse is getting worse. You are behind the scenes; you will be the first to notice subtle nuances that indicate the violence is escalating.

Once you recognize that you are done, and the relationship must end even if you still have lingering feelings for your abusive partner. To outsiders, that sounds crazy, but to those of us who have been through it, we get it. All times together aren't bad times, there was once love and affection there, it will take time to process the full range of

emotions, that is normal. Don't let that uncertainty prevent you from taking action ,

You know deep down you have to get out but for most people their first thought is "But where am I going to go?"

That is why this is the first thing for us to discuss because it is often the biggest mental, physical, and financial hurdle survivors must face.

### ***How do you begin the plan?***

**CREATE A CODE WORD/PHRASE:** Creating a code word that can be shared with people that you trust implicitly. The purpose of the code word is to sound the alarm that you need help immediately. The code word/phrase should be something that is easy for you and them to remember but it should NOT BE something that you say on a regular basis.

So, if you send a text message or I call them say the code word or phrase they will know to call 911 and seek seek help immediately. If you can provide them with additional details that is best because it will help first responders know how to approach the situation. However, if you cannot, the instruction to them is clear, dispatch help, explaining there is a DOMESTIC ASSAULT happening and you are in danger.

If you have children who are upper adolescence or into teenagers, you can probably share the code with them. Be mindful that regardless of age, kids can be manipulated, especially by a parent. You don't want to give the code word to a child who may "let it slip" or be excited about having a secret and share the information with the abuser.

## *Making a Safe Exit*

Kids are very, very aware of what's going on in the home so even if they know that abuse is taking place. That's still their parent, and so they may feel compelled to “tell” if questioned out of fear so be cautious when you're deciding whether or not to share the code word with your child.

The objective of the code word is to get help but not alert your abuser to what's going on.

**WHERE WILL YOU GO?** Now is the time to begin identifying where you will initially go upon leaving. This will be discussed in more detail later, but it has been included here as well because that is often the only consideration. As you will see there are many more.

The natural reaction for most people is to go to a friend or relative. **WORD OF CAUTION** if that's the only avenue or option that you have, OK but you must consider two things.

One, typically your abuser is gonna know all of those go to places. They are well versed in your life and habits; they know who your circle of support is. That will be the first place they're going to go look for you. Therefore, it potentially compromises your location.

Secondly, this knowledge could invite violence to their doorstep and may even place the person who's giving you shelter, as well as anyone else who lives there, in harm's way. This is a judgment call for you and for them, based on how on how escalated the violence is.

The recommendation will always be to choose someone other than a close family member or friend. Preferably

## *Making a Safe Exit*

someone your abuser has no knowledge or no way of finding out where they live.

Choose someone that you trust completely to assist you with gathering and storing emergency documents such as birth certificates, identification, court papers, police reports, etc. They can be a huge help with this part, even if you are not going to STAY with them. This information will be covered again later, but this also is important to bring up at this point because you will need access to these documents to begin rebuilding.

You can have them mailed and stored with this friend or family member. This along with emotional support and encouragement is what friends and relatives will primarily be used for, especially if they're in close proximity to where you're where you currently live.

Friends or relatives outside of the city outside of the state. Maybe a little bit better of a resource for you as far as staying with than ones that live nearby, just because they're harder to get to, but that also means they're also harder for you to get to in the event that you need help.

As you begin to go through the process of determining where you will go you want to make sure you consider location in the decision making process. Consider things like:

Physical distance- . How fast can you get there?

Transportation- How will you get there? If you have a vehicle, you always want to try to maintain at least a half a tank of gas in your vehicle. f you're gonna be taking, you

## *Making a Safe Exit*

know, a rideshare service like Lyft or Uber, you need to factor in the time between when you can order the ride and when one typically comes. Because that's not always a reliable timeframe. If you're gonna take public transportation. If you're relying on a bus system, for instance, you're gonna want to have that route mapped out from point A to point B. You will want to know the specifics related to the timing, all of that kind of stuff, because every second counts. And then when we think about where you're gonna go as far as. If you're going to use resources like shelters in your area or. You know, if you're gonna go to a hospital or if you're gonna go wherever you're gonna go, you want to know specifically what the rules are there. And so that's where a whole lot of research comes in. And when we talk about, it's just not that simple. It's not simple.

My team here at 9 Seconds is working behind the scenes as we speak, contacting all of the different agencies here in the state of Arizona so that we can do that groundwork for you. But it is depending on where you're located at there may not be something like that available. And even for us, we have the information. But it's not on our website yet because we're still in the process of contacting the various agencies and it's a long list with a lot of nuances to consider. But as you discover resources and begin to go through the list of various resources:

### **For housing and shelter services**

Admission / Acceptance: You're going to want to make certain you understand what is required for admission/acceptance into the program of facility. For

## *Making a Safe Exit*

residential services some agencies are only accessible with referral from the police or social services agency.

**Length of Stay:** You will want to be clear about how long you can stay. Some cater to immediate crisis response and limit your time to 24 or 48 hours. Others are designed to provide more long-term services. In those facilities you may be granted 30 days or more.

**Curfew/Access:** Some agencies establish curfews for admittance or for coming in for the evening. This is important to know concerning when you can be admitted. You will want to make certain the facility hours align with your work / school / childcare schedules etc.

**Accommodations for Children:** If you have children in your care, you will want to know if they allow children and any age or gender restrictions they have. Some do, some don't. You will want to know if there is a maximum number of children allowed. Again, each provider will have their own rules and regulations.

**Fees/Costs:** You want to find out. If there's any nominal fees or anything involved you wanna find out if there are fees, how do they take payment? Is it gonna be cash only? Do they take cards if they take cards now? You've gotta be careful because that information is tracked, right?

