

A COMPANION TO THE DAY I CHOSE MYSELF

The Survivor's Guide

Safety planning, grounding, and the next safe step

You are allowed to take the next safe step.

*If you are in immediate danger, call 911 (US/Canada) or your local emergency number.
For confidential support, see the crisis lines at the end of this guide.*

Before You Begin

This guide was created as a companion to *The Day I Chose Myself*. It is not a substitute for professional support, legal advice, or emergency services — it is a set of practical tools you can return to, in your own time, at your own pace.

You don't have to be fearless. You don't have to have everything figured out. You only need the next safe step.

Use whatever parts of this guide are useful to you right now. Skip what isn't. There is no correct order, and no deadline.

How to use this guide

- Print it, or save it somewhere private and password-protected.
- Fill it out in pencil, or keep it entirely in your head — whatever is safest for you.
- Revisit it. A safety plan is a living document, not a one-time task.
- Share it only with people you trust completely.

Part 1: Safety Planning

A safety plan is simply a personalized, practical plan that helps you avoid dangerous situations and know the best way to react when you're in danger. It does not require you to leave — it exists whether you're staying, planning, or already gone.

1. Know your patterns

Think about the moments that tend to precede escalation — certain words, times of day, substances, locations. You don't need to write these down if that doesn't feel safe. Simply noticing them helps you plan around them.

2. Identify your safe people

- ☐ A friend or family member I can call any time, day or night: _____
- ☐ A neighbor who knows to call for help if they hear something concerning: _____
- ☐ A code word I can text or say that means "I need help": _____

3. Plan your exit route

- Identify which door, window, or stairwell is easiest to leave from quickly.
- Keep your car (if you have one) fueled and parked facing the exit, when possible.
- Practice leaving calmly — you do not need a dramatic exit to have a safe one.

4. Prepare a go-bag

If it's safe to do so, keep a small bag — with a trusted person, in your car, or hidden at home — containing:

- Identification (yours and any children's)
- Copies of important documents (ID, lease, financial records)
- A spare set of keys
- Some cash
- A change of clothes and any essential medication
- A charged phone or backup charger

5. Protect your digital safety

- Use a private or public device (library, friend's phone) for sensitive searches.
- Turn off location sharing on apps you don't control.
- Consider a separate, private email account for anything related to leaving.
- Clear browser history if that is safer for you, or use private/incognito browsing.

Part 2: Grounding Exercises

Grounding techniques help bring you back to the present moment when fear, panic, or overwhelm take over. None of these require anything but you — they can be used anywhere, anytime, without anyone else knowing.

The 5-4-3-2-1 method

Slowly name, either silently or aloud:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

Box breathing

Breathe in slowly for 4 counts. Hold for 4 counts. Breathe out for 4 counts. Hold for 4 counts. Repeat until your heart rate settles.

Physical grounding

- Press your feet firmly into the floor and notice the contact.
- Hold something cool or textured in your hand — a coin, a piece of fabric, a smooth stone.
- Name the room you're in out loud: the walls, the furniture, the light.

A grounding phrase

This feeling is real, but it will pass. I am safe in this moment.

Choose your own phrase if this one doesn't fit. Write it somewhere you'll see it — a note in your phone, the inside of a cabinet, a bookmark.

Part 3: Your Next Safe Step

You do not need a five-year plan. You need one next step — small, achievable, and yours. Use this checklist as a starting point, and only take on what feels manageable today.

This week

- ☐ **Identify** one person I trust and let them know, even briefly, what I'm going through.
- ☐ **Save** one crisis or support line number somewhere private.
- ☐ **Locate** copies of one important document (ID, lease, etc.).

This month

- ☐ **Set** aside a small amount of money, if possible, somewhere only I can access.
- ☐ **Research** one local resource — a shelter, legal aid clinic, or support group.
- ☐ **Practice** one grounding technique until it feels familiar.

When I'm ready

- ☐ **Talk** to an advocate, counselor, or trusted professional about my options.
- ☐ **Build** or update my full safety plan.
- ☐ **Reconnect** with one person or activity that reminds me who I am outside of fear.

Leaving may be complicated. You are allowed more than one attempt at moving in the direction of your safety.

