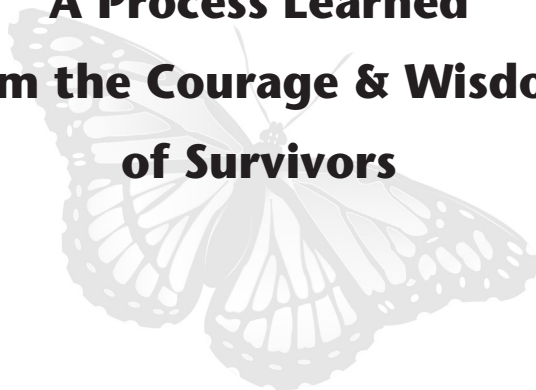




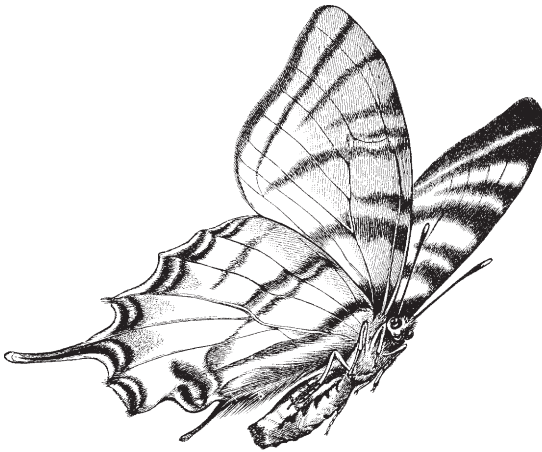
# GETTING OUT

**A Process Learned  
from the Courage & Wisdom  
of Survivors**



## **Dedication**

*To those who shared the experience,  
strength and wisdom they gained  
from leaving an abusive situation,  
and to those still living  
in dangerous relationships*



Published in 2000 by S.T.O.P.S. to Violence.

**For more copies, contact:**

S.T.O.P.S. to Violence  
Box 4481  
Regina, Saskatchewan  
S4P 3W7

Phone: (306) 565-3199

E-mail: [stopstoviolence@sasktel.net](mailto:stopstoviolence@sasktel.net)  
[stopsadmin@sasktel.net](mailto:stopsadmin@sasktel.net)

Website: [www.stopstoviolence.com](http://www.stopstoviolence.com)

Feel free to copy and distribute this booklet.

**NOT FOR RESALE**

# How to Use this Booklet

*This guide offers a step-by-step process for leaving a violent or other abusive relationship: recognizing the abuse, planning and leaving, and rebuilding a life in safety. It is a companion to the video, "How Then Shall We Live," and can also be used in conjunction with the video discussion guide.*

**The Escape Planner on coloured paper is a pull-out easy reference guide of contact numbers and a checklist.**

Those currently living in dangerous situations will find this booklet useful. Many hardships can be avoided by drawing upon the experience of those who have already left, and by reaching out to resources available in the community. It's important to keep this booklet in a private place if you are currently living in a dangerous situation.

Service providers will find this booklet useful for their own information. Keep copies on hand for your clients.

The most important indication of whether or not a person will be successful in escaping an abusive situation is the amount of planning carried out prior to leaving. This guide will assist in ensuring the planning process is effective.



# Contents

Preface . . . . .	6
<b>Part 1: It Really Is Happening to Me . . . . .</b>	<b>7</b>
Acknowledging the Abuse . . . . .	7
Types of Abuse . . . . .	8
Excuses the Abuser May Use . . . . .	11
The Need for Outside Help . . . . .	12
<b>Part 2: Preparing to Leave . . . . .</b>	<b>14</b>
Safety Issues . . . . .	14
Keeping Track of Events . . . . .	16
It's the Law – How Can It Help Me? . . . . .	17
Getting Help. . . . .	19
Escape Plan Checklist . . . . .	22
Packing an Emergency Bag. . . . .	24
Contacts. . . . .	26
What about the Children?. . . . .	29
Important Information for Teens. . . . .	32
Important Information for Lesbians and Gay Men. . . . .	32
Important Information for Immigrants . . . . .	33
Important Information for Seniors. . . . .	34
Important Information for Rural People. . . . .	34
Important Information for People with Disabilities . . . . .	35
Important Information for Aboriginal People. . . . .	35

**Part 3: Leaving** . . . . . 36

Ready – Set – GO . . . . . 37

Letting Others Help You . . . . . 38

Dealing with the Abuser . . . . . 38

Important Information for Teens. . . . . 39

Important Information for Immigrants . . . . . 39

**Part 4: New Life After Leaving** . . . . . 40

Making Positive Changes . . . . . 41

Staying Away . . . . . 43

Communicating with the Abuser . . . . . 44

Keeping Track of Events . . . . . 44

Making Sure Your Children are Safe and Protected . . . . 45

Securing Home and Personal Safety . . . . . 46

Important Information for Seniors. . . . . 47

Important Information for Rural People. . . . . 47

Acknowledgements . . . . . 48

**The Escape Planner on coloured paper  
is a pull-out easy reference guide of  
contact numbers and a checklist.  
See pages 21-28.**

# Preface

The genesis of this booklet was a series of consultations held by S.T.O.P.S. to Violence (Saskatchewan Towards Offering Partnership Solutions to Violence) in 1996-97 in Saskatchewan with representatives of seniors, teens, gay men, lesbian women, people living in rural areas, Aboriginal people, immigrants and visible minorities, and people with disabilities. The purpose of these gatherings was to develop the video, "How Then Shall We Live." The video offers information to people who may need to escape safely from violent or other abusive relationships.

The information in this booklet reflects these community consultations. It is based upon the experiences of people who have left violent and abusive relationships and are now living violence-free lives. In every consultation, each group wanted to acknowledge their own unique and specific experiences: participants identified special needs they thought were not accommodated by mainstream services.

It is our hope that the information in this booklet will assist the reader to identify violence and abuse and to recognize that there is hope and help.

This booklet is offered with respect and humility to honour the true experts on family violence — the survivors, who took the time to share their courage and wisdom with us. I am truly honoured to have been a part of this work.

*Becky Wentzell  
Former Co-ordinator,  
S.T.O.P.S. to Violence*

## Part 1

# It Really Is Happening to Me

*When violence first occurred in my marriage, I truly thought it was my fault and that I should never say or do anything to anger my alcoholic spouse. If I did, I thought he was justified, because in my mind he was always right, therefore I must be wrong. Because I didn't want to think badly of him, I just denied that any violence occurred.*

## Acknowledging the Abuse

"It won't happen again. S/he promised."

