

# **Domestic Violence Safety Plan Workbook**

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A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE THAT CAN HELP KEEP YOU SAFER WHETHER YOU STAY OR LEAVE

**Third Edition**



*Third Edition Changes*

*The Domestic Violence Safety Plan Workbook: A Comprehensive Guide That Can Help Keep You Safer Whether You Stay or Leave, Third Edition adds social networking and cyberstalking considerations, detailed cell phone dangers, planning for pets, a minor title change and other updates to wording and text.*

Download a free version of this plan at <http://verbalabusejournals.com/how-stop-abuse/safety-planning>

*You can find Kellie Jo Holly online at:*

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Email at [kholly@verbalabusejournals.com](mailto:kholly@verbalabusejournals.com)

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# Contents

Introduction .....	1
The Goal of This Safety Plan .....	2
Part I: Preliminary Domestic Violence Safety Form .....	3
Why Do I Need a Short Form Too?.....	3
Phone Number List.....	4
Promise to Myself .....	5
Part II: Safety While Living with an Abuser .....	6
Signs My Partner Is Becoming Abusive .....	6
Strategies for Before or During Abusive Episodes .....	9
Other Strategies I've Used to Protect Myself from Abuse .....	11
Different Things I Can Do When I Sense Abuse Is Imminent.....	13
What I Can Do If I Must Leave Home Temporarily.....	15
How I Can Increase My Physical Safety at Home .....	18
Increasing My Safety During Drug or Alcohol Use .....	19
Cyberstalking and Cell Phone Considerations .....	21
Reminder .....	27
Part III: I May Leave But I Haven't Left Yet .....	28
Safest Ways to Leave An Abusive Relationship.....	28
Financial Planning .....	31
Providing for Pets.....	33
Part IV: Safety After I've Left My Abuser .....	35
Social Networking Safety Considerations .....	35
Making My Home More Secure .....	37
Protecting the Children .....	37
Dealing with In-Person Stalking .....	39
Protecting My Emotional Health.....	42
Appendix.....	45
How to Identify Abuse.....	45
Personal Boundaries .....	59
Emotions Wheel.....	65
Recommended Reading .....	66
Recommended Websites and Web Pages .....	67
About the Author .....	68



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## INTRODUCTION

The message to leave abusive relationships is a solid one. No one deserves to be abused, and certainly if your abuser uses physical violence, it is time to leave. However, the message is also too simplistic. In my case, the urgency of feeling I needed to leave caused so much anxiety that I made plans to stay in my abusive relationship instead.

The time between realizing my husband abused me and leaving him confused me to no end. On the one hand, everyone told me to leave, to be good to myself—to respect myself. I wanted to do it, but ... I could feel everyone's eyes on me, judging me. I burned inside from the shame.

On the other hand, I couldn't leave. Not yet. I wasn't ready. I wasn't strong enough. I didn't want to give up on my marriage. I didn't want to go into the world alone and unprepared. I had to be sure that I was right to leave—and at that point, I wasn't yet sure.

And then one day, I decided to stay. I felt monumental relief because I was *choosing* my path. Soon after deciding to stay, my husband abused me again in a hundred different ways. He didn't have to do that, but I'm glad he did. That experience showed me that I needed to educate myself, so I could see his abuses coming. I wanted to stop crying and cowering when he abused me. I wanted to stop yelling at him and more than anything, I wanted to stop the fighting.

Along my journey of self-education, I learned new ways to react to his abuse and found empowering thoughts to fill my mind. I detached so I could relieve myself of the pain that my husband's nonsensical insults and manipulations caused. My education brought me out of the fog. Not only could I identify the abuse, but I could rise above it. I chose how to react to the abuse. I wasn't his puppet anymore.

And then he put his hands on me again. I left. And because of my education, I stayed gone. No, I wasn't ready, and I didn't have a real plan, but it didn't matter. Because of what I'd learned about abuse, about abusive people, and about myself, I was strong enough to go.

This workbook is my education. It gives the lessons I had to learn before I could leave. My education taught me how to be me in the face of abuse and violence, and once I got *me* back, I could not let her go.

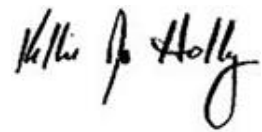
## THE GOAL OF THIS SAFETY PLAN

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I hope that you can take yourself back and rejoice in who you are before you leave your verbally and emotionally abusive relationship so once you free yourself, you are able to stay away. The education in this workbook will help you to do that. Whether you leave the relationship or not will be your decision, your choice, just as the choice to stay in it is today.

The goal of this safety plan is to keep you as safe as possible until you can, or decide to, permanently leave your abuser.

Love, light and laughter,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kellie Jo Holly". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kellie Jo Holly



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# PART I: PRELIMINARY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SAFETY FORM

## WHY DO I NEED A SHORT FORM TOO?

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You may need the information in this short form and on the phone number list sooner than you think. So, fill in the short form and the phone numbers immediately, then work your way through the rest of the plan.

What does my abuser say or do in the lead-up to violence (including verbal violence)?

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Where can I send my children if violence feels imminent? \_\_\_\_\_

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Where can I go when violence is imminent? \_\_\_\_\_

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What is the safest room in my home with an exit door or window? (Kitchens, bathrooms and garages are generally the *least* safe.)

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Where can I keep a cell phone for emergencies? I don't have a phone: Where can I get one? \_\_\_\_\_

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Where can I hide an extra set of house keys? Car keys? \_\_\_\_\_

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Where can I park the car for a quick escape? (Avoid places I can get blocked in)

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Where can I keep an emergency bag in case I need to leave the house in a hurry?

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What will I put in the emergency bag? \_\_\_\_\_

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What else will I need to take with me? \_\_\_\_\_

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Where will I keep the emergency bag and other supplies? \_\_\_\_\_

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Where can I go to be safe for a few hours? \_\_\_\_\_

Where can I go to be safe for 24 hours or longer? \_\_\_\_\_

## PHONE NUMBER LIST

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Police department near home: \_\_\_\_\_

Police department near my or children's school: \_\_\_\_\_

Police department near my work \_\_\_\_\_

National domestic violence hotline: 800-799-SAFE (7233) or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY)

National sexual assault hotline: 800-656-4673

State/Community domestic violence hotline: \_\_\_\_\_

Domestic violence program/advocate: \_\_\_\_\_

County registry of protective orders: \_\_\_\_\_

Family Advocacy Program Office (Military): \_\_\_\_\_

Military social services (check in the hospital): \_\_\_\_\_

Military One Source (*free counseling for active duty & dependents*): 800-342-9647

Partner's work number: \_\_\_\_\_

Partner's supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

My supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Attorney: \_\_\_\_\_

Chaplain/Clergy/Church: \_\_\_\_\_

Therapist/Counselor: \_\_\_\_\_

Schools/Daycare: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Doctor: \_\_\_\_\_

Neighbors: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Friends: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Family: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Taxi Service / Uber: \_\_\_\_\_

## PROMISE TO MYSELF

---

I, \_\_\_\_\_, am in a relationship with someone who manipulates, confuses, insults, threatens, intimidates and abuses me. I am afraid my partner may physically hurt me (or hurt me again). Living with my abusive partner diminishes my ability to nurture myself and the ones I love. I want to feel better and be safer, whether I choose to stay or to leave this abusive relationship.

This plan will help me to react in more empowered ways the next time my partner engages in abusive behaviors. I cannot control my abuser's behavior, but I can choose how to respond to my partner and plan reactive behaviors that optimize my safety.

I understand that because I experience verbal, mental and emotional abuse, then I am in danger of experiencing physical violence at any time.

During this relationship, I may have said or done some things that don't make me proud. I may have given in to my abuser's demands. I may have tried to manipulate or control my partner. I may have fought back against the abuse in ways I wouldn't want others to know about. This safety plan is not about judging my reactions to abuse. Abuse takes people to dark places, and I'm not alone in my feelings of regret, embarrassment, shame or otherwise.