**Location:** Where are you going? How will you get there?

**Financing your Exit:** Ask yourself things like if you can't use your debit or credit cards, where can you stash and save up some cash. This takes us back to the friends and family that you can trust. You may need to have some cash set aside in



## *Making a Safe Exit*

cash with an outside resource, we'll talk about that later but it's an important consideration when deciding where you are going to go. The distance can be a huge factor as it relates to how much it will cost you to get there.

It is imperative for a safe and successful exit that you be mindful of all of the intricacies that are involved in the planning.

You will want to every detail when creating your plan of how you will get from where you are to where you need to be to reach safety and shelter? For how to actually develop your exit strategy.

The good thing is that the individuals working and serving in these agencies are more than willing to help. It is extremely rare to find someone who chooses to do this work without a passion for the people we serve.

When you call be transparent and explain that you are developing an exit or safety plan to leave your abuser. They will be more than willing to help and provide you with information. They may even have some additional resources or suggestions for you to consider. In some cases, there are facilities designated as safe houses where you're not even gonna be able to find them on your own. They are intentionally maintained off the grid. In these instances, having an inside track to familiar with these other resources can be a huge help.

As you gather information be mindful of your home environment as you begin making this exit strategy and pay attention to where you're keeping this information when you find it, how you're tracking it.

## *Making a Safe Exit*

Your goal is to do it in such a way that your abuser is not alerted to the fact that you are planning to leave.

One major word of advice, as you are planning is **DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE ANYONE**. Just because it hasn't reached a certain point up until now doesn't mean that it won't. Upon discovering that you are leaving can be a tipping point that pushes the abuse to a level that goes from bad to 50 times worse.

I don't say that to scare you. I say that to hopefully prepare you. No matter how long or how well you think you know someone do not underestimate them.

Trust your instincts. Trust your judgement. Nobody knows your situation better than you do. But making your exit strategy and making it safe exit does require planning. It is complex. There are a lot of moving parts.

# 2

## Before You Go... Packing Your Safety Bag

## *Making a Safe Exit*

This level of forethought can feel like it is extreme or overkill but it's not.

In the previous chapter we talked about where you will go. This chapter focuses on setting the stage for when you actually make your move.

We are going to now focus on the things you will want to already have in place to increase your chances of not just escaping but decrease the likelihood that you will go back.

We have all seen or heard the stories about people returning to abusive relationships. It actually is quite common, but a big reason is because they find themselves left without the necessary resources.

They don't have a place to stay. They don't have the things they need to take care of their kids in some cases, and then find themselves feeling forced to go back. Not because they want to, or because they are 'in love' but out of basic necessity. If they go back there's a roof over their head, food, access to money, etc.

A sound safety plan is critical to the prevention efforts in remaining safe and staying out of harm's way. It provides the strength necessary to fight the urges and manipulation attempts because you already know your next moves.

Let's take a look at some of the things you can / should do before you go. Think of it like prepacking all of the things that you need to operate your day to day life for at least 2 - 7 days. Preferably all in one bag. However, if you have children, you may pack smaller bags and have one for you and one for each of the children.

## *Making a Safe Exit*

Again, I want to encourage you not to be intimidated. Just his process alone can be enough to keep people stuck. But going through this process can be the difference that prevents you from being forced into interacting with or having conversations with your abuser.

Let's begin...

**Location of your bag:** You don't want to risk it being discovered by your abuser. It is important to think through where you will keep your bag. For some, you may want to keep your bag at another location that you are sure you can get to relatively easily.

**Keep your bag current:** Update your bag as information changes. Documents, phone numbers, addresses etc.

**Write down important phone numbers:** I don't know about you, but personally and I'm sad to admit this, I don't remember anybody's phone number anymore. My brain used to be a rolodex for phone numbers, but technology has made me lazy. If you can relate to this and you also don't remember phone numbers having them written down is huge. This is also helpful if your phone dies or it is taken from you, or the service is turned off.

You may want to keep a list in your bag and also provide the list to a trusted friend or family member. Stashing a copy in your car may be another option.

### **Emergency numbers:**

- Friends and family.
- Nearby hospitals

## *Making a Safe Exit*

- Primary care doctors, dentists, or other health providers
- Schools
- Employers
- Emergency Services (shelters etc.)

**Back up phone:** For some, they opt to get a backup phone. Something small and simple like a flip phone that is easy to conceal but can be activated quickly in case of emergency.

If you choose this route, you still run the same risks if you lose access to the phone so this SHOULD NOT REPLACE THE WRITTEN CONTACT LIST.

But it does potentially give you a backup communication option that You've got a backup way to communicate that isn't being tracked. And once you have the backup device, you can add those phone numbers to that.

True story, when I was assaulted, and I got out of the house. I had my phone in my hand, but I was so discombobulated and confused I called the one phone number that I knew from memory. That happened to be then number of a friend who had the same number for 20 plus years. It was literally the only number I could think of. I had my entire contact list, but my level of trauma was such that using it didn't even register with me. I can't express how important your emergency contact list is.

**Get an extra driver's license or State issued ID:** Laws vary from state to state but most will issue a new ID if you indicate yours has been lost. Once the new one is received tuck it away in your safety bag.

## *Making a Safe Exit*

Again, depending on which state or country that you live in and their rules you may need to go in person to get it issued. Other states allow you to order online and have it mailed for a small replacement fee.

If you have it mailed DO NOT MAIL IT TO YOUR HOME ADDRESS where your abuser may find it or the envelope it came in. This could raise suspicion. So back to that trusted friend or family member. This is another way they can help.