"I must have made a mistake, and s/he was only trying to teach me to be better."

"But s/he never hits me, and if I don't have bruises or broken bones this can't be abuse."

"S/he wouldn't hurt me if s/he'd only stop drinking. It's all the alcohol's fault."

"S/he only has my best interests at heart. S/he really does love me."

"If I hadn't said (or done, or not said, or not done) that, s/he wouldn't have hit me (or yelled, or hid the car keys, or beat the dog)."

“S/he is smarter than me so *should* make the important decisions.”

Often people don't realize the situation which they consider “normal” is really one of abuse. Abuse happens whenever one person manipulates or controls another person into doing with her/his body, mind or spirit that which s/he does not want to do.

Any of the following feelings might indicate that abuse is taking place: fear, anxiety, guilt, nervousness, feeling controlled, helpless or worthless.

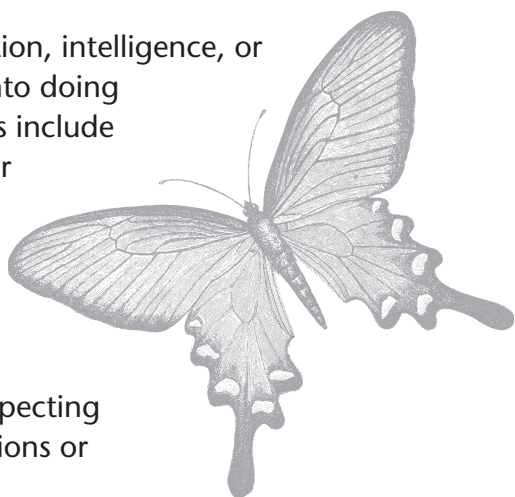
## Types of Abuse

Types of abuse include:

- **Physical:** using any physical force, or threatening to use physical force. Examples include hitting, slapping, punching, pushing, grabbing, shoving, choking, shaking, head-banging, tickling into hysteria, kicking, depriving you of food, clothing, shelter, not permitting you to perform normal bodily functions (e.g. sleep, go to the bathroom), threatening physical violence to you, your children, your friends, your parents or your pets.
- **Emotional:** actions, statements, gestures or behaviour which attack your self-esteem and sense of self-worth. Examples include putting you down, sarcasm, name-calling, swearing/cursing, yelling, blaming, shaming, treating you like a servant or slave, sulking in silence/ ignoring you for long periods of time, being jealous, accusing you of infidelity, phoning you and hanging up,

staring or glaring at you in silence, spitting/urinating on you, refusing to talk, negotiate or compromise, and not calling you by your given name. Emotional abuse also includes threats, for example, to take the children away from you, to commit suicide or murder, to report you to authorities, to disclose your secrets, to damage your possessions.

- **Intellectual:** using education, intelligence, or experience to force you into doing what they want. Examples include criticizing your opinions or accomplishments, comparing you to someone else, trying to force agreement by arguing until you're worn down, discounting, disrespecting or disregarding your opinions or wishes.
- **Sexual:** forcing you to engage in sexual acts or behaviour against your will, treating you like a sex object, having sex with you while you're unconscious, asleep, or intoxicated, withholding sex, rape, forcing you to use objects, forcing you to have sex with other partners, inflicting pain during foreplay or sex, forcing you to watch pornography, calling you names such as whore, slut, etc., knowingly passing on a communicable disease from someone else, criticizing your body, controlling what you wear.
- **Financial:** making you financially dependent in order to control you. Examples include controlling all the money,

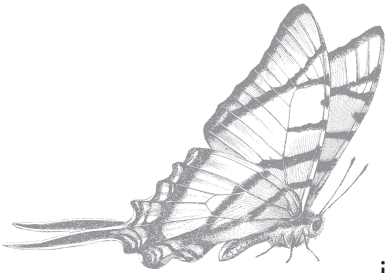


even the money you earn (e.g. by making you ask for money and account for everything you spend), preventing you from obtaining or keeping a job, taking money away from you or giving you an “allowance,” hiding money from you, forging your signature on monetary documents, discouraging your educational or employment advancement, demanding that the family live on too little money.

- **Social:** controlling where you go, what you do, who you see and whom you talk to, embarrassing you in front of other people (e.g. through criticism or put-downs), attacking you for something about your person (e.g. sex, race, intelligence, size, religion, socio-economic status), monitoring your phone conversations, cutting you off from family, friends, peers, education and/or information, reading your mail, criticizing your support system, lying to you about others, taking away or sabotaging your transportation.
- **Spiritual:** All abuse damages the spirit. Specific forms of spiritual abuse can also include using spiritual or religious teachings as a weapon (e.g. “The Bible says ...”) and stopping you from practising your spiritual beliefs.

The common thread that underlies all types of abuse is the *need of the abuser to exert power and control over someone else*. Abuse is no respecter of status, income, or place of residence. Anyone can abuse or be abused: men, women, homosexual or heterosexual, all ages, races, religions, political persuasions, abled or disabled, urban or rural, rich or poor, professionals, students, employers or employees.

# Excuses the Abuser May Use



The first task in addressing situations of abuse is to recognize and acknowledge that the abuse is actually happening. This may be difficult, since the abuse is often subtle and not clearly defined in law. The abuser may have many excuses for his/her behaviour. Most frequently the abuser blames the victim of the abuse for “provoking” it. The following are some tactics the abuser may use to avoid taking responsibility for his/her actions:

- **minimization:** attempting to make you believe the abuse was less than it actually was.
- **denial:** stating that s/he did no actual harm, or that the abuse never even took place.
- **blame:** what happened suddenly becomes your fault; you are to blame.
- **isolation:** just you and the abuser, no witnesses.
- **justification:** rationalizing an explanation for the abuse, e.g. “I was tired, stressed, the kids were making too much noise ...”
- **avoiding responsibility:** what you did or did not do caused the abuse, e.g. “If you hadn’t ... I wouldn’t have ...”
- **controlling the environment:** manipulating people within the environment (e.g. neighbours, relatives) so the abuse is not reported.

- **guilt:** using your past history as an excuse for continuing the abuse.
- **criticizing your mental abilities:** e.g. “You’re crazy so no one will believe you.”

