Safety Planning:
A Guide for Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Individuals who are experiencing intimate partner violence

About This Document

There are many sections to this safety planning document in order to provide a more comprehensive tool. It may feel long and overwhelming. Consider reading only a few sections at a time. Remember also that *any* step you take to improve your safety is important; you do not need to take them all.

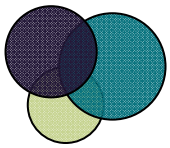
Ideally, people using this Safety Planning tool should write out their answers and notes, to help solidify their thinking and so they can access help remembering their plans if they are under stress, such as during an episode of violence. HOWEVER, it is EXTREMELY important that these notes – whether they be on paper or electronic – NOT be left anywhere where an abuser could find them. Possible places where it **may** be safe to make and leave notes include: your computer at work; on a thumb drive you always carry with you or hide at a friend's house, a public (i.e., library) computer where you can store the answers "in the cloud"[1] under a password your abuser doesn't know; a friend's computer; or at a helping agency or professional's office, such as your therapist's office or your local domestic violence program. It is also advised that any lists of friends' contacts, bank accounts, service options, etc. that you generate be kept separately, to minimize the risks should one fall into your abuser's hands.

The Purpose of Safety Planning

There are some very common, but mistaken, beliefs about intimate partner violence (IPV). Some of the primary myths include:

- The victim[2] believes it is their/zir/his/her behavior that causes the abuser[3] to "lose control." This belief is often fostered by the abuser, who usually blames the victim for "provoking"

[1] GoogleDrive, Dropbox, SugarSync and other cloud-based providers offer small amounts of free storage.
[2] "Victim" may be a word that doesn't resonate with you. This document uses victim to include anyone who is currently or previously experiencing abuse or violence by their partner (from dating partners or long term relationships).
[3] "Abuser" may also not be a word that feels comfortable or relatable. Throughout this document, the use of "abuser" is a date or partner who is exhibiting abusive behavior, power, control, or violence against you.



the victim. That means the abuser doesn't have to take responsibility for their abusive actions. It also, perversely, helps the victim imagine they[4]/ze/he/she has some control over the situation.

- The victim and/or abuser may believe that relationship violence is normal and to be expected.

- The victim and/or abuser may believe that the violence was a one-time occurrence that will not be repeated.

- The victim and/or abuser may believe that it's only domestic violence if it's a man abusing a woman.

Through safety planning, friends, family, advocates, and concerned professionals can help victims understand that these beliefs are dangerous myths and help the victim focus on where they/ze/he/she actually does have power and control: planning for and taking concrete actions that can enhance their/zir//his/her safety.

What is Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)?

IPV is known by many names, including domestic violence, family violence, abuse, and battering. While most people think IPV involves physical violence, it can also include forced sexual activity, financial exploitation, stalking, blackmail, coercion, isolation, harassment, and emotional abuse. The line between normal disagreements or tension between within a relationship and IPV may be subtle. Many people say that it is IPV when one person routinely tries to control the other through violence, threats, and manipulation. If you feel afraid at home or when you are with your partner, there's a good chance you are experiencing IPV. Another sign of IPV is realizing that your partner has slowly managed to isolate you, separating you from your normal supports, activities, and friendships. Abusers tend to do this to make their victims more dependent on them, and to lower the chances that the victim will decide to leave. A third possible sign of IPV is realizing that your partner has made you feel chronically ashamed of yourself or worthless.

Some abusive relationships will only contain one or two of these components, while other relationships will have many, complicated, forms of abuse woven throughout multiple aspects of their relationship dynamic. Any amount of abusive behavior is abuse. You deserve to access support that will help you live without abuse. Everyone deserves relationships that are free from abuse of all kinds.

[4] To be inclusive of all genders of victims and abusers, this document will list multiple pronouns or use "they" as a singular pronoun.

How Often Does IPV Occur?

IPV is very common. A lot of research indicates that roughly 1 in every 4 intimate relationships – be they heterosexual or lesbian, gay, or bisexual; people who are transgender, gender non-conforming, or non-transgender; people of any race, age, level of disability, income level, religion – experiences IPV. Despite how common it is, it is not something you have to live with. Many people grew up in abusive households and never learned that living together peacefully is normal and something they should have. Transgender[5] people, often having grown up subject to others' hurtful name-calling and/or abuse because they are gender non-conforming, seem particularly likely to believe that they are lucky to ever find love, even if that love turns violent. No person should have to be in a relationship that is abusive. Transgender people can and should have loving partnerships that are free from violence or coercion.