However, I can stop feeling ashamed because I am abused. My abuser is the one who should be ashamed for abusing me (but isn't). It's not my job to take responsibility for what my partner says or does. I am not responsible for my partner's choice to abuse.

This safety plan, once completed, represents my promise to myself to take better care of my mental and emotional health, to take responsibility for my behavior and to stop blaming myself for my partner's abusive behavior.

Sign Here: \_\_\_\_\_

*If I already experienced physical assault, it is important to leave the relationship as soon as I can. However, leaving immediately and permanently is not always be possible. The goal of this safety plan is to keep me as safe as possible until I can, or decide to, permanently leave my abuser.*

Let's get started.

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## PART II: SAFETY WHILE LIVING WITH AN ABUSER

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### SIGNS MY PARTNER IS BECOMING ABUSIVE

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Although abuse can erupt suddenly, there are certain words, tones of voice, or actions that my partner uses before some abusive incidents begin. There are diverse types of signs I see before the attack; for example, my abuser's face may be relaxed before one event and violently red before another.

Here's an example from a female victim of a male abuser:

**My abuser's face may look like this:** narrowed eyes, red-faced, pursed lips / when we're in front of other people he looks at me out of the corner of his eye, purses lips, look embarrassed / sometimes my abuser smiles, looks almost normal but ... there's a narrowing of his eyes and his eyebrows raise a little just in the middle.

**My abuser's behaviors may include:** starts moving erratically, grabs this and that and then puts them down harder than normal, clenches fists, sometimes takes over what I'm doing / when we're in front of others the same erratic movements start but he does things to help the other people in whatever situation we're in (like make coffee or put tools back in the toolbox), he'll try to hide feeling angry and smile at me or make jokes that I know are to cover anger and humiliate me ('tease' me).

**My abuser may make noises or say things like:** when we're alone or in front of other people he'll laugh or say "Go ahead and keep talking since you know everything already," or some other snide comment / when we're alone he starts cussing a lot and will ask me why I married him or wonder why he married me - "It's times like these when I wonder if you really love me." He'll mutter about the old days when women knew their place or say his grandmother would be so sorry he married someone like me.

**When I sense an abusive episode is about to occur:**

**I feel:** I feel frantic to figure out what it was I said or did so that I can undo it. I feel cornered even when I'm not - caught even though I did nothing wrong. I feel scared and wish I could just make things right. Other times I'm ready for a fight, but with the same fearful feelings. I want to stand up to him and make him scared or have hurt feelings too. I guess I want to either hide or lash out, depending on the situation. Either type of feelings can come up whether we're alone or with other people, but when we're with

other people I'm a little more scared because the 'real' abuse will happen later.

**My body reacts by:** My chest, neck and shoulders tighten. My heart starts thumping heavier, I will forget to breathe and feel prickly on my arms and legs. I can't take my eyes off him.

**In my mind, I tell myself things like:** Mostly my mind shuts off. I don't tell myself anything because I need to know what he's going to do next. I think "Here we go . . ." or maybe "No, no no! We can't do this right now!" I'll also wish for someone to come get me - to ring the doorbell or call - any excuse that will make him stop. I'll tell myself that what he's doing or saying isn't right, but I can't do anything to stop it. I question myself about how to react to make it stop escalating or to make him be quiet. I think "I can't take this anymore."

**My behaviors that my abuser or another observer could notice include:** Maybe they would see me stiffen or see fear flash across my face. Depending on how bad it's been lately, I may get tears in my eyes. They would probably see me as acting either angry or scared, but quiet. I'm not sure. I don't know who to ask about what they notice. I'm not sure anyone would see anything. Sometimes at home I act like I'm busy doing something or continue doing whatever I was doing, but faster. Nervous energy kind of drives me - drum my fingers, bite my nails, rush around but not away.

**These are my observations of what happens before verbal, emotional or physical attacks:**

My abuser's face may look like this: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

My abuser's behaviors may include: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

My abuser may make noises or say things like: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

When I sense an abusive episode is about to occur:

I feel: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

My body reacts by: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

In my mind, I tell myself things like: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

My behaviors that my abuser or another observer could notice include: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Knowing these things about my (often subconscious) reactions to fear will help me prepare myself for impending abusive behaviors from my partner.

## STRATEGIES FOR BEFORE OR DURING ABUSIVE EPISODES

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No matter what my abuser says or does, I will remember that I did *nothing* to deserve those hateful words and actions.

### THE STRATEGY OF APPEASING THE ABUSER

Sometimes I may avoid abuse by giving in to my abuser's demands. Giving in to his or her demands could mean all types of things, including demands like having sex, taking drugs, or committing crimes. In most cases, the demands are not crimes. However, meeting the demands of my partner often corrupts my mental or physical health or my morals (i.e. completing online classes for the abuser's degree).

### WHEN I APPEASE MY ABUSER

Here are some things I've done to appease my partner: \_\_\_\_\_

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When I do what my abuser tells me to do, his or her response tends to be: \_\_\_\_\_

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After I comply with my partner's demands, I often feel: \_\_\_\_\_

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### WHEN I REFUSE TO APPEASE MY ABUSER

These are some demands I refused to do: \_\_\_\_\_

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When I refused to do as my abuser orders, my partner reacted like this: \_\_\_\_\_

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After refusing to comply with my partner's demands, I feel: \_\_\_\_\_

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In the future, I can protect myself after refusing my abuser's demands by: \_\_\_\_\_

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## OTHER STRATEGIES I'VE USED TO PROTECT MYSELF FROM ABUSE

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Appeasing my abuser is only one type of strategy I've used to stop the escalation of abuse. Sometimes my strategies work, and sometimes they don't. Sometimes what worked last week did not work last night. But for as long as I live with my abuser, I can keep track of my strategies and the results. Eventually I may prove to myself that it doesn't really matter what I do to avoid abuse. If my partner wants to abuse me, he or she will abuse me.

There is no guarantee that anything I say or do will help to forecast or avoid my partner's abusive behaviors. However, recognizing some of the strategies I've used, and the results, could keep me safer in the future.

Below are three examples of abuse I've experienced and the result of my reactions to them.

1. The situation leading up to the abusive incident (if known): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

My abuser said/did: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I reacted by: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The result: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. The situation leading up to the abusive incident (if known): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

My abuser said/did: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I reacted by: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The result: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. The situation leading up to the abusive incident (if known): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

My abuser said/did: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I reacted by: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The result: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

No matter what my abuser says or does, I remember that I cannot *cause* a person to abuse me - the abuser makes the choice to abuse. I could think about it this way: If I am powerful enough to *make* my partner abuse me, then I am powerful enough to *make* him or her be nice to me, too. **If I had the power to control my abuser's behavior, then wouldn't I make my partner act sweetly toward me *all the time*?**

Abuse is *not* my fault.

## DIFFERENT THINGS I CAN DO WHEN I SENSE ABUSE IS IMMINENT

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Every abusive episode could potentially end in violence (even if my abuser has not shown physical violence before), so I must trust my intuition as to which strategy to use and when. At any time, I can choose a different strategy.

I could do any number of things from leaving the house to stating a personal boundary and then acting on its. If I have no boundaries when it comes to my partner, I am not alone. Abuse erases boundaries. I can look in the Appendix for ways to create my boundaries.