## The Need for Outside Help

In order to even consider the possibility of leaving an abusive situation, many abused people have found it essential to build their own self-esteem first. If you don’t believe you deserve to be happy, you’ll have a hard time leaving a situation in which you are abused. Many have found it impossible to gather the courage to leave all on their own. They’ve needed the support and encouragement of friends and therapists or counsellors to build their strength and resolve to leave.

You may also encounter social pressures to stay, which need to be confronted and addressed. For example, family, religious and social customs may lead you to believe that you are “less a person” — a failure as a spouse or parent — if you leave a relationship. Women, who have been socialized to take primary responsibility for the care and maintenance of relationships, may find it especially difficult to work through these conditioned beliefs. Men, who have been conditioned to be “strong,” often find it difficult to admit that abuse is a factor in leaving. Once again, it is important to rely upon the support of others who have left, and to reach out for professional help.

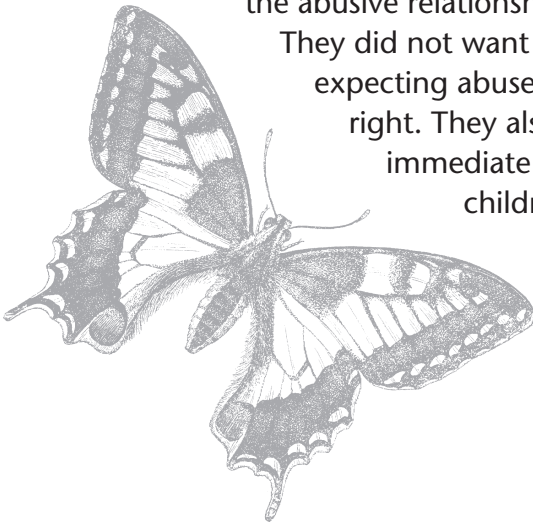
The effects upon children who witness violence and abuse cannot be understated. Research shows the trauma is as

great as if they were being abused themselves. It's also important to recognize that often children are being emotionally or physically abused in a domestic situation where abuse between adults is taking place. Think of what they are learning about how relationships work if they witness abuse or are themselves being abused.

The person being abused is usually totally focused upon the actions of the abuser. Often the abuser lacks the maturity needed to provide effective and nurturing parenting. This means the children's needs (whether physical or emotional or both) are neglected. Neglect is a form of abuse.

Children who have been abused or who have witnessed domestic violence are more likely to engage in abusive relationships as adults than those who grew up in non-abusive households. What appears "normal" in the home you grew up in is what you are likely to repeat in your adult life. Often, the people who have left successfully cite their children as the bottom-line motivation for leaving the abusive relationship and staying away.

They did not want their children to grow up expecting abuse and believing it was all right. They also recognized the almost immediate positive changes in their children once they left the abusive situation and no longer lived in fear.



## Part 2

# Preparing to Leave

*No matter what, no one has the right to abuse anyone. I had to separate my own behaviour from the abuser's behaviour before I could realize that the abuse was my spouse's problem, not mine. I did this by removing myself from the battles. Arguments are useless. Talking to a person who is in a rage is a waste of time. I am taking the unnecessary risk of being hurt when I meet anger with anger.*

## Safety Issues

If you have been physically or sexually abused or threatened, it is normal to feel afraid to do anything. It can take every ounce of your courage and faith to act with strength. It helps to remember that no one deserves to live in violence.

You don't need to decide how to resolve the situation once and for all. Your **first task** is to get out of harm's way. Gradually, you will become free to make choices that are right for you. Remember, your decisions can change. As your situation changes, you will discover more options. Decisions you make today are not carved in stone.

Many people decide to stay with their partner, at least for the moment. Things may get better for a while. However, the abuser must want to change, and seek professional help to do so. Otherwise the abuse will escalate and

become worse. Your safety and your children's safety must come first. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a safety plan.

In order to make sure you are safe at home, when working, meeting with friends, or while going from one place to another:

- Find the best escape routes from different areas of your home.
- Find out if there are weapons and ammunition. Know where they are kept.
- Decide what you will say to the abuser and what you will do if s/he becomes violent.
- Make a list of safe people to contact.
- Work out a code word or sign with your family, friends, teachers or co-workers so they will know when to call for help.
- Keep change or a phone card with you at all times. Memorize all important phone numbers.
- Keep vehicle keys, a change of clothing and personal documents in a safe place where you can get them quickly.
- Remember you have the right to live without fear and violence.

Go over your safety plan and your emergency escape plan on a regular basis. Update your plans when circumstances change (e.g. change in seasons, taking a different job).

# Keeping Track of Events

There are many benefits to keeping a record of what is happening in your relationship. It will provide the information you may need if police lay charges against the abuser, or if you decide to leave and pursue a custody agreement for your children. Most importantly, it will give you the information you need to decide, in moments of calm, what is best for you and your children.

Many people have found the following suggestions to be helpful:

- Keep a daily journal of abuse/ events/contact. List the specific facts of what happened, when, and where. You may want to include how you feel about the events and your fears. If you are still living with the abuser, keep your journal in a place where s/he will not be able to find it. Your journal will provide documentation should you need it. As well, putting down what happened on paper will help you look at your situation objectively, so you can focus on what you need to do next.
- Call a trustworthy person (e.g. friend, family member, counsellor, transition house employee, family violence worker, police) immediately after an incident and tell them what happened, and how you feel.
- When possible, try to ensure that witnesses are present (e.g. if you are being harassed at work).



# It's the Law – How Can It Help Me?

It is important to determine your legal rights when you're not in a state of crisis and you can think clearly.

If you fear for your safety, your children's safety, or the security of your property, talk to the police. They will be able to provide advice about the range of options available to you in order to help protect you from further violence. There are numerous criminal and civil actions that may be appropriate in your situation. For example, police may suggest obtaining a peace bond<sup>1</sup> under the *Criminal Code of Canada*. Or, they may suggest an Emergency Intervention Order,<sup>2</sup> issued under the *Victims of Domestic Violence Act*, as useful in your situation.

Consult a lawyer as you design your safety plan. This is essential if children are involved. Acting in haste could jeopardize future custody agreements and financial arrangements. Ensure your own actions are always non-violent and within the law.

<sup>1</sup>A peace bond is a promise made to a court that a person will live by certain conditions. It is usually issued when there is not evidence to support a criminal charge. A peace bond is available when you have reason to fear for your safety, your children's safety, or your property. It may require the person not to harm or harass you and not to have any contact with you or your children.