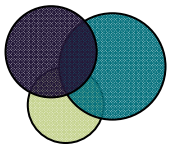
Can Abusers Change?

Some abusers do eventually learn how to have an intimate relationship without hurting or trying to control their partner. However, this is not an easy process and almost never happens after an abuser simply promises they will never be violent again. Instead, violent or coercive partners have to unlearn habits of thought and behavior that lead them to try to control their partners' behavior rather than their own behavior and emotions. Oftentimes, they have to work through and heal their own experiences of having been abused. Then they have to learn and practice new interpersonal skills to a point where even under substantial stress, they are able to control their emotions and behavior, which result in making choices that are healthy for both partners. Making these changes takes a lot of time and effort, and usually requires therapy or other professional assistance.

Some domestic violence advocates urge partners who are being harmed to ***not*** attend couples counseling with their abuser. Their fears include:

- the therapist may agree with the abuser that the victim needs to make all the changes;
- the victim may say something in therapy the abuser may use against him or her later; and
- the abuser may use therapy as just another setting in which to make the victim feel bad.

[5] FORGE uses "trans," "transgender" and "gender non-conforming" as very large umbrella terms that are fully inclusive of hundreds of gender identities, histories, experiences, and expressions. Although this document will primarily use the terms "trans" and "transgender," FORGE includes and presumes that many individuals will more closely align with terms such as genderqueer, gender fluid, bi-gender, omni-gender, two-spirit, androgynous, femme, butch, transsexual, crossdresser, woman of transsexual experience, man of transsexual history, trans man, trans woman, boi, T-girl, stud, aggressor, and many other terms.



However, you know your abuser better than anyone else, and only you can decide if couples counseling will be safe for you and might be helpful to both you and your partner.

For a variety of reasons, many people who experience IPV choose to stay with their partner, either temporarily or permanently. (Individuals who experience harm from their partners also frequently leave and then return, sometimes more than once before they are able to permanently stay away.) If this is true for you, you can and should think about how you can lower the chances of you and/or your children and pets being harmed by your abusive partner. Safety planning can help you do this.

What Is a Safety Plan?[6]

A Safety Plan is a set of actions you can take if you stay with the abuser, while preparing to leave the abuser, and/or after you have left. This document will help you identify ways of being more prepared to keep yourself (and your children and pets, if you have them) safe. Work through the sections in this safety planning tool that are relevant to you – by yourself, or ideally with a friend, advocate or provider.

Remember that a Safety Plan can't prevent abuse, because that's under the control of the abusive partner (no matter how much they claim you provoked it). But if you:

- Plan what to do ahead of time;
- Prepare to carry out your plan; and
- Rehearse the steps you need to take…

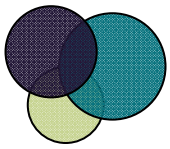
you are far more likely to be successful at avoiding the worst.

Note that the suggestions in this Safety Plan are written for a wide range of situations. You know your situation best, so make sure you think through what is best *for you* and make whatever changes or additions feel right to you.

Laying the Groundwork

You can't always predict an incidence of violence, and many victims find that they are either gradually or suddenly being subjected to much worse violence than they were at first. For both

[6] FORGE is grateful for other LGBTQ organizations who have constructed safety plans. Some content in this document has been adopted from the online Safety Planning guide of the Gay Men's Domestic Violence Project (http://gmdvp.org/domestic-violence/safety-planning) and the "Intimate Partner Violence Safety Plan" developed by Outfront Minnesota (http://www.outfront.org/programs/avp).



these reasons, seriously consider laying important groundwork that may later prove lifesaving, even if you think your current situation doesn't warrant such measures.

Identify service and support options. Find out what domestic violence services are offered in your area, and what their phone numbers are. There are over 40 LGBTQ[7] anti-violence programs (AVPs) across the country. AVPs exist to support people who have or are experiencing abuse or assault. They work hard to identify local, state and regional resources for LGBTQ people who have experienced violence and need help. You can find a list of the AVPs at http://www.avp.org/storage/documents/NCAVP_member_and_affiliate_list_October_2012.pdf). If one is near you (in your state or region), include them first on your resource list.

Identify other local domestic violence services. One place to start looking for referrals is The National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233). (Their TTY number is 1-800-787-3224).