I could state a personal boundary that I'm willing to act on immediately. Some of the boundaries I have include: \_\_\_\_\_

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I could act on a boundary without saying anything to my partner. Some boundaries I've stated before that I feel don't need to be repeated include: \_\_\_\_\_

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Throughout the build-up to abuse, I can silently remind myself: \_\_\_\_\_

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*(I am **not** trying to convince myself that the abuse is not happening! The abuse is real, but I can make great choices during it. I can use empowering thoughts to stay calmer, so I can think more clearly.)*

I could distract myself by (*listening to music, gardening, journaling about what my partner is saying/doing, etc.*): \_\_\_\_\_

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I could move to a low-risk area of my home, away from my abuser. I want to avoid the kitchen, garage, bathroom, any area with hard surfaces or objects easily used as weapons, and rooms without access to the outside. Low-risk rooms in my home are: \_\_\_\_\_

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Rooms that have working windows and doors that lock are: \_\_\_\_\_

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If my children are present, I can try to protect them by (*sending them to a neighbor or friend's house, calling someone to come over, etc.*): \_\_\_\_\_

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My partner is less likely to abuse me if others can see or hear us. I could call:

\_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_

Or I could move to a place where neighbors can see me or hear me better, such as:

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## WHAT I CAN DO IF I MUST LEAVE HOME TEMPORARILY

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Sometimes the only thing safe to do for my mental, emotional and physical health is to leave the house. I can do this but leaving temporarily and safely requires some forethought.

If I choose to leave my home temporarily due to my stress level, anxiety, fear or abuse, I will simply gather my things and leave. I will not warn my abuser that I am leaving, I will not threaten to leave—I will not discuss it with my partner at all. I'll simply go.

### BE READY TO GO

I could place my personal belongings (keys, wallet/purse, diaper bag, et cetera) by the door or inside my vehicle. If I make this a routine, my abuser is less likely to question why I'm doing this. Here's what I need to have ready: \_\_\_\_\_

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If my abuser asks why I'm changing my routine, I could: \_\_\_\_\_

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I could create a duplicate purse/wallet to include house and car keys and leave it (*hidden in the car [perhaps in spare tire well in the trunk], at a neighbor's house, in the bushes enclosed in a plastic bag, etc.*). I will hide the duplicate purse/wallet and car keys here:

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I could also call \_\_\_\_\_ and ask that he or she come over while I gather my children's things to avoid my abuser's temper.

I might need assistance to leave my home or may have no vehicle available to me. To enable my quick exit, someone should know that my partner abuses me so he or she will come over promptly when I call. People, organizations, public transportation and/or taxi services like Uber available to me are : \_\_\_\_\_

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In any case, I can dial emergency services and help will come to me.

I understand that my partner does not want me to leave for a variety of reasons--mostly because he or she cannot control me after I leave the house. My partner may become

increasingly abusive or physically violent (even if he or she has never been physically violent) as I leave. If this happens I will call emergency services immediately.

Some signs that the abuse is increasing include: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### WHAT TO DO WHILE I'M AWAY

After I leave the situation, I will enjoy the peace of being alone and having time to think.

While giving myself time to think de-stress, there are places I could go until I am ready to return home. Such places include churches, well-lit parks or parking lots, stores, friends' homes, et cetera. I could go to these places: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

My favorite safe places are: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

While away from home, I can call someone on a secret cell phone, record the abusive event in my journal or abuse log, sing at the top of my lungs or any other activity to release stress so I can think. My favorite ways to release anxiety and stress are: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I am aware that my partner may have installed GPS tracking or a spy app on my usual cell phone, so when I leave, I should turn off my phone (if my phone is an Android, I must remove the battery). Turning off my phone or removing the battery is especially important if I retreat to a place where I am likely to be isolated or alone.

#### RETURNING HOME AFTER AN ABUSIVE INCIDENT

*Returning home after temporarily leaving can be scary and dangerous. I can do several things to increase my chance of returning safely.*

I could return home with the police and legally force my abuser to leave. This works after I've filed a report and received a restraining order, ex parte judgment or whatever document my state provides to remove my abusive spouse/partner from the home. I don't have to own the home or be named on the lease to qualify for a restraining order (state and local laws vary, and I should check them before taking this route). Calling the sheriff or police department in my area can help me to learn how to get a restraining order. Here's how I can go about getting a restraining order: \_\_\_\_\_

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I could return home with a friend or member of the clergy who knows what happened. People who could accompany me and help mediate my return include: \_\_\_\_\_

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If I took my children with me, I could leave them with a trusted person and return home alone. I can bring the children home when it is safe. People who could keep the children during this transition include: \_\_\_\_\_

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I could return home when my partner is not at home, making sure I'm near an escape path when my abuser returns home in case I must leave again. A good place to be when my abuser enters the home is: \_\_\_\_\_

I could call my abuser to discuss my return. Here's what I could say: \_\_\_\_\_

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If my partner asks where I've been, I should not reveal my safe spots. However, I could say: \_\_\_\_\_

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What else could I do to feel comfortable returning home? \_\_\_\_\_

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## HOW I CAN INCREASE MY PHYSICAL SAFETY AT HOME

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I may not always be able to avoid abusive and violent incidents. To increase my safety, I may use a variety of strategies. I can also teach some of these strategies to my children as appropriate for their age. I can use some or all the following strategies:

If I could have more than one exit plan to get out of my home quickly and/or secretly, I will make sure the routes I decide to use are problem-free. For example, I can check that windows open easily, fire escapes work, or outside gates are easy to open.

I can tell my neighbors \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ about the abuse and request they call the police if they see or hear anything suspicious or scary at my house.

I could have one secret cell phone at my house and perhaps a second hidden in my duplicate purse/wallet. A secret phone is useful if I need to call the police and my abuser broke or took my phone or turned off my service. I can hide the secret phone(s) here:

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I should not tell my children about my secret phone(s).

I can teach my children how to use a phone to contact emergency operators if I use a code word or whenever they are scared.

I will use \_\_\_\_\_ as my code word with my children and friends so they can call for help.

When the abuse starts, I will try to move to a space that is low-risk, avoiding the bathroom, garage, and kitchen, near weapons or in rooms with no working windows and only one door.

I will use my judgment and intuition. My life is more important than being right, and sometimes the bravest thing to do is give in so I can avoid physical violence.



## INCREASING MY SAFETY DURING DRUG OR ALCOHOL USE

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It is important to acknowledge that no matter why or how I become intoxicated, *alcohol or drug use will reduce my awareness of danger and take away my ability to think and act quickly*. Therefore, I need specific plans to deal with any alcohol or drug use.

Substance abuse is a frequent problem in abusive relationships, both for the abuser and people receiving the abuse. I will remember that drugs and alcohol do not change anyone's personality. My abuser is not a nice person who turns ugly when intoxicated, he or she is an ugly person who loses control of his or her nice façade when intoxicated.

Sometimes, abusers force their partner to abuse substances. I may have developed a substance abuse problem as an effect of this abusive relationship. I could consider getting help for addiction or substance use.

My partner may drug me without my knowledge (i.e. date rape drugs, laced marijuana). I could request blood work at my doctor's office if I think my abuser secretly drugs me.

If I feel strange after drinking or eating, recognize signs of intoxication when there should be none, or feel much differently than I expected after drinking alcohol or using a substance known to me, I should immediately call emergency services for help.

### **My Partner's Substance Use**

If my abuser uses alcohol/substances at any time, I must be aware of how he or she acts when intoxicated. I can consider how he or she treats me *and* people outside of our relationship to help me judge my safety in the situation.

When intoxicated my abuser treats *me* this way: \_\_\_\_\_

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When intoxicated my abuser treats *others* like this: \_\_\_\_\_

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A reminder: If my intoxicated partner treats me worse than he or she treats friends or strangers, then my partner understands the proper way to behave, even when intoxicated. My partner chooses to abuse me, drunk or sober. Intoxication is not an excuse to abuse.

**My Substance Use**

If I use alcohol or other substances, I could do so in a safe place and with people who understand the risk of abuse that I face, and who are committed to my safety. People I trust include: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If I cannot be with people I trust, I can locate a phone and exits from wherever we are before becoming intoxicated.

I could ask a friend of mine or my partner’s to be the designated driver or suggest that we use Uber or a taxi service for the evening.

I could stop using substances entirely; or, at least until I know I am completely free of my abuser.

If I need help to stop using substances, I can \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

To safeguard my children while I detox, attend rehab, etc., I could \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

When my abuser and I both use while our children are present, I can best protect the children by taking them to a sitter outside of our home. These are the people I trust to take care of my children: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If my partner and I use substances together and I cannot send the children to a safe place, I could *(leave with the children, choose not to use, pretend to use but abstain, tell the children to sneak out of the house and go to the neighbor’s, call a friend willing to come to my home and stay sober while my abuser and I use, etc.)* The best choices for me include: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If my abuser is using while we’re living together but I am not using, I can best protect myself by: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I can protect my children and myself from my intoxicated abuser by: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## CYBERSTALKING AND CELL PHONE CONSIDERATIONS

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### CYBERSTALKING

Cyberstalking happens during and after abusive relationships. An abuser, even one with very little knowledge of computers or software, could quite easily cyberstalk me and cause confusion, embarrassment, mental or emotional trauma and fear. Cyberstalking could cause me to lose important relationships, my job, and credibility in my community.

Cyberstalking is one of the most insidious forms of abuse—difficult to identify and difficult to deal with after the fact. Knowledge is power, and communicating with my employer, friends and family about cyberstalking can go a long way to preventing harmful effects.

#### *Methods of Cyberstalking*

The methods of cyberstalking vary, but there are several ways my abuser can either control or abuse me online. The following list suggests popular cyberstalking methods.

- Demanding my passwords.
- Checking my messages and email without my permission.
- Giving me a phone (to keep track of where I am and what I'm doing).
- Giving the children phones (with or without tracking software) to contact and keep track of me.
- Using the children's social media accounts to communicate with me or discover where I am.
- Tracking me via GPS or using social media apps to check my location.
- Making me feel afraid to *not* respond to a call or text because of what my partner might do (such as threatening suicide, harm to children or family, etc.).
- Using text messages, phone, etc. to harass me, call me names and put me down
- Threatening me through phone calls, text, email, social media, etc.
- Posting negative information about me on social media.
- Sharing private photographs or videos of me without my permission.
- Impersonating me in emails, text messages and/or social media.

#### *Risks of Cyberstalking*

There are many *other* risks of cyberstalking too. Additional risks of cyberstalking include (GetSafeOnline.org):

- Identity theft

- Creation of malicious websites, blogs or social networking accounts (impersonating me or talking about me)
- Discrediting me in court, social media and/or in the workplace
- Stalking or harassing my relatives, friends or colleagues
- Provoking others to attack me
- Physical violence
- Suffering posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders, depression and/or other illnesses

### WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT CYBERSTALKING?

No protection method is foolproof, so it is important to take precautions repeatedly.

It is more difficult to protect myself from cyberstalking when I'm living with my abusive partner, but there are some things I can do. They include:

- Telling my employer and people close to me that my partner may or does cyberstalk me and what it could look like (false texts, emails or messages from me, social media posts I didn't make, sharing of intimate pictures, etc.). I can ask that they notify me if they see or receive communications from me that are inappropriate or suspicious.
- Changing important passwords regularly (email, social media, bank website, etc.).
- Installing antispyware and using it on my cell phones, computers, and other electronic devices (Important note: antispyware may not block spyware already installed on my devices).
- Turning off location notifications for social media accounts.
- Refusing to create intimate videos or pictures with my partner.
- Keeping a secret device where I access a secret email account, receive information from domestic violence websites or attorneys, etc. (install antispyware immediately after you get the device).

**This is what I plan to do to prevent cyberstalking:**

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*After Leaving the Abusive Relationship*

After leaving my abusive partner, there are still more precautions I can take to avoid cyberstalking. They include:

- Getting a new phone number.
- Keeping an email address or a phone that only my abuser uses to contact me (about the children, business partnership, or other legal reasons) and refusing to give my abuser other methods of contact.
- Creating all new social media accounts.
- Communicating only non-personal information on business social media accounts.
- Blocking my abuser’s social media accounts.
- Reviewing privacy and security settings on every account (social media, email, etc.).
- Trimming my friends’ lists to include only people I trust to keep my information private.
- Checking for information about me online regularly (i.e. google myself)
- Updating passwords and security measures on my home router.
- Refusing to let my abuser enter the home if he or she arrives expectedly (i.e. pick up the children) or unexpectedly (stalking).

It is possible my abuser will cyberstalk me after I leave the relationship even if he or she didn’t cyberstalk me during our relationship. It is possible that my partner did cyberstalk me, but I am not aware of it.

I will not give my abuser access to my personal information to the extent that I am able. I know he or she can and probably will try to use that information against me and/or use it to work back into my life. Here’s what information or images my partner could use against me and what I can do to prevent damage: \_\_\_\_\_

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## CELL PHONE TRACKING APPS AND SPYWARE

### *Tracking Software Is Easy to Install and Hide*

Cell phone trackers usually advertise themselves to worried parents. Their webpages talk of protecting your children and always knowing where they are. Hoverwatch.com proclaims, “The invisibility feature of the cell phone tracker allows it to stay completely hidden from the user, even if *your children* are familiar with how their devices work.”

One spy tracker doesn’t require installation onto the target phone at all. The user simply calls the target’s number, and even if the call goes to voicemail, the two phones are linked. The user can then monitor the target phone from the web. Read this from the Cell-Trackers website (CellTrackersWebsite):

*“All you need to do is install this free spy software on YOUR Cell Phone, NOT on the Target Phone. Once done with that you will have to call the Target Phone to PAIR both phones.*

*“Dialing the target number to pair will not display your number on the target device. A set of random digits will show up on the target screen, thus providing total anonymity to the user of this amazing software.*

*“Also, the pairing call does not have to be answered. It will work even if you get the voice mail. All that’s required is that both, your cell phone and the target phone, must pair with each other just once, and the rest is done by Cell Tracker...absolutely undetected!”*

Still another tracking app hides their program behind your phone’s system icon. For example, if you go into your phone’s settings, you’ll see system app icons, generally with names that don’t make sense to the average user. The spyware morphs its program icon to match your phone’s system icon. Even if you reset your phone, the “system” app reinstalls itself.

### *Tracking Software Does More Than Report Your Location*

But a tracking app can do much more than tell your abuser where you are. For example, the spy apps can

- Share your texts (incoming and outgoing),
- Access your call history and who you spoke to (by matching the number to your address book information),

- Record your phone calls or allow your abuser to listen to them as you talk,
- See the location from where you made a phone call,
- Record voicemail or other audio recordings
- Access photos from your camera,
- *Take* photos from your camera at any time,
- Eavesdrop on your social media communications (WhatsApp, Facebook, Viber, Skype, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.)
- Show what websites you visit,
- Access your calendar,
- Access your to-do list,
- Access your contacts,
- Record ambient sound (your conversations or activities) from wherever you are, *when you are not using your phone.*
- Detect changes to your SIM card,
- Track more than your cell phone (other mobile devices like laptops, tablets, etc.)

For many of us, our phones hold our lives. Your abuser can easily exploit the information to find you, cyberstalk you, harass you, or just make you think he or she has eyes on you all the time. If your abuser has ever known something he or she had no way of knowing, it could be due to tracking software on your phone.

### *What Can I Do to Protect Myself from Tracking Apps?*

Some abusive spouses check your phone and expect it to be accessible to him or her. If that's your situation, then using a passcode to access your phone's data isn't feasible. However, if a passcode is not an issue, setting one is your first line of defense against spyware that can be manually installed on the device.

Another thing that protects against spyware is antivirus software. A reliable antivirus app can go a long way toward protecting your phone from any kind of spyware, not just tracking apps.

Sometimes, resetting your phone to factory condition removes spyware. There are instances where resetting the phone won't remove spyware. If you choose to reset your phone, make sure your phone is set to *not* automatically reinstall the apps you have on your phone.

### **Know some common signs of cell phone spyware:**

- Your phone is hot even when you haven't been playing games on it.
- It takes longer for your phone to charge than usual.

- Your home screen flashes on when you're not using the phone.
- You hear bits of other conversations or clicking sounds.
- You receive garbled text messages or phone calls from phone numbers that are hidden or made up of random digits (false area codes could tip you off to these).
- You see apps or system files that have spyware-type names in them.
- Your phone takes a long time to shut down.