<sup>2</sup>This Order may be requested in emergency situations when evidence of violence exists. Specially-selected Justices of the Peace are contacted to determine if the situation is urgent enough that it cannot wait to be heard by a judge. Police officers, mobile crisis workers, victims' services coordinators and community case workers on some reserves can help you apply for the Order. The Order may include: exclusive occupation of the home, removal of the abuser from the home by a police officer, supervision by a police officer while the victim or the abuser removes personal belongings from the home, and a restraining order saying the abuser cannot contact the victim, the victim's children or family.

Some lawyers acknowledge that their profession is uninformed about domestic violence and the legal remedies. You may have to shop around. The legal counsel you choose should be willing to answer questions before you hire her/him. Ask about specific services s/he will offer, fee structure, her/his experience and “track record” in cases involving domestic violence and her/his attitude towards cases in which abuse is a factor. If you are eligible for and choose to use Legal Aid, call for an appointment immediately. Lawyers in the Legal Aid office cannot act for you if the abuser is already a client there.



The Victims Services Program of Saskatchewan Justice offers a range of direct and indirect supports to victims of crime, including:

- crisis intervention (information, support and referral through community-based, police-affiliated and specialized victims services).
- victim/witness services (court orientation and support to victims and witnesses during their involvement with the criminal justice system).

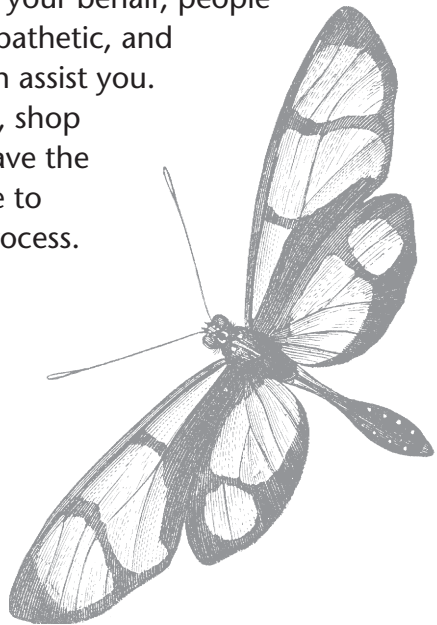
- victim's compensation (payment for reasonable expenses resulting from a police-reported criminal act of personal violence).

The first priority of the Victims Services Program is victims of police-reported crime. Your local police or RCMP, or one of the toll-free numbers on page 26, can put you in touch with victims' services and programs available in your area.

## Getting Help

Leaving an abusive relationship is difficult. Leaving is a process. It is common for an abused person to leave the relationship and return many times. Gather a support system of non-judgmental people who will support you in the decisions you make. You need people who can act as advocates on your behalf, people who are knowledgeable, empathetic, and aware of the services that can assist you. As in obtaining legal services, shop around for advocates who have the knowledge, ability and desire to support you through your process.

Members of your support system must also be trustworthy. You need to know that they will not betray your confidence, or tell the abuser anything you have told them in confidence. It's important to trust



your intuition, and to reassess on a regular basis the “safety” of members of your support network. Be clear about what you need from members of your support system, and what they can expect from you. Obtain their commitment to help when needed. Include people in your network who will give you support whether you leave or stay, and people who understand what you are going through.

Seek out community resources. They will likely provide more people to add to your support network. Be open to assistance from others. Give yourself permission to ask for help.

Develop a safety code word to use in case of emergency, and share it with the people in your support system. If possible, carry a phone card with you. Make sure your support system is large enough so if one person isn’t available, you have back-up people to call. Always tell someone where you are going and when you expect to be home.

If there has been previous violence, keep the police informed of any changes in your situation. Your doctor may be an advocate, but make sure s/he is interested in finding out what is happening to you, not just in prescribing medication.

***Above all, be realistic about the potential for violence and determine your bottom line for ensuring safety for yourself and your children. Develop a support system of safe, affirming people. Prepare a financial plan for how you will live when you leave. Review (and if possible, practise) your escape plan with your children, so you will all be ready if the need to use it arises.***



## **Escape Planner**



# ESCAPE PLAN CHECKLIST

You may decide not to leave. However, an emergency may arise that might place your safety — and the safety of your children — at risk. Therefore it is important to **have your Escape Plan in place.**

Set up this plan when you're not in crisis or panic. Teach your children the signs of needing to leave. Practise the escape with them, much like a fire drill.

## **Here are some steps to take:**

- Decide where you are going to go. Set up an escape route. Find out where you can go to be safe, even if it's only to make a phone call.
- Talk to the children. They need to know which neighbour to run to in an emergency. If they're old enough, teach them the phone number to call and what to say if they're trapped in the house. If it is safe to do so, program emergency numbers into the phone (police, shelter, neighbours, those who will help you).
- Speak with your neighbours and people you trust. Let them know what is going on so they can watch out for you.
- Call a shelter or transition house and talk to the staff. You may want to work out a code word so they know who you are if you have to call them in a crisis.
- Get legal advice now. That way you'll know your rights, and what you should and should not do in an emergency.

- If possible, put aside an amount of money (cash) to see you through a short-term period.
- If you don't have a way to save some cash, ask family, friends, or social assistance.
- Open a separate bank account in your own name. Put as much money as you can into it. Do this each month. Ask the bank to send your statements to your workplace or to a trusted friend, rather than to your home.
- Find a way to get to your emergency safe place if it becomes necessary. Is there someone who can come and get you? Can you take a car, taxi or bus?
- Find someone to care for your pets if you need to leave quickly.
- If you've been abused before, make sure the police know what is going on.
- Find somewhere outside your home to keep your escape bag and important documents (e.g. at a safe person's house, or your workplace).
- Write down all weapons, guns, ammunition and their serial and registration numbers.
- Become familiar with your local shelter. Find out about what housing is available.
- Decide what to take (furniture, vehicles, clothes, photos, baby pictures, personal items).
- Keep your children's daycare, school, etc. informed of the situation.

# PACKING AN EMERGENCY BAG

If you need to leave quickly, it's important to take the documents and other items you may need. You may not come back home immediately. Even if you do, the documents you need may be gone.