When you are ready to call an AVP, the National Domestic Violence Hotline, or any other DV program, call them from a safe place (see "Become aware of your electronic trail," below) and find out what their policies are about serving transgender people and what services, if any, they may be able to offer you while you remain with your abuser and/or if you choose to leave.

Start a dated journal of your abuse. Include threats, stalking, and destruction of property. Add photos if you can. This information will be useful in securing a restraining order or any other legal action you may need to take later on. Obviously, it is critical that this journal be kept somewhere where your abuser will never find it. Consider renting a safety deposit box to keep hard copies of journal entries or photos. A second relatively secure option is to use a password protected cloud-based electronic file service, so no electronic file is on your computer's hard drive, and no photos are on your phone or hard drive.

Begin recruiting supporters and develop code words. Transgender people may need to think very carefully about who they know who they can trust to keep confidential information from the abuser. Such individuals may be friends (particularly if they are not also friends with the abuser), neighbors, co-workers, or other people you know. When you identify such individuals, begin sharing your situation and ask them specifically if they would be willing to help you if the situation got worse. Set up a code word or phrase that will tell them you are in danger and need them to call for help (make sure you are

[7] LGBTQ = Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning

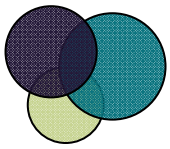
explicit about what kind of help you want them to call). Find out if they would be able to offer other concrete help such as housing you in an emergency, storing duplicate copies of important papers, or keeping your safety bag of packed clothes/supplies.

Stock your wallet and its backup. Keep your wallet with important identification, credit cards, and other material with you at all times. Make copies of critical documents and account numbers and keep them someplace safe, such as a friend's house, at work, or in a password protected computer file stored outside of the house. A following list includes most of the documents you might need if you leave for a lengthy period of time:

- Driver's license/state identification card, car registration, and proof of insurance
- Work ID/work permit
- Health care insurance or Medicaid/Medicare ID cards
- Social Security card
- Birth certificate
- Passport
- Green card, visa, or other immigration papers
- Carry letter if your identification has not been completely updated
- Surgeon's letter if your identification has not been completely updated
- Court order for name/gender change
- Copies of any restraining order, if you have obtained one
- Welfare identification
- Lease or home deed, house or renters insurance information
- Children's identification/adoption records
- Paternity or custody records
- School and vaccination records (self and children)
- Marriage license or divorce papers
- Medical records
- Other court documents
- List of possible service organizations (see Laying the Groundwork)
- List of friends' and therapist's addresses and phone numbers

It is common for abusers to become angry and increase the level of violence when their partner leaves, even if they intend to come back. Leaving is therefore a very dangerous time for victims. Begin planning for this eventuality by developing **two useful habits**.

1. **Become aware of your electronic trail.** With many people carrying cell phones that can be tracked by GPS and using computers that keep traces of users' searches and communications, it is becoming increasingly easy for knowledgeable individuals who wish to control or stalk their partners to track down where their victims have gone.



Your travels may be traceable through credit card bills, debit card statements, your cell phone, and, of course, your social media updates. If you search for shelters on your home computer or a tablet you leave behind, your abuser may be able to learn where you might be. Don't trust your cell phone to keep all of your friends' and resources' phone numbers (it might be left behind or broken), but don't leave a paper or computerized directory around where your abuser can find it, either. Make sure you have multiple ways of accessing important numbers, and that they are kept in places your abuser doesn't have access to, like at friends' houses, work, or electronic storage not accessed by computers/phones at home. Whenever possible, do your resource scouting at public computers and/or public phones, or borrow a friend's. Hide critical computerized information behind passwords your abuser would never guess, not your usual ones.

2. **Develop habits that regularly take you out of the home.** Develop a regular habit that takes you out of the house, such as daily taking out the garbage, going for a walk, or getting a newspaper. This activity can be used as an excuse to leave if you have warning that abuse is about to occur. Or if you are planning to leave, the activity can be a safe way to get out of the home.

Staying Safe at Home

Scout out your home. Sometimes when it's not possible to avoid a peak violent episode, a victim can still maneuver that outburst to a safer spot.

You want to avoid:

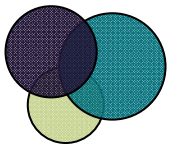
- Being cornered in closets, small spaces, or bathrooms;
- Rooms where weapons (guns) or potential weapons (knives, fireplace tools, or fire extinguishers) are stored; and
- Stairways, unless you are using them to flee the home.