**Secure your passport:** If you've got a passport, make sure that that is someplace secure. Keeping it in your safety bag. On a daily basis I keep mine in a safe, but if I was trying to escape from an abusive situation, that's not the that's not the place where it should be. Because it's not easily accessible.

Packing your safety bag is all about making it easy to leave as quickly as possible if necessary.

**Cash on hand:** When you make your exit. Have some cash on hand. If possible, try to have an average of \$200.00-\$300.00 per person. But there is no hard rule. Some people may have considerably more other will have less. Just do the best you can. Try to have at least \$100 to cover a meal and an inexpensive hotel or a transportation. The more people who are leaving the more it will cost.

**Legal Documents:** Consider child custody issues in this phase. If custody is an issue or could become one you want to be prepared in advance.

If you've been through a divorce or if you're going through a divorce, you've got temporary custody a copy of that

## *Making a Safe Exit*

paperwork should be in your bag. This is huge because you the last thing you want is for your abuser to call the police on you saying that you've kidnapped your own children and you have no proof that the children should legally be with you.

**Birth Certificates:** Make sure you've got the birth certificates for you and your children. Certified copies or the original documents are preferred but a copy is better than nothing at all.

**Immunization/Allergy Records:** Their immunization records will be required for school registration in most cases. For safety of you and the children choosing a new school and may be necessary and you will likely need proof of immunization records. This will eliminate the need to request the from their doctors and then have period in time before you can get request them from a doctor's office. Or if you don't remember the doctor, that type of thing.

**Insurance documents:** This may include life insurance, medical insurance, or car insurance. Keep copies of all insurance cards and policy documents in your bag. For most insurance documents copies are sufficient.

I would also add the provider name, policy numbers, coverage limits on your Writing Emergency Contact sheet with the phone numbers.

I know this sounds extreme at this point but leaving is stressful. You want to reduce or eliminate the need to recall of find things as much as possible. That way if you need it, boom, you got it. This is true under any context or



## *Making a Safe Exit*

circumstance even more so in the case of a grab and go type of situation or.

**Medical Records / Medications:** In addition to insurance documents some may need copies of various medical records. If you take medications daily, you will want at least a day or two in your bag until you can get in contact with your doctor. I can't stress this enough. If you leave on a Friday, and your doctor's office doesn't open until Monday you will want to have enough to get you by for a few days.

**Housing documents:** This may include lease agreements or mortgage documents that prove ownership or possession of property. You may need these in case you're trying to get back into your property because somebody could claim you had abandoned it or had no rights to access it. Your documents will provide the proof and secure your rights.

For apartments check with your leasing office and find out what the rules are concerning domestic violence. Laws across the country vary but many now have domestic violence clauses. You will want to know what the requirements are in advance. For instance, some may require documentation of domestic violence such as a police report or written proof from a physician or social service provider.

Again, this is about making sure you know all of this in advance, so you are as prepared as possible

**Spare keys:** You run out of the house, you don't have a key to get back in, have a spare key in your safety bag. Also, if you're going to go to somebody else's house, a friend, a family member, a coworker, ask them if you can get a spare

## *Making a Safe Exit*

copy of their house key. This protects you in the event you need to escape in the middle of the night at a time that they're not home.

This also applies to car keys. Keep a spare car key in your bag in case you can't reach your primary set of keys.

**Clothes:** At least two to three sets of clothes for you and each of your children. Again, depending on ages and numbers of kids they may each have their own bag for their clothes.

Include pajamas, under clothes, and a couple of outfits. If you're transitioning between seasons, you might wanna throw a jacket in there or winter coat. This can be made easier in warmer climates because the clothes are typically as bulky but if you have seasons, you may need to update your bag periodically as seasons shift.

If you have kids: keep in mind that this will be stressful on them as well. Try to included familiar or meaningful items for them in their bags. This may be a blankie or stuffed animal, game, book, photos etc.

For your kids, if it's something that they use on a day to day to day to day basis, that they're gonna miss it may not be possible to snag in advance. But be aware of this.

You understand what's going on, they don't understand what's going on. So, your efforts to make the transition as easy on the kids as possible as will serve double duty to reduce some of pressure on you to comfort them.

**Personal mementos:** These are for you. Putting baby pictures of your children, family photos of maybe your

## *Making a Safe Exit*

parents or your siblings, things like that. Things that mean a lot to you that are irreplaceable because a lot of times what happens. When you leave, if your abuser retains access these things become tools of manipulation. They know that they mean a lot to you and will use them to hurt you. They will try to bargain to get you to come get them or they will destroy them to exert control and 'punish' you.

Packing your safety bag allows you to make sure you have the things that you need for yourself and for your children in advance while you're still able to think clearly.

Then store the safety bag to someplace where you'll have access to it, but your abuser is not going to be able to find it.

For example, storing in the trunk of your car and your abuser opens the trunk for some reason and discovers the bag. Instantly the situation escalates, or they keep quiet but begin plotting their own next move.

If you work away from home and have an option keeping your bag at work may be a good solution. Just remember you need to be able to access it at any time.

Remember, that goal of all of this is to make the process of extricating yourself from these a dangerous relationship as safe as possible. We want you to live to tell the story.

There is nothing wrong in sharing what is going on and asking for help. Yes, I know it can feel embarrassing or dehumanizing. I know this firsthand. But guess what? The goal is to live through it. I realized that a bruised ego is a small price to pay to keep yourself and your loved ones safe as

## *Making a Safe Exit*

you try to escape and prevent further abuse from happening.

# 3

## Making It Out Alive

## *Making a Safe Exit*

Thus far, we have discussed deciding where you are going to go and the importance of packing a safety bag, along with some recommendations of some items that should be included.