**Pack an emergency bag** and leave it with a trustworthy friend or in another safe place you can get it easily.

## **The bag should include:**

- enough clothes for you and the children for a few days.
- medical prescriptions and medications you or your children may need.
- money, bank books, credit cards.
- duplicate house and car keys.
- driver's licence and car registration and insurance.
- identification and important papers (marriage certificate, birth certificates, school records, social insurance numbers).
- hospitalization numbers/cards for you and the children.
- First Nations status card, treaty numbers.
- immigration/citizenship papers, passports.
- medical records, police records, your journal or diary, and other evidence of violence.

- investment information and life insurance policies.
- income tax records, accountant records.
- copies of your lease, mortgage or other deeds.
- your address/phone book.
- a list of the contents (including serial numbers) of your house.
- the children's favourite toys and books.
- your favourite possessions/photos (things that give you comfort).

Try to obtain originals of all the documents. If this isn't possible, make photocopies.



# CONTACTS

RCMP Emergency	1 306 310 7267
Health HelpLine	1 877 800 0002
Health HelpLine TTY	1 888 425 4444
Abused Women's Info Line	1 888 338 0880
Farm Stress Line	1 800 667 4442
Kids Help Phone	1 800 668 6868
La Ronge Crisis Line (Call Collect) (Northern Saskatchewan)	1 306 425 4090
North East Crisis Line (North East Saskatchewan Only)	1 800 661 6349
Senior's Hotline	1 888 823 2211
South West Crisis Line (South West Saskatchewan Only)	1 800 567 3334
Hudson Bay and District Crisis Centre	1 866 865 7247
24 Hour Abuse/Sexual Assault Helpline	1 800 214 7083
West Central Crisis and Family Support	1 800 310 4357
<b>Mobile Crisis (24 Hours):</b>	
Regina	1 306 757 0127
Kindersley	1 877 310 4357
Prince Albert	1 306 764 1011
Saskatoon	1 306 933 6200
<b>Child Protection:</b>	
Regina	1 306 787 3760
North Battleford	1 306 446 7535
Prince Albert	1 306 953 2345
Saskatoon	1 306 933 5961
Swift Current	1 800 567 3334

## **Safe Shelters and Transition Houses**

Kindersley: Crisis and Family Support Centre	1 306 463 4357
North East Outreach and Support Services	1 306 752 9464
Battlefords: Interval House	1 306 445 2742
Fort Qu'Appelle: Safe Shelter	1 306 332 6881
Lloydminster: Interval Home	1 780 875 0966
Meadow Lake: Waskoosis Shelter	1 306 236 5570
Moose Jaw: Transition House	1 306 693 6511
La Ronge: Piwapan Women's Centre	1 306 425 3900
Prince Albert: Safe Shelter for Women	1 306 764 7233
Prince Albert: Children's Haven	1 306 922 4454
Prince Albert: Lodge Shelter for Men	1 306 763 6673
Prince Albert: Grand Council Men's	1 306 765 5300

## **Traditional Housing**

Regina: Isabel Johnson Shelter	1 306 525 2141
Regina: Sofia House	1 306 565 2537
Regina: Transition House	1 306 569 2292
Regina: WISH Safe House	1 306 543 0493
Saskatoon: Interval House	1 306 244 0185
Saskatoon: Adele House	1 306 668 2761
Saskatoon: Crisis Nursery	1 306 242 2433
Saskatoon: Family Healing Circle Lodge	1 306 653 3900
Saskatoon: Salvation Army Men's Shelter	1 306 244 6280
Swift Current: SW Crisis Shelter	1 306 778 3692
Yorkton: Shelwin House	1 306 783 7233

## **Aboriginal Family Violence Programs**

Battlefords: Kanawayimik Child and Family Services	1 306 445 3500
Prince Albert Grand Council Women's Commission	1 306 953 7254
Regina: Circle Project	1 306 347 7515
Regina: First Nations and Family Support Centre	1 306 522 6722
Saskatoon: Indian and Metis Friendship Centre	1 306 244 0174
Saskatoon: Family Healing Circle Lodge	1 306 653 3900
Yorkton: Metis Women of Yorkton	1 306 782 5533

## **Websites and Resources**

- Provincial Association of Transition Houses of Saskatchewan  
[www.abusehelplines.org](http://www.abusehelplines.org) 1 306 522 3515
- S.T.O.P.S. to Violence  
[www.stopstoviolence.com](http://www.stopstoviolence.com) 1 306 565 3199
- Government of Saskatchewan – Ministry of Social Services  
[www.socialservices.gov.sk.ca](http://www.socialservices.gov.sk.ca)
- Government of Saskatchewan – Ministry of Justice  
[www.justice.gov.sk.ca](http://www.justice.gov.sk.ca)

# What about the Children?

Children are traumatized by witnessing abuse. This is true whether they are being abused themselves or not. As much as possible, be aware of their emotional needs. Children find it easier to act out their feelings rather than talk about them. It is even harder for children living in abusive homes to talk about their feelings. All members of the household may be angry, confused, afraid and anxious. Therefore the children may sense that no one is available to listen or help them.



Children may be angry at the abuser. They may also be angry at the one being abused for not protecting them. They may feel guilty. They may assume they have caused the violence by not being “better”. They live in constant fear of more violence. Headaches, stomach aches, bed-wetting, and nail-biting are common. Children may also become violent towards their brothers and sisters. They might react to the abuse through temper tantrums, withdrawal, depression, drug and alcohol abuse, stealing, promiscuous sexual activity, and inability to concentrate or failing grades at school. Sometimes children react in the opposite manner and become over-achievers in school or sports. It is always true that children will be affected in some manner by violence and abuse.

Children exposed to domestic abuse and violence have special needs, including:

- a place they can feel safe.
- healthy role models.
- encouragement to talk about their feelings.
- someone who will listen to and believe them.
- firm (not abusive) and consistent parenting.
- to learn non-violent ways to show their anger and settle disagreements.
- to be able to identify and express their different emotions in a healthy manner.
- to feel okay about loving both parents.
- to feel okay about being a girl or a boy.
- to know what abuse is.
- to know that abuse is not appropriate.
- to understand the violence in the home is not their fault.
- to learn that violence in relationships is not acceptable.