Part 4: My Domestic Abuse Safety Plan

This plan helps me think about practical steps I can take to stay safer if someone becomes violent or abusive towards me. I can complete this plan on my own or with a trusted professional.

I will keep this plan somewhere safe where the abuser cannot find it, for example:

- With a trusted person
- At work
- In a password protected phone or email
- In another safe place outside the home

1. If Violence Starts

If the abuser becomes threatening or violent, my first aim is to get to safety as quickly as possible.

If it is safe to do so, I will:

- Move towards the nearest exit
- Leave the home immediately
- Take my children with me if it is safe
- Take my phone and keys only if they are within reach

My safety is more important than taking belongings.

If I cannot leave the home, I will try to move to the safest place possible. A safer room should:

- Be close to an exit
- Have space to move
- Have a door that opens easily
- Have a window if possible

I will try to avoid places where I could be trapped or where objects could be used to harm me, such as:

- Kitchen
- Bathroom
- Garage or workshop
- Small rooms without exits

Safer places in my home may include: _____

2. Leaving the Home Quickly

If I need to leave quickly, I will:

- Leave through the closest safe exit
- Go somewhere where other people are present

The safest ways to leave my home are: _____

Transport options I may use to get away: _____

3. Safe Places I Can Go

If I leave the home, I will go somewhere safe where other people are present. Possible places include:

- A neighbours home
- A nearby shop or café
- A public building
- A police station
- A friend or family member's home

Safe places I can go: _____

If I cannot return home, I may stay with: _____

4. Getting Help

If it is safe to use my phone, I will call the emergency number in my country.

Emergency number (for example 999, 112, or 911):

If I cannot call, I will try to:

- Knock on a neighbours door
- Go to a busy public place
- Ask someone nearby to call for help

Trusted neighbours or others who know about my situation:

5. People Who Can Help Me

People I trust who may help me in an emergency:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

If it is not safe to say that I need help, I may send a pre-agreed message that means I am in danger. Example messages may include:

- "Can you call me?" – meaning "Please call emergency services for me."
- "Can I come over today?" – meaning "I need help or a safe place to go."

People who understand this message: _____

6. Planning With Children

Children should never try to stop violence.

If possible, I will teach my children to:

- Leave the room or house if violence starts
- Go to a neighbour's or safe place
- Call emergency services if they are able

Children and I may agree a code word that means they should leave and go to the safe place immediately, or call emergency services.

Code word: _____

Safe place children can go: _____

Trusted adult children can go to: _____

7. Preparing in Case I Need to Leave

If it is safe, I may prepare a small bag so I can leave quickly. Items may include:

- Identification documents
- Birth certificates
- Passports
- Money or bank card
- Medication
- Phone charger
- Spare keys
- Important phone numbers

- Clothes for me and my children

I may keep this bag:

- Hidden in my home
- With a trusted person
- At work

In another safe place outside the home

Where the bag is kept: _____

8. Phone and Online Safety

The abuser may try to monitor my phone or online activity. To increase safety I may:

- Change passwords
- Turn off location sharing
- Log out of shared accounts
- Delete browsing history
- Check my phone for tracking or monitoring apps
- Use a different phone or device if needed

9. Safety If I Am No Longer Living With the Abuser

If I am not living with the abuser, I may increase safety by:

- Changing locks if possible
- Informing trusted neighbours
- Changing daily routines
- Blocking phone numbers or online accounts
- Asking others to screen calls or messages

Other steps I may take: _____

10. Support

Experiencing abuse can affect emotional wellbeing.

Support services, trusted people, or professionals I can contact:

Important: Abuse is never my fault. My safety matters. I can review and update this safety plan whenever my situation changes.

Immediate Support

If you are in immediate danger, call 911 (US/Canada) or your local emergency number.

Alberta & Edmonton local support

- Family Violence Info Line: 310-1818 (24/7, confidential)
- The Today Centre — local crisis and support services
- WIN House — emergency shelter and support

National Canadian & US hotlines

- Suicide Crisis Helpline: dial 988
- Community social services: dial 211
- Kids Help Phone: text CONNECT to 686868

This guide is offered as a companion to your journey, not a replacement for it. You are the expert on your own safety. Trust that.