Now let's move the discussion to a critical point in the conversation. The ultimate goal for this book and all of the work is to make sure you GET OUT ALIVE and are able to remain safe while you rebuild your life with a new normal.

This is your actual escape plan/route. Physically getting out. While we are discussing this in the context of domestic violence these same principles can be applied to other safety hazards such as fire, carbon dioxide, etc.

Again, it is important to begin thinking about these things ahead of time. It is important information to have even if you're not quite ready to leave but you know you will need to eventually. Even if you stay in you need to be as safe as possible.

This heightened awareness and planning is also applicable when you travel or stay in hotels or with others. Think of it along the same lines as when you board a plane. EVERY TIME they give the safety speech. They tell you how to fasten your seat belt, even though most of us are well versed in how seat belts work.

Your personal safety plan should be viewed in much the same way. It may feel redundant, but it is about awareness.

If you are in your own home, you likely know this information instinctively, but do not consciously think about it. As you are strategizing your exit, you need to keep

## *Making a Safe Exit*

this in the forefront of your mind and continuously be thinking about ways to make the exit as quick and safe as possible.

**Layout:** You want to the layout of your of your house or apartment. Familiarize yourself with potential exits. Include doors and windows. Be cognizant of location, accessibility, and lighting conditions. Particularly if you will be escaping in the middle of the night or early morning hours before the sun comes up.

- Are you in a single family home or an apartment?
- What size is your home?
  - How many rooms to go through to get to an outside exit?
- Single story or multi-story structure
  - For Multi-story houses/apartments consider what floor you are and identify exits on each floor.
  - How will you get down if it is too high to jump?
    - Can you use bed sheets?
    - Can you get/use an emergency ladder?
  - Are your children able to escape with you unassisted?
    - If not, how will you get them out with you?
    - What about your safety bag/bags? Can the children escape and carry their own bag?

This exercise is designed to provide you with awareness of the fastest path to freedom. So, it may seem extreme to think about it this deep, considering what type of house you

## *Making a Safe Exit*

have, and what floor you are can be the difference between life and death.

Let me give you a personal example of how this works. In my apartment in Arizona, I live on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. I have 4 windows and one door. Only two windows are large enough to escape out of. To get to the door from the master bedroom I need to go down a narrow hallway and to reach the front if the danger/abuser/fire is in the front. My best exit option is my bedroom window.

If I am in my office, kitchen or living room the front door is the closest exit and it opens directly to the outside. If the danger is in the living room, then escaping from my office window would be the only option.

Once I make it out the front door there is a small balcony and a walkway that lead to the external stairs. If I can get down the stairs, I'm safe. If I can't access the stairs, then I would need to jump either from the balcony or the walkway. If I jump from the balcony directly in front of my front door, I'm landing on concrete or I'm hitting my head on concrete and metal stairs, so I would technically need to go down a little ways on the walkway leading to the stairs and jumped down because that's it's like rocks and bushes and I don't.

Hopefully this gives you a visual of how to do your layout assessment.

**Accessibility:** It is important to not how easily you will be able to access the exit point and what will be necessary to get out.



## *Making a Safe Exit*

- Is the door/window typically kept locked?
- What type of lock is used?
- Will you need a key?
- How does the lock work?
  - Is it a chain lock that makes noise?
  - A padlock with a combination or key?
  - Is there an alarm system?
    - Are you able to disarm it?
    - Is the system monitored?
    - Is it visible on your abusers phone?
    - If the alarm goes off who is notified?

If you are considering an escape, and you will be relying on a specific door or window, is there a way that you can keep it unlocked without it being detected?

Remember, at this point we are considering this information as it relates to your own home, these same things apply if you are visiting or living somewhere else, even temporarily. Access to this information can become a bit more difficult when you are someplace outside your normal environment. When you are someplace that you're unfamiliar with it can seem like shooting in the dark but it all about exiting safely. It will require you to become very intentional and more observant of your surroundings. You can practice out in public. For instance, if you go into a restaurant, finding out where the nearest exit is?

As stated earlier this information is all relevant any emergency exit protocols. In fact, the American Red Cross recommends that everybody have an exit strategy for exiting their home. That is because overall, with all of the disaster work that the Red Cross responds to their biggest

need is actually house fires. So, this this process is going to help you in either case.

Which is a great way to incorporate your children into the exit planning and safety strategy. You can teach them using fire safety as the reason for it. It also makes a built in excuse in the event that your abuser becomes suspicious. It is EMERGENCY FIRE SAFETY PLANNING.

### **The getaway:**

#### **Once you get out how will you get away?**

##### **If you are driving, where are your keys kept?**

**Away from home:** Let's say you're on vacation, right? You rent an Air BnB, or a hotel and you find yourself in an abusive situation with a volatile partner. You need to be doing these same assessments in every environment you're in, whether it's a hotel, whether it's a restaurant, whether it's whatever you need to be thinking about these things.

In my case, I was driving in the car with my abuser as a passenger when he began an escalating verbal attack. I could sense a physical attack was imminent. In minutes I had to determine the best course of action that could potentially get me to safety.

At the time I was living in a large two story home with a 2 car garage. I knew my surroundings; I knew the entrance and exit points. While driving I silently devised my exit plan in my mind while I was driving. The plan worked, I reached my house, got out of the car and into the house which I had deemed would be safety since he did not have a key. I had overestimated his strength while in a rage and

## *Making a Safe Exit*

underestimated the strength of the door frame on my home.

After a few attempts he kicked in two doors and proceeded to attack me and hold me hostage intermittently beating over a period of several hours.

The attack took place in the living dining room area nearest the front door. He made numerous attempts to beat and drag me to the back of the house near the kitchen and back sliders. I knew I could not let that happen because of the knives and weapons that would be within reach. Additionally, I had a swimming pool, the potential also existed for him to get me out the door and drowned me. There was also no way to exit the back yard without running a great distance end getting out of a 6 foot fence with a bolted gate.