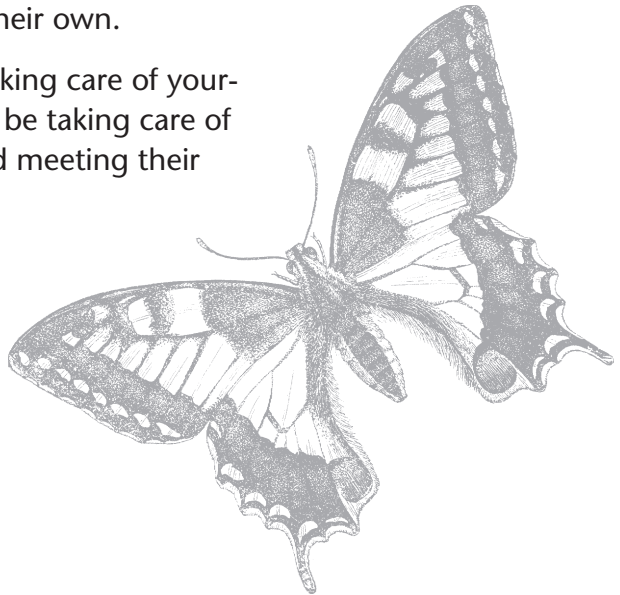
You may want to call upon professionals to help you give your children the emotional support they need to deal with the abuse. Your children may also benefit from counselling. There may be support groups available for children of separated or divorced parents. There may also be programs in your community for children who witness violence.

Prepare your children to leave the situation, or to adjust to living without the abuser. Depending upon their ages and maturity, you will need to decide how much information to give them. Remember that the abuser may try to obtain information from the children. This could be dangerous for you and for the children.

At the very least, develop an escape plan. Have the children practise it. This would involve leaving the house quickly, and going to the safe neighbour(s).

As a parent, you are responsible for keeping the children safe. Many people stay in abusive relationships “for the sake of the children.” However, over the long-term, witnessing abuse, or being victimized by it, tends to keep alive the cycle of violence into the next generation. On the other hand, when abused people leave the situation, and provide a safe, violent-free atmosphere, children flourish. They have opportunities to develop healthy relationships of their own.

Remember, by taking care of yourself, you will also be taking care of your children and meeting their needs.



## **Important Information for Teens**

If you live with your parents, and you think they will be supportive of what you are going through, talk to them and other members of your family. Enlist their help in developing a safety plan. If you think they will not be supportive, find other people who can help you. If some of your friends are trustworthy, let them know what's going on so they can be your allies at school. You may also find it helpful to talk to a school counsellor or trusted teacher. Remember that jealousy is not a sign of love, and that no relationship is better than an abusive one.



## **Important Information for Lesbians and Gay Men**

Understand that an imbalance of power can exist in any relationship. Anyone can also participate in breaking the silence and stopping the cycle of abuse. You may have internalized society's homophobia, which contributes to lower self-esteem and therefore increased vulnerability to abuse. Homophobia also complicates the leaving process, as you may be unsure of whether or not you will find advocates and supportive people. Search out (from Gay/Lesbian centres, shelters, women's centres, crisis lines) potential advocates. Remember, above all, that you have a right to be safe.

# Important Information for Immigrants

Violence is not acceptable in any culture. The following factors may keep you in a situation that is unsafe for you and your children:

- isolation
- language barriers
- lack of money
- fear of division from your cultural group and extended family
- fear of losing your immigrant status
- fear of being separated from your children
- fear of working with counsellors and other professionals who have a western concept of what is right in society.

It's important to gather as much information as you can before you leave. Determine your immigration status, and your legal rights. Obtain information on the *Victims of Domestic Violence Act* and other legal possibilities for help. Find out where you can go if you leave (contact Immigrant Women of Saskatchewan, or an Open Door Society). Put passport and immigration papers for you and your children in a safe place where you can get them quickly if needed. Find out if you can apply for a visa or passport renewal for your children without the other parent's signature. Look for emotional support outside of your community. Find advocates who will support you in whatever decision you make.

## **Important Information for Seniors**

Develop a safety plan together with a trustworthy person or persons. Have a meeting with your adult children and tell them what you are doing. Recognize that they may have torn loyalties, so may not be sympathetic, or able to support you in your decisions. Recognize that it is not appropriate to use them as confidantes. As part of your escape plan, obtain the information you need to change government benefits such as Canada Pension, income tax rebates, and GST rebates. Open a bank account in your own name.

## **Important Information for Rural People**

Do not suffer in silence. A “failed marriage” may not be a failure, but a sign of strength. You will probably have to search for support, as there may not be as many advocacy and helping services available as in urban centres. Determine your unique needs when developing your escape plan. For example, you may not have access to a vehicle, or ready cash, if you need to leave quickly. Can you call on a trusted friend, family member, or RCMP member to help? Keep trying until you find an advocate who can provide the support you need. Search out community resources that can offer support. If there are weapons in the home, record all serial numbers and registration information. Find out where the ammunition is kept and let other people know about the weapons. Know your land description numbers.

## **Important Information for People with Disabilities**

Identify the safe and unsafe places within your home. As part of your escape plan, identify agencies that can provide accessible housing, transportation, and attendant care if needed. Understand that the abuse is not your fault, and recognize that you deserve to be safe. Choose people to join your support network who are available, and willing to help you find the information and resources you need.

## **Important Information for Aboriginal People**

You may need to address jurisdictional issues if you are moving to or from a reserve. Seek legal advice. Find out if self-government legislation gives you rights to protection from domestic abuse. Be realistic about the potential for violence and determine your bottom line of ensuring safety for yourself and your children. Develop a support system of safe, affirming people. Prepare a financial plan for how you will live when you leave. Practise your escape plan with your children, so you will all be ready if the need to use it arises.



## Part 3

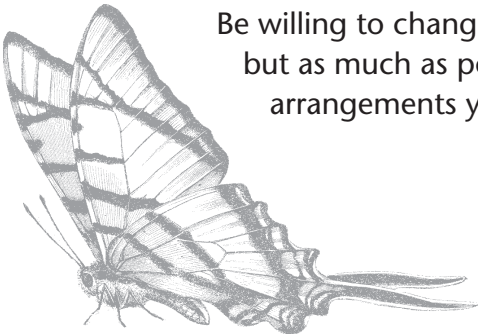
# Leaving

*We are all on a personal journey home to the centre of our soul. Remember, we are all at a place in our personal journey that we find tolerable today.*

The most important thing to do when leaving is to remain focused. If your escape plan is in place, you'll only have to follow it one step at a time. Little steps are easier to take, and will lead to more successes. Practise your plan before you need to use it, so when the time comes, you'll be ready. Remember to stay focused in the present moment, to do what's in front of you, until you are in a safe place.