These signs do not mean that your abuser installed tracking spyware on your phone. Any type of spyware can cause the issues listed (such as spyware from online retailers or pornography websites).

*What Can I Do About My Cell Phone?*

I will check with my cell phone company to find out if they see any GPS tracking software is on my phone (and my children's phones if applicable). My cell phone company may not be able to tell if there's tracking software on my phone. But if geotracking software is discovered on my phone, I will wait until the day before I plan to leave to cancel the service. If I cannot cancel the GPS tracking service, I will stop using my phone when I leave (my abuser could also restart the service after discovering it is off).

The cell phone company may not be able to tell there are any third party geotracking or spy apps on my phone. I could use a prepaid phone my abuser doesn't know about instead of my cell phone.

I may already have a secret phone for emergencies, but I will consider purchasing a new one after I've left my abusive partner so I know for sure there's no tracking software on it.

I could request a free cell phone through a domestic violence organization. I will ask to see if the cell phone they provide comes with minutes or if it can only call emergency services.

I will make sure to record my friends' and family's phone numbers on the phone list in the front of this book.

**Here is how I will deal with my cell phone:**

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## REMINDER

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Completing this plan can take an emotional toll on me. It may be difficult to plan for my safety because, in some ways, it may feel like I am betraying my partner. I am not. If I feel uncomfortable at any time, I can take a deep breath and then remind myself that my partner betrayed *my* trust. My partner seeks to control me; my home does not feel safe. My partner does not honor our relationship's stated or implied contract of "love, honor, and cherish."

I could reach out to my friends, family, therapist, community domestic violence advocates and anyone else I trust to help me deal with the anger, fear, pain and guilt that planning for my safety may cause me to feel.

I can put any feeling aside for a little while longer. Even if I do not plan to leave my partner, the next section is important too. I do not know for sure whether my partner will physically harm me or if I will wake up one day and decide I am unwilling to stay another minute. I've done wonderfully so far and can continue.

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## PART III: I MAY LEAVE BUT I HAVEN'T LEFT YET

I must have a careful plan for leaving to increase my safety. I'm aware that my partner might strike out and escalate to violent behavior (even if there's been no violent behavior before) if he or she believes or finds out that I am leaving the relationship.

**For that reason, I will not tell my partner about this safety plan. I will keep this plan secret from anyone I do not completely trust.** I will not tell my partner's family, friends or our mutual friends. I will tell only the people who can actively help me execute my plan.

I may not have any friends of my own or family to reach out to for help. If this is so, the people I can completely trust currently are professionals like my doctors, counselors, and domestic violence outreach workers. This is okay. I trust that I'll meet other people I can trust in the right time.

### SAFEST WAYS TO LEAVE AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

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#### CREATE INDEPENDENCE BEFORE LEAVING THE RELATIONSHIP

I could create a private email address that my abuser cannot access. If my partner comes to me with information that could have been found only in my private email address, then there is some sort of spyware on a device I use to access the email.

I could rent a post office box. The price of a PO box in my area is: \_\_\_\_\_

I could open a personal savings or checking account. I could use (*family or friend's address, PO box, etc.*) as my mailing address so that bank information is not sent to my home. Here is the address I'll use: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Other things I can do to increase my independence include: (*stockpiling baby supplies, filtering kitchen necessities to a friend, moving clothing, household necessities, etc. to a storage area, etc.*) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I could keep important documents or copies of them at (*home of family or friend, bank*

safety deposit box, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I understand that if I use my credit card or cell phone, the bill and statement (paper or electronic) will tell my abuser the numbers that I called before or after I left and possibly give clues to where I'm staying. To keep my telephone communication confidential, I must either use a pre-paid phone card or cell phone that I keep secret from my partner. I might ask a friend to permit me to use his or her telephone/cell phone/credit card for a limited time when I first leave. My best options are:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I will check with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
to see who would be able to let me stay with them or lend me money.

I can leave extra clothes with \_\_\_\_\_

I can access a computer that my abuser could not have spy software on it at the library, \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ and use it to change all of my website passwords. Additionally, I will block my abuser from my Facebook account and other social networking accounts when possible.

IF I FORCE MY PARTNER OUT OF THE HOME USING A PROTECTION OR RESTRAINING ORDER

It is possible to legally force my abusive partner out of the home. However, laws vary so I must do some research to find out how to go about it.

- I can call a domestic violence hotline for information and referrals to local agencies.
- I can call the sheriff, police department or magistrates office with my questions. If a person cannot answer my questions, I will ask them what agency can, then call that agency. I expect the run-around, and I will call the same people more than once if I must.
- Attorneys with experience in domestic violence can help me navigate the system.

Here is what I must do to have my partner legally removed from the home: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When I have a protection or restraining order against my partner, I cannot violate the terms of the order and cannot contact him or her in any way.

The order can be modified in further hearings, and probably will be modified if we have children or run a business together.

If I live in a smart home, I'll need to change the codes and settings for equipment used in my home so my abuser cannot torment or spy on me.

#### IF I CHOOSE TO LEAVE THE HOME

It is best to have a restraining order on the day I leave. However, I may not have enough evidence of abuse to receive a restraining order from the court.

I will leave when my abuser is not home. I can request that the police come to my home while I gather my things or drive by often as I pack a moving van. They may or may not do so.

If possible, my children will not be home when I gather my things. I could ask someone I trust to tend to the children until I'm able to pick them up. Ideally, the person will know what I'm doing and agree to keep the arrangement a secret from my partner – at least until I'm able to pick up the children. I can approach these people about the possibility:



#### *Where Will I Stay?*

I will have a clear idea of where I'm going to stay when I go. If I need to stay with someone, I will arrange it before I leave the abusive relationship if possible.

If I need to stay at a shelter, I will find out from a local domestic violence agency or the police department how to ensure a place at a women's shelter. (If I have children and require a shelter, I will be sure the shelter houses children.)

## FINANCIAL PLANNING

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The fear of a lack of money is a threat that keeps many abuse victims trapped in abusive relationships. However, there are things to consider when planning to leave my abuser that may make ending the relationship less scary.

### PREPARATION TO LEAVE

I could open a bank account in my name. To prevent my abuser from seeing bank documents, I could use this mailing address \_\_\_\_\_

and/or sign up for electronic documents to be sent to this safe email address: \_\_\_\_\_

I could hide or deposit into a personal bank account an amount of money that's safe for me. I could probably hide \$\_\_\_\_\_/paycheck without my abuser noticing. If I'm hiding my money at home, I could hide it in these ways/places: \_\_\_\_\_

(Search online for "hide money from burglars" for some creative ideas.)

If my abuser discovers my savings, I can tell my partner I'm saving the money for: \_\_\_\_\_

I could apply for a credit card in my name (although starting a life free of abuse with more debt is not ideal). I should use a safe mailing address to receive the card and/or rejection letters. I can use this mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_

I can request a free credit report, so I know the credit situation I'm facing before I leave. I can dispute any mistakes or financial abuse to the credit reporting companies before I need to use my credit. Usually the credit report arrives electronically, so I'll use a safe email address when signing up. Just in case, I can use this mailing address if I need to: \_\_\_\_\_

### POSSIBLE SUPPORT AFTER LEAVING

One financial consideration often overlooked is that I may receive court-ordered financial support or be eligible for other types of support after I leave. I can investigate these possibilities to help manage my fear of leaving:

- Restraining orders may provide for temporary financial support and/or child support.
- Restraining orders may remove the abuser from the home so you can stay there.
- Restraining orders may provide for the use of a vehicle.
- Emergency public housing may be available to domestic violence survivors and their children (check with public housing as “emergency housing” does not always mean “immediate housing” and there may be other requirements you must meet to receive public housing.)
- Consider taking 50% of joint funds (75% if leaving with children) when you separate but keep track of how you spend the money as you may need documentation for the court.
- Child support may apply.
- Bills and expenses will be different and may be more affordable after leaving.

