

HATCHING AN ESCAPE PLAN

For successful independent living

A. PLAN, PLAN, PLAN well in advance

If it is possible to recognize the signs of coercive control BEFORE things get out of control, then ending and leaving abuse behind is easier, so STEP 1 is to

RECOGNIZE the signs of coercive control/abuse

STEP 2: open up a secret, separate bank account that the partner cannot know about or have access to. Put all extra savings into that account, and save for a last and last month's rent

STEP 3: DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT

- Buy small, pocket-sized notebooks and find a safe place to keep them in after you have written in them. Before starting to journal and document abusive events which have happened, save the first few pages for something mundane, such as grocery lists. If the journal is discovered accidentally, perhaps the ex will not look past the first few pages. Do the same for the last few pages.
- -Just as you used to document classroom incidents, document all of these incidents with date, time and details.

STEP 3 continued

- keep all journalling in your own handwriting. DO NOT USE ELECTRONIC STORAGE, as this is too easily lost, deleted or discovered by an abuser.
- Write all details of the relevant incidents, including the names of any witnesses
- as each journal is full, you may put it in a safety deposit box, and only keep the current journal at home. HIDE THE CURRENT JOURNAL IN A PLACE WHERE HE WILL NOT FIND IT.

IF THE ABUSER LEAVES MARKS

- Have someone in a trusted position of authority to take a photo as well as notes regarding what happened. This could be a physician, nurse, social worker, etc. The photo is evidence.
- Hand-written journals are accepted evidence in a court of law; therefore it is important that all evidence is protected until it is needed
- Children of parents in seniors' residences and LTOS can track suspicious activity by hiding small cameras in stuffed animals or other places where staff cannot find them easily.

B. OUTWIT THE ABUSER

- Marshall resources BEFORE you MUST leave, in order to have everything organized when it happens. These resources may include
 - -professionals, such as doctors, social workers, lawyers who specialize in family law and custody, members of clergy from your faith community, psychotherapist, etc.
 - Looking at available housing, including subsidized housing, apartments, friends who might have a spare room, etc.

A caveat with using friends with spare rooms is that they must be TRUSTWORTHY and able to keep a confidence

PLAN, PLAN, PLAN ...

- In order to physically leave your home, you will need help to get your things out. Plan on a day when he is NOT at home, and would be working. Use a “fast-move” company to help you take your things. Note that you should only take “your things” as well as the things your children need.
- **BE SURE TO TAKE YOUR JOURNAL WITH YOU AND ALL OF THE EVIDENCE YOU WILL NEED FOR COURT.**

STEP 3: GETTING OUT OF DODGE

- Plan on a day when he is not there, if possible, and hopefully this is before a physical altercation occurs
- If there is a confrontation with threats, etc., it is best to leave, taking children with you, and CALL 9 1 1.
- Only tell ONE trusted friend or family member that you are leaving, and DO NOT tell anyone else where you will be.
- If it is an emergency, you can try to go to a shelter, but these are often full. That is why planning in advance to leave before the situation gets out of hand is important

STEP 4: DEALING WITH CUSTODY AND SEPARATION

- FIND A GOOD FAMILY LAWYER, one who understands the dynamics of power and control, and who will truly represent your interests as well as that of your children
- Legal Aid is available to those with limited financial resources and is often a good way to access legal help right away.
- You may enlist police to help you serve the separation and custody notice to your ex provided that you witness it from a safe distance. You may also enlist police for a few hours to help you remove things from your home.

WHEN THERE IS THREAT OF VIOLENCE

- Get a restraining order from the police. There is no guarantee that the partner will abide by it, but some will.
- You may also insist that the abusive partner only has access to visitation with your children through the Family Access Centre, where social workers will watch to ensure that the partner behaves in a safe manner to interact with the children

STEP 5: EXPECT PUSHBACK FROM THE EX

- And plan accordingly. He will usually try anything to get you to return, including trying to find your location by contacting family and friends, physically looking for you, calling your church or your children's school, etc.
- **MOST IMPORTANT: ONCE YOU ARE OUT, STAY OUT. DO NOT GO BACK NO MATTER HOW MUCH HE PLEADS, CONJONES, PROMISES TO DO BETTER OR THREATENS. GOING BACK TO ABUSE EMBOLDENS AN ABUSER.**

STEP 6: REBUILDING YOUR LIFE

- Counselling for you and your children is an important step in regaining self-confidence and moving forward
- Try to get custody of your children so that they will be clear about why the family has split up
- Give yourself plenty of time to heal and **DON'T JUMP INTO DATING AGAIN** until you can be sure that you are healed of the emotional scars of abuse. Often this process takes a long time, even years.
- **YOU CAN DO IT HAVE CONFIDENCE IN YOURSELF AND YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM**