

How to safety plan with your children



Formulate a safety plan with your child/ren so they know how to react in an emergency and keep themselves as safe as possible when there is an incident. It's important to use language that they will understand. We use the term 'fighting' in this guidance as this is often how children will describe domestic abuse incidents, but you may choose to use other terminology.

Determine what is safe and appropriate to discuss with your children, ensuring your approach is appropriate for their age and individual needs. Where **possible and appropriate to do so**, it's helpful to incorporate the following key points into their safety plan:

- 1. Go to a safe place** - Is there a safe place where your child/ren can go to if there is a 'fighting; happening and/or they feel scared or worried? It might be a room in the house, such as their bedroom. For younger children, this could be anywhere where the 'fighting' is not going on.

Encourage them to do something that distracts or comforts them. Sometimes older children may want to leave the home while the 'fighting' is going on; talk with them about safe places to go. Many children/young people have mobile phones. If they have one, be sure to include using their mobile phone in their safety plan, keeping it with them in and out of the house.

- 2. Don't get in the middle** - Talk with your child/ren about how getting in the middle of 'fighting' could be dangerous for them. Affirm with them that they may feel conflicted about the fighting and may want to stop the fighting themselves. Tell the child/ren that it is safer for them, and you, if they do

not get involved. If they need or want to stay close by, advise them to stay out of sight, and if possible, to have a phone nearby.

3. **Call for Help** - Teach your children how to dial 999 and what information they would need to give to the emergency services; for example, their full name, address and telephone number. If safe and appropriate to do so, create a prompt card that they can refer to with the details.
4. **You are not alone** - Encourage your child/ren to identify who else in addition to yourself they could talk with about the domestic abuse and any worries that they may have (this might be a school counsellor or other professional or a trusted family member or friend). Help them to understand they are not as alone as they may feel. The person(s) they choose to talk with could be someone who could help in an emergency and/or someone they could seek support from over time. If necessary, you can help to program numbers of safe people and places into their mobile phone if they have one.
5. **You are not to blame** - Reaffirm to your child/ren that they are not to blame for the 'fighting'. Let them know that even if they may hear their name in the fight, it is not their fault.
6. **Explain that** it is okay to love the parent/person being abusive, but not their behaviour.
7. **Create a password** for in the event your child/ren are approached and told that you have given permission for them to leave with that person. If the person is not aware of the password discuss a safety plan with them to act on.
8. **Practice/ rehearse an escape route** with the child/ren when the alleged perp is not there so that if they ever must leave in an emergency, they know exactly what to do. (Think about where they will go/ how to leave the house safely with the child/ren/ consider moving to lower risk areas of the house/ best escape route).
9. **Place to meet-** Plan a place to meet with the children if you get separated, for example, a neighbour's home, front garden, etc.
10. **Safety in school-** Ensure that your child's school is aware of the domestic abuse and any related concerns you have and keep an open dialogue with them. If the police are called to a domestic abuse incident where a child is present, they have an obligation under ["Operation Encompass"](#) to inform the child's school.

REMEMBER - There is not a "one size fits all" safety plan. Each safety plan should be unique and specific to your child.