You do want:

- Rooms with a phone and/or a door or window you can escape out of.

Try not to have your abuser standing between you and an exit. Think ahead. Before an incident, practice how to get out. Teach the escape plan to your children, if you have any. If you live in a tall building, consider what elevators, stairwells, or fire escapes you can use.

Recruit your neighbors. While some trans and gender non-conforming people do not feel like calling the police is helpful, others do. If you do want the police called when you are in



danger, consider talking to trustworthy neighbors and asking them to call the police if they hear suspicious noises coming from your house. You may also want to develop a code phrase or visible sign (like a towel hung in a window) that will signal them that you are in trouble and want them to call the police.

Emergency Safety Bag

Abuse can get worse over time or quite suddenly. If you have ever felt in danger from your abuser, consider preparing an "emergency safety bag" that can save you precious time if you suddenly need to leave your home. This bag should be stored in a safe and easily accessible place, such as a friend's or family member's home, at work, in a car trunk, or any place to which the abuser will not have access.

Possible contents include:

Finances

- Cash
- Credit cards and ATM cards[8]
- Checks[9]

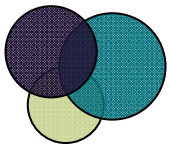
Essential resources

- Keys to car, house, work, safety deposit/post office boxes
- List of possible service organizations (see Laying the Groundwork)
- List of friends' and therapist's addresses and phone numbers
- Spare glasses or contact lenses
- Medications, prescriptions, contact information for doctor(s) and pharmacy
- Cell phone and charger[10]
- Any assistive devices you need
- Photos of the abuser
- Your journal of abuse, if you do not already store it elsewhere, and/or photos of injuries your partner has inflicted on you
- Public transportation schedule

[8] If your credit card and bank charges statements go to an address you share with the abuser, they can be used by the abuser to trace where you are. Ideally, change the address where these statements go so they do not fall into your abuser's hands. If the accounts are in both names, the abusive partner can still request access to the account information from the bank. It is safest to consider using only cash and/or opening new accounts if you leave.

[9] See above.

[10] Your cell phone may have a GPS that your abuser can use to track you. You definitely do not want to leave your cell phone where your abuser has access to it – it will contain too much information about your friends and contacts – but it may be safer for you to stash it someplace after you leave and purchase a new, limited-use phone. You can also ask a domestic violence program to assist you in obtaining a free cell phone that can only dial 911 in emergencies.



Identification and paperwork

- Driver's license/state identification card, car registration, and proof of insurance
- Work ID/work permit
- Carry letter if your identification has not been completely updated
- Surgeon's letter if your identification has not been completely updated
- Health care insurance or Medicaid/Medicare ID cards
- Social Security card
- Birth certificate
- Passport
- Green card, visa, or other immigration papers
- Court order for name/change change
- Copies of any restraining order, if you have obtained one
- Welfare identification
- Lease or home deed, house or renters insurance information
- Children's identification/adoption records
- Paternity or custody records
- School and vaccination records (self and children)
- Marriage license or divorce papers
- Medical records
- Other court documents

Hormones and prosthetics

- Hormones, prescriptions, contact information for doctor and pharmacy
- Binders
- Stand to urinate devices
- Packies or penile prosthetics
- Wigs
- Gaffing materials
- Shaving/plucking tools
- Breast/hip forms or other feminizing prosthetics
- Makeup

Clothing

- Change of clothes and shoes
- Note: if you have difficulty finding clothes and/or shoes in your size, consider buying extra items when you find them and asking friends or colleagues to keep them for you. Also add your favorite clothing sources to the list of addresses and phone numbers you take with you.

Other things to consider taking

- Jewelry, personal photographs, and other valuables
- Personal items that bring you comfort or peace
- Small saleable items
- Items of special sentimental value

If you do leave and you have the time, clear the browser history on any computer left where the abuser can access it.

Note that if you want to leave, you do not have to wait for the violence to escalate or something terrible to happen. It's ok for you to go whenever you want to or can.

Financial Planning

Many transgender people are living paycheck (or benefits check) to paycheck and find it extremely difficult to put aside money that can be used in an emergency. Whatever you can put aside, however, even if it is just the change from your pocket every day, will increase your options should the abuse you have experienced gets worse.