I knew my best option to get out alive was to remain in the front of the house. I clung to the stair railing for dear life, literally. After several attempts to escape I was eventually able to wrestle my way free and make it out the front door.

The point in sharing this, is to demonstrate how critical your awareness of your surroundings is. I got out alive, in part, because I knew for sure which room gave me the best chance for escape.

Apply these same concepts to your workplace in the event that your abuser comes to your job. This is especially important if you have successfully escaped from the home and the workplace is the one place they know where and when to find you. Domestic & Relational Violence is often a precursor to Workplace Violence. Often people assume that

if they have escaped the home, they are safe and forget their workplace. Abusers typically know your schedule and they know that if they can't gain access to you or find you anywhere else, more than likely you will be at work.

All the same awareness's you must have for home you need for your workplace, and then some....

### **At work consider the following:**

- Is there building security?
  - Is security armed?
  - What is the patrol frequency?
  - Does patrol include parking structures?
- Are you in an open parking lot or a parking garage?
- How far away do you have to park?
- What is the lighting situation in the parking lot/garage if you arrive or leave when it is dark outside?
- Does the parking lot/garage have security or secured access?
  - Is it below ground?
  - Do you park on an upper floor?
  - Can someone escort you to and from your vehicle? (even in daylight depending on the volatility of the situation with your abuser).
- Do you access your job from an elevator or stairwell?
- How many entrances and exit options are there?
  - Are exits locked or alarmed at certain times?
    - Alarmed exits can be a great deterrent to prevent an abuser from trying to follow you out an armed door once the alarm sounds.

## *Making a Safe Exit*

I know I have said it before, and I will continue to say this. I know this is a lot to process and consider. Making a safe exit can be done incrementally depending on how much time you have to plan. But when it comes to getting out alive, we I think of executing the plan in bite sized pieces.

As the saying goes, How do you eat elephant? One bite at a time.

That's how we deal with domestic violence prevention. As well, one bite at a time, one little piece control what we can control. But with an awareness of all the things that go into making a safe exit. I want you to start thinking in these contexts no matter where you're at, if you're at a holiday party, is someone else's house, at work or at the movies. Your vigilance and commitment to this process can make all the difference for you, and those who are around you. Like I mentioned previously, never UNDERESTIMATE YOUR ABUSER.

This is why our motto is It's just not that simple...

We understand the complexities of abuse and if leaving were safe and simple everyone would do it. Nothing about domestic violence is simple. Certainly, exiting a relationship is not simple. It's one of the most dangerous times, and that's why we have to do the planning ahead of time before it's an emergency.

A grab and go, run out the house should be considered only as your last resort. Even in those instances if you have been following some of the planning strategies in this book it will help you exit and stay safe once you've gotten out.

## *Making a Safe Exit*

But also practice your exits strategy, and practice being vigilant and observant outside the home. Practice your plan with your children if you have them.

Practice matters! You want your exit plan to be instinctive. For example, I used to be in banking. At one bank where I worked at, I was robbed at gunpoint four times. We did robbery training every single year. I knew instinctively what to do in the event of the robbery. Although, I had underestimated the effect of emotion and adrenaline that you experience when there is a gun pointing at your head with an erratic gunman shaking and screaming at you.

But I knew what NOT to do, because we had rehearsed it.

When I became a bank manager, we incorporated live mock robberies into our training to prepare the employees for the adrenaline and emotion. Even though staff knew it was a mock set up, the adrenaline still kicked in, emotions still rose up. It gave them an opportunity to see the difference between how effectively they could follow procedures and get an adequate description of the robbers both with and without the guns.

As the violence escalates your will naturally rely more on emotion and instinct than you will training.

### **Safe Exits with children:**

#### **911 protocol:**

If you have small children teach them about 911 in detail. It is important that they are prepared for what will happen when they call. They need to understand what it's for as well as when and how to use it.

## *Making a Safe Exit*

- Teach them what the 911 operator's job is
- Educate them about the types of questions they will be asked.
- Make sure they know their address
- The types of questions they will be asked
- Explain why they need to stay on the line or at least not hang up after they have called.

### **Emergency HELP WORD, SAFE WORD, ESCAPE WORD:**

This will depend in large part about the age and reliability of your child(ren). They will need to be old enough to understand the use of the words, remember them, and be able to know when it is appropriate time to use them.

**HELP WORD:** Means CALL 911 for help. \*When it is safe to do so. Not when the abuse will likely be transferred to the child as punishment for trying to call.

When the child hears you use that word in an argument or fight etc., they know to call 911 and exactly what they will need to tell the operator.

**SAFE WORD:** If anyone other than you comes to get them from school, daycare, events, practices etc. they must provide the SAFE WORD. If the person (even the other parent) does not give them the Safe Word, they are to run to teacher or another supervisory adult.

- One caveat, if you are implementing a safe word for pickups, it is recommended that you notify the schools, daycares, or other care takers. This allows them to know when and how to intervene. Up to and including calling 911.

**ESCAPE WORD:** This word tells your child to RUN! Leave the house and wait at a designated nearby safe place that you have identified in advance. Perhaps a neighbor's house or some other nearby location until you come and get them.

- Once they are safe, they should call 911 themselves or have an adult call.
- If the child calls, they need to be able to tell the 911 operator where they are located or put an adult on the phone to explain.

Again, making sure your child is capable of such responsibility. It is best if it is a place where someone will be background, and I wrote disaster contingency plans.

Stress plays a huge role in how the effectiveness of the use of emergency words and PRACTICE MATTERS.

