

Safety Planning for Children living in abusive situation

- ◆ The most important thing a child can do when there is a violent situation is to get away from the area.
 - ◆ Children often try to stop the abuse by distracting the abuser or directly interfering in the abusive episode.
 - ◆ Tell your children that the best and most important thing for them to do is keep themselves safe.
- ### **When the family is living together, teach your children:**
- ◆ To get out of the room where the abuse is occurring;
 - ◆ Identify a safe room/place in the house preferably with a lock on the door and a phone;
 - ◆ It is not their responsibility to make sure their parent is safe. Your children must focus on their safety first;
 - ◆ How to contact the police at the emergency number and to avoid using a phone in the abuser's view;
 - ◆ Their full name and address;
 - ◆ What they will say. In the case of a young child, it should be simple yet specific, ex. "Someone is hurting my parent";
 - ◆ To leave the phone off the hook after they are done talking. The police will call the number back if they hang up and this could create a dangerous situation for the children and yourself;
 - ◆ To go to a safe place (out of the home) to meet after the situation is safe for you and them;
 - ◆ The safest route to the safe place;
 - ◆ To stay out of the kitchen.

Teach your children:

- ◆ How to phone home, get the operator, call long distance, and talk to answering machines;
- ◆ Make sure they know your number;
- ◆ How to dial 911 and what to say;
- ◆ Make an escape plan with your children on how to get out of a situation, this may include codes, who to talk to, where to go, etc;
- ◆ What to do if the other parent is intoxicated;
- ◆ Explain what kidnapping is, and try to plan for what the children would do if this happened to them.

How Family Violence Affects Children

It is important to know that children who witness family violence also suffer. Children from violent homes may show some of the following:

Infants

- ◆ Tend to be irritable
- ◆ Can be frequently ill and/or have diarrhea
- ◆ Have difficulty sleeping or eating
- ◆ Have tantrums and anxiety

Toddlers and Preschool

- ◆ Physical complaints such as stomach aches and headaches
- ◆ Fearful of being alone, afraid of leaving their mothers
- ◆ Irritable, tantrums, anxiety
- ◆ Regress to earlier childhood behaviors such as bedwetting
- ◆ Difficulty sleeping
- ◆ Frequent injuries

At School/Daycare:

- ◆ Give the principal a copy of your court orders; tell them not to release your children to anyone without talking to you first; use a password so they can be sure it is you on the phone; give them a photo of the abuser.
- ◆ Make sure the children know whom to tell at school if they see the abuser.
- ◆ Make sure the school knows not to give your address or phone number to ANYONE.
- ◆ Make sure your child has enough money to call you, or get help if necessary.

It is important that if you leave your home you take your children with you, or you get them as soon as possible. Historically, when matters go to court the parent who has the children is more likely to keep the children.

Children Safety in Custody and Access Situations

Children who have witnessed abuse in their families may be quite fearful or anxious about visits. Planning for visits – supervised or unsupervised can help children not only manage fear or anxiety, but can help them develop safety skills and realistic safety plans to minimize the risk of violence during the visit.

- ◆ Only give your children information they need to know. Sometimes the other parent will try to get information from the children and they should be aware of this.
- ◆ If possible, use a 3rd party to arrange access visits. If that is not possible, try to have another adult with you when you have to exchange children.

School Age

- ◆ Eager to please adults and make new friends
- ◆ Problems in school, fears or a drop in performance
- ◆ Wants to be home to protect abused parent
- ◆ Physical complaints, frequent injuries
- ◆ Tantrums and anxiety
- ◆ Eating and sleeping difficulties
- ◆ Feels responsible for abused parent's pain and for making it stop

Adolescents and Teenagers

- ◆ Can be very protective of abused parent or can become aggressive and violent with abused parent, siblings and other children
- ◆ Secretive, often deny violence in the home
- ◆ School problems such as absenteeism, failing or hostile behavior
- ◆ Depression and self mutilation
- ◆ Physical complaints
- ◆ Eating disorders, alcohol or drug use
- ◆ Can accept blame for the family violence ("it's all my fault")

All of the above situations can apply at any age. These children are at high risk for abuse. Witnessing family violence is terrifying for children and can be considered child abuse.

CHILDREN CAN BE INJURED AS A DIRECT RESULT OF FAMILY VIOLENCE.

Crisis Hotlines:

Support Network Distress Line 482-4357
Emergency Social Services (after hours) 427-3390
Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-387-5437
Crossroads Outreach (youth) 474-7421
Kids Help Line 1-800-668-6868
Seniors Abuse HelpLine 454-8888
Sexual Assault Centre 423-4121

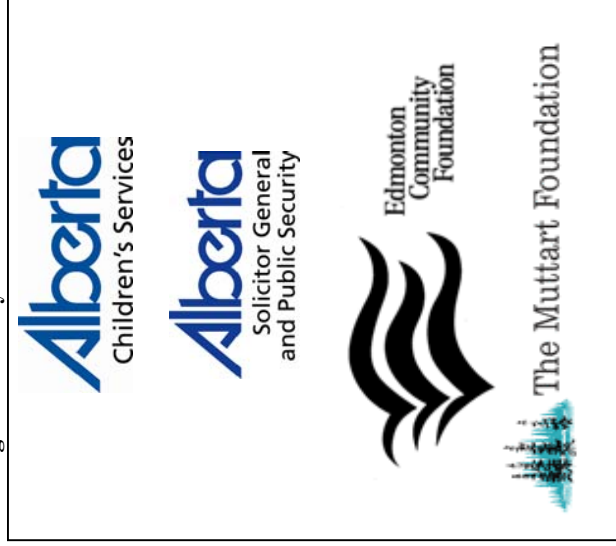
Police:

Emergency 911
Non-emergency Complaints 423-4567

Shelter Crisis Lines:

A Safe Place 464-7233
Lurana Shelter 424-5875
WIN House 479-0058
Senior Safe Housing 702-1520
Youth Emergency Shelter Society 468-7070

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FAMILY VIOLENCE

SAFETY TIPS FOR YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN

IF YOU ARE IN DANGER, CALL 911

This pamphlet has been developed as part of the **Community Initiatives Against Family Violence**