Just as important, you can take some steps now to make you safer in the future. Remember that account information now typically includes all uses of your debit card as well as checks, and can be accessed online as well as by mail and in person; if your abuser shares your account(s) or even simply knows your passwords, they/ze/he/she may be able to access information that might help track down where you are if you leave. Therefore, if possible, open a new account that does not have your abuser's name on it, and have the statements sent to an address you do not share with the abuser (such as a post office box). (Alternatively, find an online bank that doesn't send statements at all. Make sure, however, that you use a password your abuser doesn't know and wouldn't guess.) Use only this account if you leave your abuser.

Also pay attention to what happens to paperwork concerning any large asset you both own, such as a house or other property. Abusers may work to put assets in their names only, often offering very convincing reasons why this is a good idea (tax benefits, avoiding potential problems with antagonistic family members, avoiding the confusion that might result if you are planning to change your name, etc.). Given how few transgender people are protected by marriage and/or community property laws, allowing any asset to be held only in your abuser's name may mean you will lose whatever equity you put into the asset. Make sure you consult a trans-knowledgeable lawyer so that assets are held in a way that protects you and your interests.

If you hold any joint credit cards with your abuser, find out which ones you are liable for and make sure you monitor how much your abuser charges to them. You can request one free credit report every 12 months by contacting Central Source at www.annualcreditreport.com or calling them at 877-FACT-ACT (322-8228). You may then need to call each credit card issuer to determine how the card is held and what your liability is. If you need to start disentangling yourself from debts your abuser should be responsible for, contact your local credit counseling agency, domestic violence program, or United Way for a referral in your area that can help you begin the process. If you do leave and end up responsible for credit card debt, be sure to contact the issuing company or companies to discuss the situation and see if they will suspend late fees or interest, let you negotiate lower payments, or otherwise accommodate your situation. Any proactive effort you make to address debt problems will result in a better outcome than simply abandoning those accounts and financial responsibilities.

Safe Havens

Transgender people who experience domestic abuse have fewer options for finding safety than most non-transgender (female) victims. Most domestic violence shelters do not house men (non-transgender or transgender), and many will not accept transgender women, either. Some will provide hotel vouchers, but these are typically only for a very few nights. If you live in an area with an LGBTQ anti-violence program (a list is available at http://www.avp.org/storage/documents/NCAVP_member_and_affiliate_list_October_2012.pdf), contact them first, as they may know who might serve you and will advise and advocate for you no matter what other services you may be able to access. If there is no local AVP, you can call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) for a list of local referrals. (Their TTY number is 1-800-787-3224).

Every shelter has a different policy about who they house and what specific requirements need to be met. For example, there is no consensus among shelters as to whether transwomen who live in a female gender role, have identification in their current name and female gender will be allowed access into a women-only shelter. There are also pros and cons about if a transgender person should disclose their trans status to shelter staff (prior to or after being accepted into shelter). Some individuals have found it safer to have disclosed, others have noted it has increased their risk of discrimination or even ability to access shelter services. You will need to make the decision about whether or not you disclose your transgender status/history based on your own values, safety considerations, and what other options, if any, you have.

Options beyond public shelters may be limited, as well. Family members may be estranged, and friends may feel divided loyalties if they are also friends with the abuser. If you need to get out but can't find a place to stay, hospitals, airports, bus terminals, convenience stores, and

some restaurants are often open 24 hours. If you choose to go to an emergency room, you do not need to go into detail with the staff about your situation, but alerting a triage nurse that you are in flight from your abuser will allow you access to some assistance. Most emergency rooms have social workers on call who are available to help secure shelter, work with police, and contact family or friends. You will also be safe, while you are at the emergency room, which may buy you some time to consider your next steps. If you wish to remain anonymous and/or not contact the police or try to enter an emergency shelter (which are often unprepared to shelter transgender people and/or keep trans people safe), simply ask the triage nurse if you can stay in the waiting room because you are not safe on the street.

Obviously, LGBTQ community centers, transgender support groups, service organizations, and social groups may be unsafe if you leave your abuser and your abuser frequents these settings, as well, or knows that you do. Consider calling ahead and discussing the situation with staff members to problem-solve and/or make emergency plans in case your abuser should seek you out at these sites.

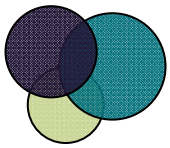
Safety in Your New Place

Abusers tend to be very emotionally tied to their victims, and frequently attempt to find them to "bring them back" if or when they leave. Here are some ways to increase your safety after you have relocated. (If you relocate to a domestic violence shelter, the staff can also help you think about how to stay safe.)