When I was attacked by my abuser, even as an adult, with many years of emergency preparedness, disaster response training, my first instinct was not to call 911. To compound it his final words to me were that he was going to come back to my house and kill me. I believe him. I did not call 911.

Post trauma review, I should have. But I could write another whole book about why I didn't.

But as it relates to the information contained in this book, these are strategies that either me or members of the Nine Seconds Advisory team have used and found them to be helpful in the exit planning process.



## *Making a Safe Exit*

Everything we do is because we've been there, and our strategies are designed by survivors for survivors.

### MEET UP SPOT:

This is to be used if you get separated during your escape. You designate a nearby meeting place. This is where your kids and you will each go if you get separated.

This can be the same place they go when using the ESCAPE WORD and the same guidance applies. Then they need to know what to do when they get there.

- Call 911
- Scream for help
- Bang on doors

This information has to be drilled into your children.

### **Exiting with individuals who have cognitive, mobility, or audible disabilities:**

Make sure you make appropriate allowances in the planning process for their safety in your exit plan. Getting out alive includes you and everyone who you're responsible for, and so you have to include them in the process.

In some cases, you may have been forced to leave them temporarily until you can get assistance to come back for them. The point here is to HAVE A PLAN in place for what you need to do, so you are not attempting to resolve it in the heat of the moment.

Also include them in the plan to the degree that it is safe to do so without compromising the overall plan. You have to include them in the rehearsals. It's not a one and done.

## *Making a Safe Exit*

Your Safe Exit plan is a living plan. You should constantly be reviewing and updating it as things change.

I repeat.... Practice, practice, practice. If it is just you, practice. If your plan involves others include them in the practice. You're constantly practicing it, you're constantly keeping it top of mind, and you're constantly making sure that your children and anyone else who you are responsible for knows this information.

# 4

## Mobile Safety

## *Making a Safe Exit*

This next section is about mobile device safety. We live in a mobile environment; with everything we want or know is accessible in the palm of our hands.

Typically, on our cell phone we use our phones for to pay bills. We use them to call people to take pictures, to take videos, to record special events, to hold information. We literally carry a mini PC in our pocket. When Bill Gates started Microsoft, the goal was a computer in every home. We have far exceeded that. Not only do we have it in our homes, but we also have them in our in our pockets and in our purses.

The blessing when it comes to Domestic & Relational Violence is that you have access to the phone and the ability to call for help when you need it. On the flip side, because it stores so much data, it also can also be tracked very easily and by extension you can be tracked. Where you are, what you inquire about etc.

As it relates to your mobile safety. Let's take a look at some way to keep yourself safe by keeping the information on your device secure.

Diving right in, the number one thing is if you were in a volatile situation and abusive relationship, consider accessing and storing Exit Planning information using a secondary device or back up phone.

You can get them in convenience stores, supermarkets, and chain stores. Keeping the device, a secret is crucial. Once you set it up, immediately turn the device and all notifications to silent.

## *Making a Safe Exit*

When it is not in use, keep it charged and turned off.

As recommended in Chapter 2 – keep it in your safety bag.

But when we're talking about your primary phone, I want you to be thinking with a worst case scenario mindset when you access or store information in your phone (or on your computer). Consider, what someone can do with the information?

### **Consider who owns your phone:**

Do you own it or does the individual that you're trying to leave own it? If your abuser owns the phone or the plan is theirs, they can gain access to all of your information. Additionally, they can shut it off anytime they want. You have no control, no say so over it. If you have the means, it is important you are using a phone that you own.

If that is not an option, getting an inexpensive backup phone becomes even more important.

**Consider your use of passwords:** Even if the phone or the plan is in your name, but you access it on your computer at home a lot, or if you use just a blanket login and password for everything, they can gain access using your login credentials.

Change passwords frequently and do not store the login on your computer. Biometrics and facial recognition can be forced so an actual password is the most secure.

The goal is to limit the amount of risk exposure.

Limit who knows you have a backup phone and restrict who you give the number to. That information should only be

## *Making a Safe Exit*

shared on a must need to know basis. Definitely do not share this information who are bonded to or easily manipulated by your abuser.

You can use it for schools, medical personnel if necessary but be really restricted in who you give that phone number to, because the last thing you want is for that information to become public information. The backup phone is just for safety purposes. It's for emergency planning. It's for your safe exit plan.

**Code name for access.** This would be for people that are in on the plan and that may have a need to contact you on that number. If they call your phone and anyone else answers, they know not to ask for you unless that person gives the code name. The phone is the first place thing people want to gain access to if they suspect anything suspicious. Because that's where all the secrets are kept, right? Even if there are no secrets, that's the perception is that that's where your secrets are kept.

So, what this would look like if you called my phone, and I didn't answer. You would ask if Stephanie were available? Well, my name clearly isn't Stephanie. If someone who is not in on the plan has answered they will say they have the wrong number. If they are in on the plan, they will respond with, this is Stephanie and you both know it is ok to proceed. If the person who answered your phone says there's no Stephanie here. Then as the caller you would know to hang up. If I see, I missed a call then I would know I need to call you and follow up.

## *Making a Safe Exit*

When I call back, I would say something like “This is Stephanie, I see I missed a call”. Or if you are placing an outgoing call you would ask for Stephanie, then they know it is you and there is an emergency happening.

**Use lock codes.** Some phones allow you to do like facial recognition, someone like fingerprint. They're great, but they can also be used when you're not conscious, so you need to be aware of that.

Using a pin code. Most phones will now allow you to do up to 6 digits. Make sure it is like any other pin that you use. I know typically like ATM's or things. Most things have 4 digit pins. Do at least a 6 digit pin if you can, something that that person is not gonna know. So don't do your birthday or your kids birthday or anything like that. It has to be information that your user is not going to be able to just sit there and figure out.