Stay in contact with your support persons, and keep them informed of what is happening. Ask for help when you need it. Help could include rides, child care, a cup of tea, someone to listen, a reminder of why you are leaving, or any other support that will help you leave in as stress-free a manner as possible. Always remember that by leaving you are taking care of your safety and the safety of your children.

Be willing to change your plan as needed, but as much as possible, stick to the arrangements you've made.



Remember that, without professional help, it is very unlikely that the abuser's behaviour will change. In order for the abuse to stop, s/he has to be willing to change, to decide to change, to take responsibility and to be accountable for his/her actions. You are not responsible for the abuse. If you had the ability to stop it from happening, you would have by now.

## **Ready – Set – GO**

Always carry enough money for a phone call. Better yet, obtain a phone card. Keep in contact with your support persons and know who is away at any time. Have an alternate contact person you can call. Keep your car keys in your pocket. Understand your legal rights and custody regulations. Do not underestimate or minimize the dangers. Realize that you'll be feeling all kinds of emotions during this period. Give yourself permission to feel them, to name them, and to share them with someone you trust.

There is no right or wrong way to go. When it's time, just leave. Try to follow the plan you developed. If necessary, adjust it to the current situation. Keep your safety and that of your children at the top of your priority list. Activate your support system so they can be on call. Make the necessary phone calls so you will be sure to have a safe place to stay.

Remember that there are consequences to all your actions, so don't break the law.

## Letting Others Help You

Make use of the community resources you researched as part of your plan. The abuse is not your fault, and there is nothing for you to be ashamed of or guilty about. Be open to assistance from others. **It's a sign of strength to ask for help.** Surround yourself with positive people. Seek professional help to assist you and your children in dealing with the feelings brought about by leaving, and in problem-solving.

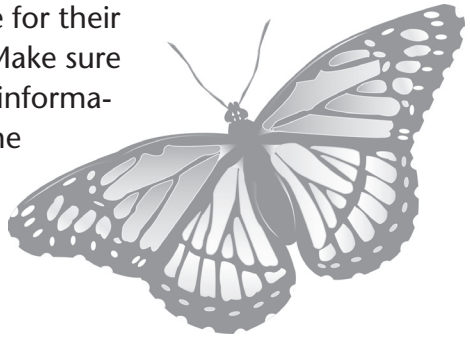
Keep your support network informed of what's going on with you. Accept their support and encouragement.

## Dealing with the Abuser

Once you have left, cut all ties with the abuser: no phone calls, messages via other people, letters, etc. If you must have contact for whatever reason, don't show your anger, hurt, fear, or any other emotion toward him/her. Share those feelings with safe people in your support system instead.

Make a list of all the reasons you and the abuser cannot continue to live together in the violence. Post this list by your telephone. This will remind you to call someone else, rather than the abuser, in those moments you may feel lonely, or think that if you just try one more time, perhaps it will work out.

If you have children, provide for their safety in all circumstances. Make sure they don't give away secret information (e.g. your unlisted phone number). It will likely be necessary to consult a lawyer concerning custody and access issues.



## Important Information for Teens

Be careful whom you tell about your plans to leave. Make sure you can trust them not to tell anyone else. If you have determined that they will be supportive, enlist the help of your parents, other family members, or selected friends.

## Important Information for Immigrants

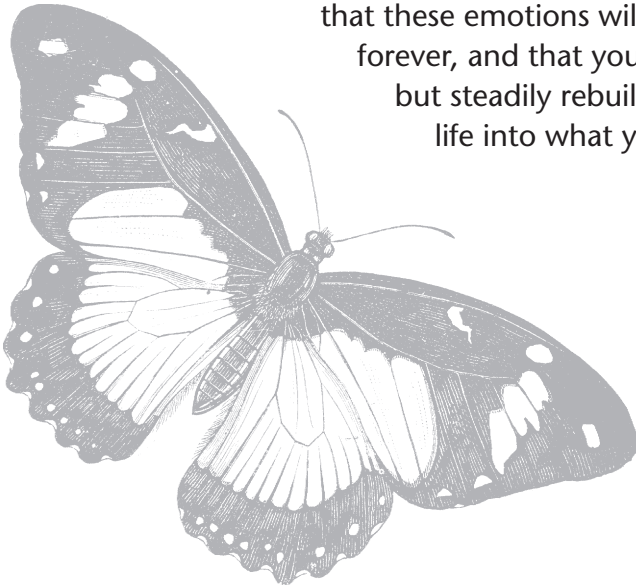
Make sure that your emotional support system is sensitive to your background and your needs. Gather support from officially-recognized agencies that have an understanding of the issues you may be facing. Keep the knowledge that you are leaving between you and the people you have determined to be trustworthy. Your extended family may not be entirely sympathetic to your decision to leave, and it's best **not** to give them information that could be used against you or may not be in the best interests of your children.

## Part 4

# New Life After Leaving

*Today, two years later, having relocated, I have gone back to school and am working on raising my child as a single parent, free of the fear of violence. My problems are not solved, only changed. I have my fears, lack of money, loneliness, and a lack of time, but I feel directed now to use my talents to the fullest and to see my problems as opportunities for growth.*

You will undoubtedly experience many conflicting emotions during the first few months after you've left. You may alternate between feeling relief and empowerment, and fear and loneliness. Recognize that these emotions will not last forever, and that you are slowly but steadily rebuilding your life into what you want.



## Making Positive Changes

As you adjust to your new emotional — and possibly physical — space, it is important to maintain contact with your support system. You may feel like you're riding on an emotional roller coaster. When you're in the midst of change, it's important to have people in your life who can support you through it, provide some continuity, and remind you that you won't feel that way forever. You may want to continue with counselling for you and your children as you learn to solve problems and rebuild new lives free of abuse. You may also find it helpful to join self-esteem and other support groups, and to make them available for your children as well. If you deal with the emotional baggage you carry from the abusive relationship, you are less likely to find yourself repeating the same pattern in future relationships.

Over time, you'll discover that you're developing new behaviours and attitudes. You'll find that you're creating new celebrations and family rituals.

Take a new family photo and notice the new life in your children's eyes. Take time for yourself: explore new activities and discover how you like to spend your leisure time.