Consider getting a restraining order. If you have not previously done so, now would be a very good time to think about getting a restraining order. See the "Restraining Order" section for more information.

Recruit allies. Give neighbors, any security guards, workplace security or colleagues, landlord or rental property manager and friends a picture of your abuser, tell them that the abuser does not live with you, and ask them to call the police if they see them/zir/him/her near your home. If you have a restraining order against your abuser, by all means share copies of that with others, as it may make them realize the seriousness of your situation and encourage them to help you. Make sure that friends and family members know to never give your new address to the abuser.

Revisit your safety plan and repack your emergency safety bag. Now that you have new surroundings, develop and rehearse a safety plan in the event the abuser shows up at your new home, including an escape route and where you would go in an emergency. Repack an emergency safety bag in case you need to leave suddenly.



Install home security measures. Add a peephole to outside doors and increase outside lighting if appropriate. Consider an alarm system, security cameras, as well as a smoke alarm and fire extinguishers. Make sure all windows have locks or window bars to prevent them from opening from the outside. If your outside doors are wood, consider replacing them with metal doors. Purchase home rope ladders to be used for escape from a second floor window.

Stop your electronic trails. Change all passwords and PIN numbers, such as on telephones, ATMs, computers, etc. If you have any kind of credit card, bank, or cell phone statements going to the abuser's home, change those immediately by closing the accounts and reopening new ones. If your abuser may be able to track you using the GPS on your cell phone, discontinue using that phone and obtain a new phone and cell phone plan, which might be a limited-use one. Change to an unlisted number. If you cannot afford another phone and cannot borrow one from someone, consider asking police or a domestic violence program if they can give you a free 911 phone that will at least allow you to call police in an emergency. If you are on government assistance programs, you may qualify for a free cell phone with 240 minutes per month through SafeLink (http://www.safelinkwireless.com). An additional benefit of this program is that they don't have billing statements or require a credit check.

If you change your address with the department of motor vehicles, be sure to ask them to use a number other than your Social Security number to identify you, and ask them to code your address to keep it confidential. (You may have to explain that you have a pursuing abuser who you need to shield your new address from.) If your abuser seems to know where you go, there is a possibility that they/ze/he/she may have placed a GPS device on your car or somewhere in your possessions. Carefully go through all your belongings and have your car inspected to see if you can find and then destroy or disable any such device.

Screen incoming and outgoing calls. Use caller ID and voice mail or answering machines to avoid accidentally answering a call from your abuser. If you want to try to block calls coming from telephone numbers you know your abuser might use, read a how-to guide at http://electronics.howstuffworks.com/blocking-incoming-call.htm. To limit how many people know your new number (and can therefore accidentally share it with your abuser), start all calls by dialing *67 before the number, so that the caller's phone will display only "Blocked Number."

Keep records of abuser attempts to contact you. Keep copies of all emails and phone messages and logs of all of your abuser's attempts to contact you. These may be useful if further legal efforts are necessary.

Safety on the Job and In Public

Recruit allies. Abusers commonly come to the workplaces of victims who have left them. If your company or building has security personnel, give them a photograph and name of the abuser and tell them you are not interested in speaking with them/zir/him/her. If you have a restraining order, give security a copy and tell them to call police if the abuser shows up. You may want to do the same with your Human Resources department and/or supervisor. If your abuser has visited your workplace on a friendly basis in the past, you may need to inform your co-workers about your situation and ask them to help. If possible, have someone screen your calls at work, especially if your workplace does not have caller ID.

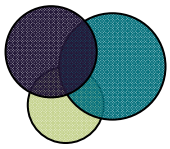
Create a workplace safety plan. As you did with your home, scout out your workplace to identify where you will go and how you will get help if your abuser shows up. You may need to recruit help from co-workers. Check if your workplace has policies regarding domestic violence and/or workplace violence and remind receptionists not to give out your home address or telephone number to anyone other than authorized individuals. If you encounter resistance from your supervisor or co-workers, consult with a domestic violence program or attorney to see what laws protect you.

Vary your route to and from work. Use a variety of routes and times to arrive and depart work, if you can. Travel with others when possible. Rehearse a safety plan in the event that something were to happen on the way to or from work. If you will be leaving after dark or working late, try to move your car closer to the entrance during lunch or a break, and if possible, leave the building with a co-worker. If you commute by bus, consider getting off at a different stop than your abuser might expect, or only get off when other people are exiting as well.