What can somebody do with this information? What can they do with this data? And it's not necessarily always too. Not only can they find you or track you, but they can find out what was going on in your head. They can find out what you're thinking about, finding out who you're talking to, that sort of thing. So be mindful who you call from that phone.

**Turn off your location:** If you have your location on, turn them off, turn them off anyway. This is for anybody, even if you're not in an abusive relationship. This includes the geo tagging in your camera settings on your phone that you turn off location tagging because what can happen is you can take a picture with your phone, give your location tagging

on when you go to upload that picture to a social media site like Facebook or Instagram, whatever that information is linked to the picture with a simple right click.

**Download a spyware tracker** app that will alert you if someone adds spyware or tracking software to your device. Then you will know it is there and you can choose to delete it. Spyware is designed to remain hidden and run undetected in the background system of your device.

**Use a Virus Protection** There's a bunch of different ones, and some offer free versions. You just have to do some research.

**Change passwords frequently:** This goes for phones, computers, and all of your social media. Platforms. Do not write them down. Do not write them down. We all know this but most of us still do it. If you do, then don't keep them where they can be easily discovered.

Keep in mind these are just some best practice recommendations to keep you as safe as possible while you're developing your safe exit strategy.

Try the library computers to do your DV research instead of using your cell phone. That way you can do your research for legal services, shelter services, housing etc.

If you have to use your primary devices to do research, make sure you have Google Chrome and do the search in incognito mode. You can also turn off search tracking in your settings.

If you're gonna stay safe and protect your mobile safety, you're gonna have to start implementing some precautions.



## *Making a Safe Exit*

And then the final thing, once you have escaped safely and you own your phone plan, you can do a factory reset on your phone and change your number.

This will erase any stored data in there and make it more difficult to reach you. But keep in mind you gotta back up anything that you're gonna need, like maybe address information. Contact information, photos, stuff like that when you do the factory reset, it washes everything up and it makes it just like they can phone in the phone store.

Remember, I know some of this seems a little bit extreme. It seems a little bit expensive, but domestic violence is extreme. It can get very, very extreme and even end up in death and at the end of the day, that's what this book is for. To keep you alive, safe and make sure that you live to tell the story.

# 5

## Protecting Your Digital Identity

## *Making a Safe Exit*

Your digital footprint, your online footprint, and you'll hear different terms for it for, but basically, it's the electronic tracking of everywhere you go online, the sites you visit, and what types of things you look for. The data gets compiled, analyzed, and sold to marketers, advertisers, and search engines like Google, YouTube, and Bing.

They use your digital identity and footprint to give you product recommendations, screen what news articles you get, how your social feeds are managed etc. Every time you logon they know if you are a Mac or PC, Apple or Android, Phone, laptop, desktop. Are you at home, school, or the office. Every move we make online is tracked and managed in a way that gives them information to manage us with. There is really no getting around it.

But for our purposes, we are not fighting Google or Amazon we are trying to keep you safe from your abuser while you develop your Safe Exit Plan.

But the fact that there is so much tracking happening it is important for you to have a broad understanding so that you can protect yourself as much as possible. It doesn't matter why or how you logon or how careful you are, you're going to leave some sort of a digital footprint.

In the case of domestic violence, it's really about minimizing the amount of information that you put out there that an abuser can track down and find you once you have made it out of the relationship. So, you want to reduce that, that digital footprint. In the last chapter we talked a bit about mobile awareness primarily as it relates to how you use your phone and what you are accessing.

## *Making a Safe Exit*

Now we are going to move the conversation more toward your actual computer devices like your desktop, laptop, and tablets. Much of the information is applicable to both since your phone is just a smaller computer.

Think about all of the things you rely on digital services. For example, I do all my banking online. I've applied for loans and credit cards online. I transfer money online between financial institutions via wire transfer, PayPal, or reloadable cards like Green Dot. I access my credit scores and my bank statements online. We utilize online service to send, share, and sign mortgage documents, lease agreements, and client contracts. We store personal, business, and private client files online. Some are on the provider servers, others are in the 'cloud' like, Google Drive or One Drive. Still others, are retained on the hard drive of the device or a backup storage device. At this point even my grocery shopping and other personal shopping is done online as well. All have access levels, login credentials, and varying levels of security.

I use online social sites to connect and communicate with friends and family. I think I pretty much have used all of them either presently or in the past.

Use of Social sites, like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and several online dating apps and sites all leave massive digital footprints. The way they are all run it is hard to even tell who you are sharing your information with. For example, if you say, I only have Facebook, I don't use Instagram. Well guess what... Facebook owns Instagram in fact they also own WhatsApp. So those other sites, even though you have never logged in, or set up a user account,

## *Making a Safe Exit*

they also have your access to all of the digital footprint info that FB has. Just like Google owns YouTube.

I also host a podcast, which is another access point and additional information for my online footprint. If someone tags you in something they are not only adding you to their footprint, but they are also adding to yours.

As you can see, it is nearly impossible to live in today's connected society and not have any digital footprint. This awareness is important from the standpoint of DV and RV prevention so that you understand how it works and can begin to be more selective about what services you access and how you access them.

Once you leave an abuser you want to limit as much personal identifying information that can be found online as possible. The last thing you want after investing a bunch of time and effort in escaping a situation is for that person to be able to easily find you and track you down and discover your whereabouts.

You have to be diligent about managing your online presence. Your online footprint, simply changing the name on your Facebook is not gonna be enough. Likewise, just changing your password on a couple of accounts is not going to be enough either. While both of those things are recommended it will require a more intensive approach to all of it.