#### DOCUMENTS AND ITEMS I WILL NEED WHEN I LEAVE

If I decide to leave my abuser, it is important to take certain items with me. I may also want to give an extra copy of papers and a set of clothing to a friend just in case I must leave quickly or my plan to remove my partner from our home does not work.

**When I leave, I should have these documents and items secured in a safe place or with me:**

Drivers’ license and registration	Work permits/Green card
Identification for myself	Prior Divorce papers/ custody papers
Military ID card(s)	Medical records
My children’s and my birth certificates	Lease or rental agreements, mortgage payment book
Passports	Bank statements
My and my children’s social security cards and my abuser’s social security number	School and vaccination records
Cash (abuser may report my ATM card stolen)	Insurance papers
Checkbook, ATM card, Credit cards with my name on them	Pre-paid Cell Phone (secret from abuser)
	Keys – house, car, office
	Medications

**If I have the time, I will take other important items like:**

Address book, pictures	Children’s favorite toys and/or blankets
My jewelry	Small saleable items (not abuser’s personal property such as cell phone, jewelry, etc.)
My computer, password list	

## PROVIDING FOR PETS

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I must make plans for my pets in advance. Most shelters do not allow pets of any kind, although this is changing. Staying in abusive relationships out of fear for what the abuser will do to pets is common—but ill-advised. It is best to make other plans for my pets while doing so is within my control.

If I am not concerned about my abuser hurting my pets, I can provide clean litter and a few days worth of food and water for my pets to hold them over until I can return safely.

I can ask family or friends to keep my pets until I find my own place. I will ask them in advance because sometimes even people we think would be open to pet sitting are not.

Friends and family who may be willing to help me include: \_\_\_\_\_

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I can call local homeless and domestic violence shelters to discover their pet policies. Here are numbers for shelters near me: \_\_\_\_\_

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I could relinquish my pet to the humane society or animal control for adoption. Awaiting adoption is better than living with my abuser. Organizations near me include: \_\_\_\_\_

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I could relinquish my pets to a no-kill shelter. Perhaps I can get them back when I have a home for them. I could disclose my situation to the shelter: Perhaps they could work with me. (Some no-kill shelters will not take pets of certain kinds or even certain colors. Sometimes there is no room at the shelter.) Here are some animal shelters near me:

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I could relinquish my pets to a breed rescue. In some cases, I must take my pet to animal control and hope a rescue worker takes him to the breed rescue. These are rescues in my area and what I need to do to relinquish my pet: \_\_\_\_\_

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I could contact pet sitters to see if one would be willing to work with me. Websites that showcase pet sitters for hire or pet sitters I know include: \_\_\_\_\_

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Some kennels may shelter animals during domestic violence separations. Here are some

kennels and their phone numbers that are near me: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Kennel costs vary. Here is how much it will cost to house my pets for two weeks at the kennels I listed above: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I could ask to borrow money for kennel fees. People who may loan me money to keep my pets safe include: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



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## PART IV: SAFETY AFTER I'VE LEFT MY ABUSER

### SOCIAL NETWORKING SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

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When I leave my abusive relationship, I will immediately cut all social networking ties with my ex-partner. My abuser currently owns these social networking accounts: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

In addition to disconnecting from my ex-partner, I must disconnect from his or her exclusive friends and other people that I am unsure I can trust. These people include: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I know that my abuser is or may be connected to my friends and family, so despite my carefulness, some of my online postings and information could reach my abuser. Although it's not an ideal solution, some people I could ask to disconnect from my ex-partner include: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The safest way to handle online social networks is to stop using them. I can delete these social networking accounts: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I must block my abuser from accessing the accounts I choose to keep the extent as I am able. I must update the privacy settings on these accounts: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Alternatively, I could begin new social networking accounts. I know new social networking accounts are not completely safe because my partner could locate me through search engines or friends I connect with online. If I choose to keep my current social networking accounts or start over with new ones, I will be very cautious with whom I share information and what information I share. Some types of information I've shared previous

to leaving that I should no longer post online include: \_\_\_\_\_

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It is best to share nothing about where I am, automatically or on purpose. I should change the settings on my cell phone and within social networking accounts to prohibit broadcasting where I am. It is important to stop posting on social media until I'm sure each account does not track my location. The accounts I must change include: \_\_\_\_\_

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***I will never post to social media from a safe house. Auto-location services could reveal where I am. Then my abuser could show up there, endangering everyone.***

I am aware that my abuser could create a fake profile to gain access to my online activities. I can prevent this by checking with the friends who want to connect with me to make sure it is really them.

I know that my abuser could create a profile to impersonate *me*, and that could have dire consequences on relationships with my employers, family and friends. The best thing to do about that possibility is to tell everyone that I left the abusive relationship and ask them to report to me any social networking accounts bearing my name before connecting to it. The people I need to tell include: \_\_\_\_\_

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If I cannot delete my business-related social networking accounts, I will share *only* business information through them. There may be certain types of business information I should keep private. This information includes: \_\_\_\_\_

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## MAKING MY HOME MORE SECURE

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If the law forces my abuser to leave our home or if I move into a new home, I can do many things to increase my safety. It may not be possible to do all the measures listed below at once, but I will do as many as it takes to feel safe.

### **Safety measures I can use include:**

I can change the locks on my doors and windows as soon as possible. If I live in a smart home, I should reset all keypads and codes that can be controlled from outside of the house.

I can replace wooden doors with steel/metal doors.

I can install security systems including additional locks, window bars, poles to wedge against doors, an electronic security system, etc.

I can purchase rope ladders used for escape from second floor windows.

I can install smoke detectors and purchase fire extinguishers for each floor in my house/apartment (abuser could start fires to force me to leave my house).

I can install an outside lighting system that turns on when a person is coming close to my house.

I can do these other things to make my home more secure: \_\_\_\_\_

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## PROTECTING THE CHILDREN

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I will teach my children how to use the telephone to make a telephone call to me and to \_\_\_\_\_ (police, friend, clergy person, other) in the event that my abuser abducts the children.

I will tell people who take care of my children which people have permission to pick up my children. The people I will inform about pick-up permission and their phone numbers include:

Day Care Staff: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Babysitter: \_\_\_\_\_

Sunday/Religious School Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Others: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I can inform the following neighbors that my abuser no longer resides with me and they should call the police if they see him/her near my residence: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## DEALING WITH IN-PERSON STALKING

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Even if my ex-partner did not cyberstalk me or behave like a stalker during the relationship, that does not mean he or she will leave me alone after I leave. My abuser's threats or behaviors during the relationship that could forecast stalking include: \_\_\_\_\_

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### SAFETY WITH A PROTECTION ORDER

My abuser should obey protection orders (the majority do obey them), but I cannot be sure he or she will obey the order. I may need to ask the police, the courts and my abuser's Commanding Officer (if my abuser is military) to help enforce my protection order.

The following are some steps that I can take to help the enforcement of my protection order.

I will keep my original protection order at (location) \_\_\_\_\_

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I will always keep a copy of my protection order with me. If I change purses/wallets, that's the first thing that I will place in the new purse/wallet.

I will give a copy of my protection order to my abuser's Commanding Officer and to the police department in the counties and cities where I work, visit family or friends, shop and live. The counties that concern me are: \_\_\_\_\_

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A county registry of protection orders that all police departments call to confirm a protection order may exist. If so, I will check to make sure that my order is in the registry. The telephone number for the county registry of protection orders is \_\_\_\_\_

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I can call the domestic violence program at \_\_\_\_\_ if I am not sure about any of the above resources or if I have some problem with my protection order.

I will inform my employer, clergy person, friends, and \_\_\_\_\_

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that I have a protection order in effect.

If I misplace my protection order or my abuser destroys my protection order, I can get another copy by going to \_\_\_\_\_ located at \_\_\_\_\_

If my abuser violates my protection order, I will call the police and report a violation, contact my attorney, call my advocate, and advise the court of the violation.