Vary your other routines. Consider switching your usual grocery store, bank branch, etc. Go at times that are different from what you habitually did when you were partnered with the abuser. Arrange for direct deposit, or ask someone to make deposits for you.

Orders of Protection

All states permit some people to obtain a legal order of protection (also called restraining order, a “stay away” order, and other names) against someone who threatens them. However, state laws differ and some do not cover same-sex couples and/or people with varying household and legal arrangements. You can do an initial check of whether your state’s



domestic violence order of protection law may cover your situation by checking the chart at http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/migrated/domviol/pdfs/dv_cpo_chart.authcheckdam.pdf

Although procedures for obtaining an order of protection vary from state to state, they all involve contact with the court and, possibly, law enforcement, and some trans people therefore do not wish to try to obtain one. It is also true that the court may not grant you the order, and that the abuser may not obey the order even if it is granted. However, having an order of protection may help get you faster and more cooperative help from law enforcement and other security personnel if your abuser does show up at your home or workplace.

A general description of orders of protection and state-specific information is available at http://www.womenslaw.org/laws_state_type.php?statelaw_name=Restraining%20Orders&state_code=GE (note that some descriptions only describe abusers as "he" which may not correspond with your situation).

Most LGBTQ anti-violence programs (a list is available at http://www.avp.org/storage/documents/NCAVP_member_and_affiliate_list_October_2012.pdf), and most domestic violence programs (The National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) can give you local referrals; their TTY number is 1-800-787-3224) can provide advocates and/or advice on how to file for a protective order in your jurisdiction.

If you obtain an order, make sure it is listed in the registries of counties where you live, work, and travel by calling the Clerk of the Court and/or the sheriff's office for each county. Make copies of your order and keep them at work, in your car, and on your person. Give copies to security personnel at home and work.

Protecting Children and Pets

If you have children living with you, they are almost invariably already aware of your partner's anger and/or abuse. They will most likely be less afraid, not more, if you teach them what they can do when you are abused and/or they are afraid.

Therefore, teach them not to get in the middle of a fight between you and your abuser. Develop a signal you can use if you want them to summon help or call 911. Make sure they know their own names, addresses, and phone numbers, and teach them how to call 911 and what to say. If you do not want them calling the police, teach them who else to call. Teach them about where to go to be safer during an incident, based on whether your abuser is likely to go after them as well, or will concentrate on you. You may want to teach them to run to a neighbor's house or nearby public place. Tell them how to call you (including making a collect

call) if your abuser takes them somewhere without your knowledge or consent. If your children are very young or liable to get confused in an emergency, prepare a laminated card for them to carry with important information on it. Make sure your children know what other adults you trust and what information you do not want shared with others.

Make sure that the people who care for your children – teachers and school administrators, day care staff, babysitters, Sunday school teachers, and others -- know who has permission to pick up your children, and give them a copy of any restraining order. Make sure the school or daycare knows not to give your address and phone number to anyone, and set up a password so they can be sure it is you on the phone when you call for information. Make sure your children know who to tell at school if they see the abuser.

If you have pets, you will need to make plans for them in case you need to or decide to leave. Some shelters will temporarily board the pets of people who are fleeing domestic violence, so call your local shelter ahead of time to find out if this is a possibility for you. Perhaps a friend or relative who cannot shelter you would be willing to shelter your pet(s). Your vet may even be willing to donate some boarding time if you let them know the reason and how soon you think you can make alternative arrangements.

Emotional Support

A common hallmark of domestic violence is that the victim has become isolated from other people. This may have happened slowly and subtly, without your conscious awareness, or it may be clear that your abuser is trying to control who you see. Either way, it is important to recognize that everyone needs other people, and that if you are isolated, you need to take steps to bring more people into your life. This may be by attending support groups, volunteering in places where you work with other people, or by reaching out to people who are already around you, like coworkers. Remember that while some people prefer to pretend domestic violence doesn't exist, 1 in 4 people have been in a situation similar to what you are experiencing. You are not alone, and you need others' input to help you stay safe and sane if you are living with an abusive partner or have just left one.

Domestic violence programs and LGBTQ anti-violence programs often have emotional support services at no cost. Ask about support groups that are open to any gender, therapists, social workers, or other supports that can connect you with others.

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