Making a safe exit and staying safe after you exit means severely limiting your digital footprint. You need to begin controlling the things that you can control.

Here are some ways that you can do that.

**Get a Private Mailbox (PMB) or PO Box:** It sounds weird when we're talking digital footprint, to start talking physical postal mailing address. But this is key because you want to remove your actual physical address where you live from anything that you access online as well as any personal or business financial records. You can get a virtual mailing address or visit a UPS Store or the Post Office. I recommend the UPS store for a personal mailbox because you get an actual street mailing address that looks like one you would see for an apartment. There are many organizations that do not accept PO Boxes and will still require you provide a street mailing address. By using a PMB you will be given an actual street address that meets this requirement.

This also gives you a place to have documents and packages sent to without disclosing your home address. In most cases they will even sign for packages and hold them for you until you can pick them up.

Now I will warn you, it is recommended that you individually update your addresses and do not do a postal forward to a PMB. It is more work to do it one by one, but it is easier to change the address if you decide you no longer want something sent to the PMB.

I know the USPS forward is more convenient, but this is not about convenience, it is about safety and can mean the literal difference between life or death for you and those you love.

**Passwords:** Again, avoid having them all be the same if you can help it. Mix them up using both upper and lower case

## *Making a Safe Exit*

letters numbers and a symbol or two. Most companies will accept 8 characters, but some require more, and others will accept more characters even if they do not require something that long.

Of example one of my banks requires 16 digits, a mix of upper, lower, at least one number and two symbols.

It took a minute before I found one that I could both use and remember. But now, believe me that is probably the one password I never forget.

Another trick is to convert a short phrase into a password. For example, convert the phrase I Love Dogs! into alpha numeric and add a symbol. So, it may look like 4L683d647! or maybe IloveD647!

The point here, make it difficult combination for someone to guess. This is especially important if you are going to insist on still using the same password on everything.

Don't write them down. You can a digital password keeper to store them all but if you go that route, you really should use a master passcode of a minimum of 16 digits. When you are considering the long passwords, phrases can help you remember them. Trying something like Summer Is My Favorite Season. It doesn't really mean anything to anybody, the likelihood of someone guessing it is pretty slim and even though there are no numbers or special characters in there. It's random. You can get as creative as you want with it.

## *Making a Safe Exit*

It just can't be anything that your abuser is going to know. Steer clear of favorite things like sports teams, foods, movies, songs, musicians, or family members etc.

So, for me, I would never have a password with the Steelers in it or my kids names because those would be obvious things to begin guessing.

**Turn on notification alerts:** This will send you a text anytime someone attempts to change a password or fails multiple login attempts.

**Turn on Multi-factor authentication:** This will require a text or email approval for any sign in from an unknown device or location. Even if it is on the same device. For example, when I was living in Alaska for a few months, any time I tried to access my online accounts I would have to do an approval because I was attempting to access from a different state that I normally used, which was Arizona

As you begin putting these new things in place be mindful of your timing. If you randomly just of a sudden change passwords that your abuser once knew, or they are suddenly required to get sign on approvals it may raise a red flag.

In this case I would begin with just the alerts / notifications so that you can begin monitoring when or how often they attempt to gain access to your information.

Eventually you will need to make the changes but timing matters. You know your situation best, so be aware of what's going on and the uniqueness of your circumstance. Before you go in and actually do it.



## *Making a Safe Exit*

**Avoid shared devices:** This isn't always possible but avoid it as much as you can. If you must use the same device as your abuser, delete the any searches that will raise red flags from the search history. Do not delete the whole history as that can raise alarm as well.

In these instances, using a public computer at the library of one of a trusted friend would be safer.

**Beware of cookies:** As discussed previously everything you do is tracked and stored. Those little alerts that pop up and talk about this site uses cookies. Well, the cookies is simply another word for tracking. It's a tracking mechanism that they say allows the page to load faster the next time you access it, but it will also begin prefilling any information or search boxes that were previously accessed on the site.

That's why if there are certain sites you access all the time it will prefill things like names, addresses, emails etc. based on what has been input previously.

For example. If I go to Google search bar and type in the number 9, it immediately prefills 9seconds.org. It predicts that is what I must want because that is a frequent site I visit.

**Delete your cookies:** After you have completed using your computer. Go to your tool bar, there's help available. You can always reach out with me. You can reach out to one of my support or training advocates at 9 seconds. We have a contact page on the website at 9 seconds.org.

Typically deleting cookies will also delete any auto stored passwords as well as search cookies.

## *Making a Safe Exit*

Cookie and browsing information can be accessed via the 3 dots to the far right of your search bar on PC. If you have a MAC consult the host for your web browsing such as Safari or Mozilla.

# 6

## National Resource Hotlines

## *Making a Safe Exit*

Hopefully this book has provided you with some useful information that will help you plan for your safe exit and stay free and safe once you leave.

**For local resources in your area, you may contact any one of the 24 Hour National Emergency Hotlines.**

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:** The National Domestic Violence Hotline Online: [www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org) or by phone: 1.800.799.7233 or TEXT “START” to 88788

**SEXUAL ASSAULT:** National Sexual Assault Hotline online: [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org) Telephone 1.800.656.4673.

**HUMAN TRAFFICKING:** National Hotline for Human Trafficking Online: [www.humantraffickinghotline.org](http://www.humantraffickinghotline.org) or by phone at 1.888.373.7888 or TEXT [233733](https://text.traffickinghotline.org)

**SUICIDE PREVENTION:** Suicide and Crisis Lifeline Online: [www.988lifeline.org](http://www.988lifeline.org) or by phone or text at dial 988

**Please add these numbers to your phone or include them on the list in your safety bag.**