You may have some issues to deal with before you can be comfortable in another relationship. This is where therapy, self-help groups and other resources for emotional support become invaluable. Eventually, you will be able to count the following characteristics as your own:

- You accept yourself fully, even while knowing there are things you may want to change. You have a foundation

of self-love and positive regard, which you nurture and expand.

- You accept others as they are without trying to change them to meet your needs.
- You are in touch with your feelings and attitudes about every aspect of your life.
- You cherish every aspect of yourself: your personality, appearance, beliefs and values, body, interests and accomplishments. You validate yourself, rather than searching for a relationship to give you a sense of self-worth.
- Your self-esteem is great enough that you can enjoy being with others who are fine just as they are: you have no need to change them. Nor do you need to be needed in order to feel worthy.
- You allow yourself to be open and trusting with appropriate people. You are not afraid to be known at a deeply personal level, but you do not expose yourself to the exploitation of those who are not interested in your well-being.
- You ask: “Is this relationship good for me? Does it enable me to grow into all I am capable of being?”
- When a relationship is destructive, you are able to let go of it without experiencing disabling depression. You have a circle of supportive friends and healthy interests to see you through crises.
- You value your own peace of mind above all else. You are no longer interested in participating in the chaos,

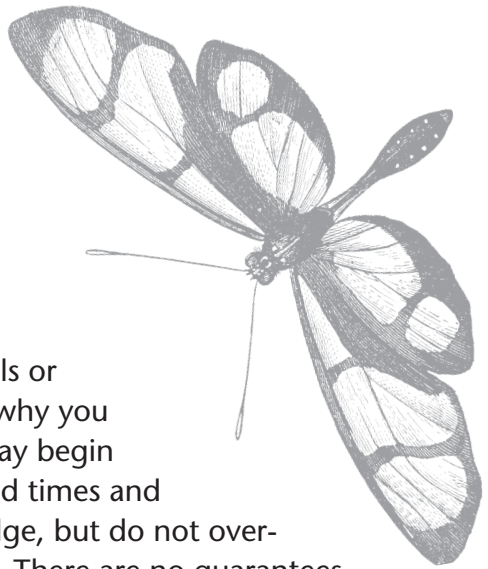
struggles and drama of violence and abuse. You protect your own health and well-being.

- You know that a relationship, in order to work, must be between partners who share similar values, interests and goals, and who each have a capacity for intimacy.
- You know that you deserve the best that life has to offer.

## Staying Away

Make a list of reasons why you cannot be with the abuser. Include all the behaviours and abuse that caused you so much pain. Read your old journals or diaries to remind yourself why you left. Recognize that you may begin to remember only the good times and forget the bad. Acknowledge, but do not over-value, the good memories. There are no guarantees that the abuser's behaviour will improve if you return. In fact, history has shown that the violence tends to intensify over time.

You may want to write down a daily goal and the steps you are going to take to achieve it. Recognize and celebrate each step you achieve. This is a way to build self-confidence to take control of your life, and to support yourself in staying away.





## **Communicating with the Abuser**

Realize that you will likely see your ex-partner again. This is especially true if you have children, and a custody agreement. Until you feel comfortable (for example, for the first year), make sure you take someone with you when you have to meet the abuser. Prepare yourself for the meeting. Practise what you will say, and what topics of conversation are acceptable to you. You may wish to enroll in an assertiveness course to help you gain the skills you'll need to meet the abuser without damaging yourself emotionally, or leaving yourself vulnerable to more abuse.

No matter what happens, make sure you don't engage in any violent or illegal acts. Don't retaliate, overstep your legal rights or break the law.

## **Keeping Track of Events**

Maintain an event journal. Record all contacts and conversations with the abuser. Also record any legal and advocacy events in the journal.

# **Making Sure Your Children are Safe and Protected**

If you believe your children are still in danger from the abuser, inform all people who are in contact with them about the need for safety. These people include teachers, school bus drivers, 4-H, Scout or Guide leaders, etc. Contact daycare and school officials to develop a safety plan for the children. It should include a list of people who are acceptable to pick the children up. Maintain regular communication with the daycare and school, and keep everyone who needs to know up-to-date with changes in the plan. Carry a copy of your peace bond, Emergency Intervention Order, and/or custody order with you, and provide copies to the daycare and school as appropriate. Once again, counselling and support group involvement will benefit both you and your children as you move through this period.



# Securing Home and Personal Safety

Sometimes the violence increases once people leave abusive relationships. It is important to be aware of the possible dangers. You can take simple actions to help make sure you are safe at home and in public:

- If the abuser knows where you live, keep your yard well-lit. Install motion detectors.
- Let your neighbours know you've just left an abusive relationship. That way they can keep an eye out for prowlers.
- Establish check-in times with safe people.
- Carry a personal alarm.
- Conduct a home safety inventory. Often the police will help assess your home for things like curtains on windows, safe and unsafe rooms. They can also help make sure your car is safe.
- Develop a signal to let others know if you're in an emergency situation. This could be using a code word over the phone, banging on walls, or turning a light on in a certain location.
- Change your routine occasionally so the abuser cannot stalk or ambush you.
- Don't keep important documents in your home.
- Know where the nearest police station or RCMP detachment is, and how you will get there quickly if you need to.

## **Important Information for Seniors**

Remember that if your children are hostile, you have no need to maintain contact with them at this time. Especially if your personal safety is at risk from the abuser, you may not want to share your whereabouts with any family member who is not supportive of your decision to leave. You can always see your children later, once you've started to rebuild your life, and they've had time to adjust to the changes.

## **Important Information for Rural People**

Ask for help. Keep asking for help until you receive it. Be persistent. Remember, this is your life and you deserve to live in safety.



# Acknowledgements

Members of the *ad hoc* support committee of S.T.O.P.S. to Violence (Saskatchewan Towards Offering Partnership Solutions To Violence) generously offered their time and expertise. We thank the S.T.O.P.S. Steering Committee for their support and guidance.

A special vote of thanks to Becky Wentzell for her energy and enthusiasm.

Production of the booklet was coordinated by Susan Risk of Live Wire Video Productions, and the booklet was written by Laura Burkhart.

LM Publication Services provided layout and design.

## Funded by:



Status of Women  
Canada



Saskatchewan  
Health



Social  
Services



Saskatchewan  
Justice



Executive  
Council



**Saskatchewan  
Labour**  
Status of  
Women Office



First Nations and  
Métis Relations



Saskatchewan  
Learning