If the police do not enforce my protection order, I can contact my domestic violence advocate and/or attorney and will file a complaint with the chief of the law enforcement department.

I can also file a private civil complaint in the offending jurisdiction where the violation occurred. I can charge my abuser with a violation of the protection order. I can also ask if the jurisdiction where the violation occurred permits the filing of private criminal complaints. I can call my domestic violence advocate to help me with this.

*I understand that no one cares about my safety like I do. Having a protection order does not guarantee my safety. It is my responsibility to use the protective order as it is intended.*

#### SAFETY ON THE JOB AND IN PUBLIC

I decide when I tell others that my partner abuses me and that I am at risk of future violence. Friends, family and co-workers can all offer protection just by knowing the truth. I should carefully consider which people to trust as I work to secure my safety.

I probably cannot trust my abuser's family and friends because they will likely support my partner and may report my movements and personal details to my abuser (stalking by proxy).

I can tell anyone I want to about the abuse before or after leaving my abuser.

I might do the following:

I can tell (my supervisor, my work's security supervisor, front desk receptionist, etc.) about my situation. These are the people who can help me at work: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I will ask those people to let me know if my partner arrives at my workplace. I can ask

\_\_\_\_\_ to screen my phone calls at work.

I could request that my employer bring in a domestic violence support person to speak to the entire office, which can make it easier for my co-workers and myself to report domestic abuse.

I can inform my partner's employer, friends and other people that my partner might ask them to locate me. I will tell those people I don't want them to share that information if they know it. This may deter his friends (from accidentally or purposefully) helping my abuser to find me.

When leaving work, I can (walk with a co-worker to my car or public transportation, carry pepper spray at the ready, be extremely observant of the parking lot, check underneath my car, the backseat, etc.) and \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When driving home, if my abuser follows me, I can \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

If I use public transit and see my abuser following me, I can \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I can use different grocery stores and shopping malls to conduct my business and shop at hours that are different from those when I was residing with my abuser. I can use a different bank and/or take care of my banking at hours different from those I used when residing with my abuser. I have some habits and patterns I could change to avoid running into my abuser or to minimize his or her ability to stalk me. Those patterns include:

\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

## PROTECTING MY EMOTIONAL HEALTH

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One of the toughest challenges I could face after leaving my partner is letting go of knowing what my ex-partner is doing, who he or she is with, what he or she is saying about me, etc. After all, I spent much of my time in the relationship staying intimately in tune with my abuser and his or her moods, words and actions. Doing so helped keep me emotionally and physically safe.

I can expect a period where I don't know what to think about. Out of habit, I might harass myself with thoughts about my abuser. Sometimes, obsessive thoughts about my abuser and our relationship can rush into my mind. If obsessive thoughts occur, I will not be surprised, and I will not mistake the obsessive thoughts for a desire to return to the abusive relationship.

*Not caring* about what my ex-partner is up to after I leave may be very difficult! Obsessive thoughts, anxiety, sadness and other negative thoughts and emotions could leave me feeling less inclined to stay out of the relationship.

I can fight through the pain by calling friends, domestic violence hotline volunteers, victims' advocates, my therapist or anyone else who could help me break free emotionally and mentally.

If obsessive thoughts of my abuser occur, I can \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The experience of being battered or verbally degraded by abusers is exhausting and emotionally draining. The process of building a new life takes courage and incredible energy. To conserve my emotional energy and resources and to avoid hard emotional times, I can think about what I may face and make plans to combat some foreseeable problems.

If I feel down and think about returning to my abuser, I can \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



If I must communicate with my abuser in person or by telephone, I can \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*After leaving my abuser, the only reasons to communicate with him or her concern the health and welfare of our children, a joint business, or other conditions ordered by a judge. Co-parenting with my ex-abuser is often necessary as most offenders who abused their partner receive visitation with their children, especially when physical abuse against the children is undocumented or unsubstantiated.*

I can use "I can..." statements with myself, to be assertive with others, and to remind myself that I have options. Some statements that have meaning to me include: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I can tell myself " \_\_\_\_\_ " whenever I feel others are trying to control or abuse me.  
I can read these things to help me feel stronger: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I can call \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ as other resources to be of support to me.

I can watch encouraging movies like: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I can create a playlist of songs or videos that make me feel better. Some songs I like are: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

To gain support and strengthen my relationships with other people, I can attend workshops and support groups at the domestic violence center or \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I can create a new email address so I can access important emails without worrying about seeing one from my abuser.

I can use the filtering options in my email account to send my abuser's emails straight to the trash. *(This option works if I do not have children with my abuser or any legal reason for him or her to contact me.)*

I can find a great counselor who is familiar with domestic violence and abuse to support me and to help me clear up the questions in my heart and mind.

Other things I can do to help me feel better are \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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# APPENDIX

## HOW TO IDENTIFY ABUSE

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Victims of verbal abuse often do not recognize our partner's words as abusive. We tend to think, "That's just how she talks" or "That's how he is." Or, we think nothing of it at all because verbal abuse wormed its way into our mind earlier in life. However, not knowing what verbal abuse sounds or how someone communicates abuse through body language severely affects our mental and emotional state. When we cannot *identify* abuse, it is easy to believe

- that we do not experience abuse,
- that our partner tells the truth about us, and
- that we must be crazy to feel so alone, depressed, and confused.

But, once we can identify verbal abuse as it happens, we regain mental balance and can improve our emotional health. We feel stronger, more like ourselves, and become better able to deal with the abuse. Living with abuse but being able to identify it will help us detach from our abusers and stop taking abusive *nonsense* to heart.

### TYPES OF VERBAL AND EMOTIONAL ABUSE

These types of verbal abuse come from *The Verbally Abusive Relationship: How to recognize it and how to respond* by Patricia Evans (ISBN 1558505822, Adams Media Corporation).

#### *Ordering & Demanding*

**Why my abuser uses it:** The abuser directly controls me when he orders me around and demands compliance or certain behaviors. My partner feels dominant, good about him- or herself, and most importantly, in control.

**Examples:** Some abusers don't want their partners to smile at a stranger, wear certain clothes, go out with friends, maintain relationships with family, etc. On the other hand, abusers might expect their victims to wait on them hand and foot. Abusers want what they want, when they want it, and it's the partner's job to make it happen for them, no matter how ridiculous the demand.

**Examples of how my partner uses ordering and demanding:** \_\_\_\_\_

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### *Name Calling*

**Why my abuser uses it:** My abuser calls me names for two reasons: either to humiliate me or to deny that I exist. One of the best ways to stay in complete control is to pretend that I am meaningless. Patricia Evans explains that abusers engage in name-calling to say, "*You do not exist. I annihilated you. Now that you are defeated, I am in control.*"

**Examples:** Abusers call victims any or all the names in the book. Or the abuser negatively labels the victim (i.e. irrational, a bad parent and spouse, disloyal, etc.) Abusers attack whatever the victim wants to be (i.e. a rational thinker, a great parent and spouse, a loyal partner). If there is not an obscene name that applies, abusers will simply tell the victim that he or she is the opposite of what the victim wants or strives to be.

Also, and sometimes in conjunction with withholding and deprivation, an abuser may refuse to call the victim by name. The abuser might refer to the victim in conversations with others by "*your daughter-in-law,*" "*your mother,*" "*your friend*" or any way possible *except* using the victim's name. By doing this, the abuser tells the victim that he or she is *nothing* to the abuser.

**Examples of how my partner uses name calling:** \_\_\_\_\_

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*Jokes That Are Abusive*

**Why my abuser uses it:** My abuser disguises abuse as a joke because putting me down makes him or her laugh and feel good. My partner avoids responsibility for the abuse by claiming, “*It was just a joke!*” even though I know it was an insult, nothing more.

