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# I want to **leave my relationship safely**

EXIT SITE

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## Preparing to leave

However you've kept yourself safe until now, there may come a time when you feel the only option is to leave your partner.

It's never too early or too late to leave an abusive partner. Your safety matters — if you do decide to leave, it is best to plan your exit carefully.

Careful planning is important because abusers can become more violent and controlling and their actions can continue to pose a danger after you have left too – so it's a time to be especially cautious. Remember: **ending the relationship will not necessarily end the abuse.** Women's Aid is here for you. You are not alone.

Thinking about leaving and making the decision to go can be a long process and may even take several attempts.

Here is a checklist of things you may want to consider in your planning stage:

- Plan to leave at a time you know your partner will not be around.
  - Try to take everything you will need with you, including any important documents relating to yourself and your children. Remember: you may not be able to return later.
  - Try to take your children with you, otherwise it may be difficult to have them living with you in future. You may want to contact the school to let them know what the situation is make sure that the head and all your children's teachers know what the situation is.
  - If at all possible, try to set aside a small amount of money each week, or even open a separate bank account.
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## Making a safety plan

A safety plan will help you protect yourself and your children. It will also help you think about how you can increase your safety both within the relationship, and if or when you decide to leave.

Only your partner can change their behaviour and end the patterns of violence and abuse they are responsible for, but there are things you can do to minimise the risk of harm to you and your children.

You might be doing some of these things already, while others might sound very obvious, but it's worth considering each point because, joined together, they can form a very helpful plan.

**Plan in advance** how you might respond in different situations, including in times of crisis. This includes thinking about different options available to you. Keep with you any important and emergency telephone numbers, such as:

- Your local domestic abuse service
- Police domestic violence unit
- GP
- Social worker
- Children's school
- Solicitor
- Freephone 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0808 2000 247

**Teach** your children to call 999 in an emergency and practise what they need to say (e.g. full name, address and telephone number). You could also teach them the [Silent Solution](#), where a caller can press 55 to tell the 999 operator that they are in an emergency and can't speak out loud. They can also contact 999 in BSL for free by visiting [the website](#) or [downloading the app](#).

**What about neighbours?** Could you trust them to give you shelter in an emergency? If so, tell them what is going on and ask them to call the police if they hear sounds of a violent attack.

**Rehearse your escape plan** so you and your children can get away safely in an emergency.

**Pack an emergency bag** for you and your children and hide it somewhere safe (e.g. at a neighbour's or friend's house). Try to avoid mutual friends or family.

**Keep money with you** at all times if possible, including change for bus fares.

**Know where the nearest phone is** and if you have a mobile, try to keep it with you at all times, fully charged. If you use , Pay As You Go, make sure it's topped with credit.

**Consider your safety options around tech.** It's important not to do these steps before leaving, as they could result in an escalation to the abuse, but it's good to familiarise yourself with the steps. Soon after leaving, change your passwords to something the perpetrator will not be able to guess, particularly your banking and email accounts. If you want to, you can talk to your bank in confidence to let them

know about your situation, they may be able to help protect your account. You can also add two-factor authentication to online banking, email and social media accounts to add an additional layer of security. Two-factor authentication requires an additional login credential to access your account. You should turn your phone's location services off so the perpetrator cannot track you, this can be done in your phone's settings.

**Know the safest place** in your house and if you suspect your partner is about to attack you, try to go there (e.g. somewhere near an exit where you can access a telephone). Avoid the kitchen or garage where there are likely to be knives or other weapons; and avoid rooms where you might be trapped, such as the bathroom, or where you might be shut into a cupboard or other small space.

**Be prepared** to leave the house in an emergency. If you drive, keep your car keys in a safe and accessible place and make sure your car has petrol in the tank at all times.

## If the abuse continues

If the harassment, threats or abuse continue after you have left, try to keep detailed records of each incident, including the date and time it occurred, what was said or done, and – if possible – take photographs of damage to your property or injuries to yourself or others.

If a perpetrator of abuse partner injures you, see your GP or go to hospital for treatment and ask them to document your visit.

If you have an injunction with a power of arrest, or there is a restraining order in place, you should ask the police to enforce this; and if the perpetrator is in breach of any court order, you could also tell your solicitor if you have one.

In an emergency, always call the police on 999. Remember, if you can't speak out loud, [you can press 55](#) so that the operator knows you need help. You can also

video call 999 to communicate in BSL for free [by visiting the 999 BSL website or downloading the app](#).

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## Support services near me

The [Women's Aid Domestic Abuse Directory](#) contains details of local, regional and national services specialising in violence against women and girls including domestic abuse, sexual violence, forced marriage and stalking/harassment.

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## Getting medical treatment

As a result of domestic abuse, you may need medical treatment both immediately and in the long term.

If you have been injured, try to get treatment straight away if possible. You could visit your GP, go to an NHS Walk-in Centre, an Accident and Emergency department or Minor Injuries Unit at your local hospital.

Even though you may feel scared, you can tell medical staff how the injury occurred and ask them to record it. This may prove to be vital evidence in any future court proceedings. For example, if you make an [application for an injunction](#); if there is a contact or residence dispute over your children; or if your abuser is prosecuted for a criminal offence. With your permission, health service staff and GPs can photograph injuries. When signed and dated, they can be useful additional evidence tools in court. If you think you might be pregnant, tell the doctor or nurse as you may need to be examined by a midwife to ensure that the baby has not been affected by the abuse.

This is what you should expect from a health professional. If your experience is not helpful, you may want to reach out to the manager of that service, or contact Women's Aid for some further guidance.

If you are worried about your health and don't want to go to your GP, you could ring the NHS non-emergency number on 111 (available 24 hours). [NHS online](#) provides information on health services and links to other agencies and self-help organisations.

For information on mental health issues, read more about [domestic abuse and your mental health](#)

## Sexual abuse

If you have experienced sexual abuse, try to get yourself to a place where you feel safe. See if a friend or someone you trust can be with you and talk to them about what has happened.

**If you need urgent medical care or attention, call 999, ask for an ambulance or go straight to your nearest Accident & Emergency department.**

If a sexual assault has just taken place and you feel able to report the incident to the police or attend a sexual assault referral centre (SARC). You may want to preserve as much evidence as possible. Try not to wash or wash your clothes in order to preserve forensic evidence.

SARCs offer a range of support services, including crisis care, examinations, emergency contraception and STI testing. A SARC examination can check for injuries, infections and collect possible evidence. If you decide you want to report an assault to the police, they can arrange for you to speak with a trained officer who can support you with the next steps. You can [find your local SARC here](#).

If you don't feel able to talk to a friend or family member, you can contact your nearest [Rape Crisis](#) organisation or call their [free helpline](#) on 0808 802 9999, open 24/7 or [webchat service](#).