**Examples:** Abusers will make public jokes about serious private issues. Whatever goes on at home is fair game. Some abusers will outright insult the victim (“What’s wrong? You know I love that sagging butt of yours!”) An abuser might tell about a time he or she hurt the victim’s feelings in a way that makes it sound humorous. Some abusers laughingly say things like, “I’m gonna have to retrain her.” Most people think that’s ridiculous and will laugh. However, the victim knows what *retraining* means *abuse*.

**Examples of how my partner uses jokes to abuse me:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Discounting*

**Why my abuser uses it:** My abuser discounts my ideas and perceptions to make me feel stupid or ignorant. If my abuser succeeds in taking away my self-esteem, then I will be easier to control. Telling me that my ideas aren’t good enough leads to me thinking that maybe I’m not good enough. This makes my abuser feels power over me.

**Examples:** Abusers try to make victims feel naïve, worthless or worse. Abusers cut down victim’s ideas and feelings. Abusers say that they’re critical of the victim’s ideas because he or she wants to help the victim avoid problems. Or the abuser may come right out and say, “That’s by far the dumbest thing you’ve ever said.”

**Examples of how my partner discounts me:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_

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*Accusing & Blaming*

**Why my abuser uses it:** Accusing and blaming me releases my abuser of responsibility for anything he or she has done (getting fired, cheating on me, using drugs, hurting my pet, giving me a black eye, etc.). I am my partner's scapegoat; I am expected to be the bad person, the guilty person, so my abuser can feel superior to me and maintain his or her self-image.

**Examples:** Abusers will accuse the victim of (doing, feeling, saying) something that forced the abuser to do whatever the abuser did ("You made me hurt you!"). There is really nothing an abuser won't accuse the victim of doing, even if there's evidence that clears the victim of wrongdoing ("I don't know how you did it, but you cheated on me—I know you did."). Abusers often accuse victims of things that the abuser thinks, feels or does ("You want to control my every move!").

**Examples of how my partner accuses and blames me:** \_\_\_\_\_

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*Countering*

**Why my abuser uses it:** My abuser counters me because he or she does not want me to believe my perceptions. Countering, even in its most ridiculous forms, can make me doubt myself, my memory, and my perception. If I am unsure of myself, will look to my abuser for answers.

**Examples:** It does not really matter what the victim says, the abuser can counter with the opposite. A victim could agree with the abuser that the light is too bright, and suddenly, the abuser will say the light is almost dim, not too bright at all. The victim may say an

apple is red, but the abuser will insist it is not red ("I don't know what color it is, but it isn't red!")

**Examples of how my partner counters me:** \_\_\_\_\_

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*Blocking and Diverting*

**Why my abuser uses it:** Blocking and diverting changes the direction of a conversation so my abuser can gain control of it.

**Examples:** Abusers use blocking and diverting to refocus a conversation away from what the victim is talking about. Abusers can change the conversation so artfully that the victim is fooled into following the diversion. Blocking and diverting the conversation can make the victim forget what he or she wanted to talk about. Here's a sample conversation.

**Victim:** "I'd really like for us to go to dinner with my sister and her husband tomorrow."

**Abuser:** "Will you feed the kids? Did you even think about them? I can go hungry, but you shouldn't let the kids starve."

**Victim:** "What? When did I ever let the children go hungry? When did I neglect them like that? How dare you imply I wouldn't have food for the kids' dinner!" [...and this tactic was successful because the victim forgot about arranging the dinner with family].

**Examples of how my partner blocks or diverts me:** \_\_\_\_\_

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*Judging and Criticizing*

**Why my abuser uses it:** My abuser judges and criticizes me to put me on the defensive. The abuser may say that I'm immoral, irrational, ignorant or other such nonsense so I am willing to adopt his or her opinion over my own. Judging and criticizing me can shame me into submission.

**Examples:** Abusers constantly imply that victims don't know how to live in the real world (which is really the fictional world made up in his or her head). They want victims to think that their flaws prohibit them from making good decisions or seeing things as they truly are. "That was a stupid mistake," or "Will you ever get that right?" are two statements that both judge and criticize.

**Examples of how my partner judges and criticizes me:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Trivializing*

**Why my abuser uses it:** Trivializing is when my abuser makes light of my accomplishments. The smaller my abuser makes me think I am, the easier it is to control me.

**Examples:** Abusers pretend that the victim's accomplishments are worthless, and often, the victim comes to believe it too. Victims can begin to feel diminished to the point that they are unimportant, especially compared to the people surrounding them (friends, colleagues, etc.).

An abuser can trivialize anything from money management skills to parenting and will find the things you are good at or want to be good at and trivialize them until you feel talentless.

Another form of trivializing would be ignoring the fact that you reorganized the garage (difficult task) while hyper-focusing on how straight you parked the car (simple task).



**Examples of how my partner trivializes me:** \_\_\_\_\_

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*Undermining*

**Why my abuser uses it:** Abusers undermine you when they attempt to make your children, family, friends and community believe that you are unworthy of respect. When you sense the lack of respect, you automatically turn inward to figure out why (often missing the fact that the abuser is behind the problem).

**Examples:** Abusers will lie about victims to other people and will lie about other people to the victim. Abusers may say that a friend said something derogatory about the victim, when no such thing happened. Abusers may tell the children that the victim is a horrible parent, causing the children pull away from the victim. The abuser may tell family and friends that he's worried about the victim's mental health so family and friends become less likely to believe what the victim tells them.

**Examples of how my partner undermines me:** \_\_\_\_\_

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*Forgetting*

**Why my abuser uses it:** Abusers purposely and regularly forget things that are important to you so you will know that your time, energy and health are unimportant to your partner. By repeatedly "forgetting" important conversations, events, anniversaries, holidays and the like, your abuser convinces you that your needs are not worth

remembering; you have no value at all. When you believe you have no value, you feel depressed and are easier for your partner to control.

**Examples:** Abusers will forget plans to go out with your friends and dinners with your family. Abusers forget when you have plans that don't include him or her, then throw a fit when you're trying to leave the house. Abusers will forget important doctor appointments (even ultrasounds of your child). Nothing you do will help the abuser remember events that are important to you—not even writing them on a calendar.

Additionally, abusers forget entire conversations - important ones. Abusers schedule routine auto or household maintenance over birthdays. Abusers forget beating your head against a wall or tripping you down the stairs.

**Examples of how your partner forgets things important to you:** \_\_\_\_\_

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### *Denial*

**Why my abuser uses it:** Your abuser can pretend that everything is under control by flat-out denying anything to the contrary. Abusers may deny any sort of challenge to their power or change in their environment. You don't change, the situation doesn't change ... nothing changes unless the abuser changes it. There are no surprises for the abuser, only for you. The abuser must believe he or she is in control always. Denial of the truth helps him or her to stay sane.

**Examples:** If you tell your partner he or she is abusive, she will deny it or turn it around, claiming you are the abuser. Abusers are so good at denial that you're sure they could pass a lie detector test while denying the truth—they seem to wholeheartedly believe the lies.

**Examples of how your partner uses denial:** \_\_\_\_\_

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*Withholding or Deprivation*

**Why my abuser uses it:** By withholding emotions and depriving me of attention, my abuser says, "*Nyah nyah! I've got something you want, and you can't have it! I'm in control and you can't do anything about it!*" Abusers will deny sexual and emotional attention, mental stimulation, and their presence. My abuser may deny me the things I want most or deserve from a relationship. By depriving me of what I need or want (or offering to give it to me in exchange for favors), my abuser can control my emotions and behaviors.

**Examples:** Sometimes an abuser will not talk to the victim for hours or days. They will push away the victim when he or she makes a sexual advance, then complain that the victim doesn't act like he or she wants sex. Abusers will avoid giving victims the time needed to have a meaningful relationship by getting drunk, going to friends' homes, busying themselves with hobbies or other activities. Periods of withdrawal can include outright ignoring the victim or refusing to use the victim's name (may refer to victim as "your mother," "your daughter," etc. when speaking to other people). Sometimes periods of withdrawal end with an outburst of abusive anger or threatening behavior.

**Examples of how my partner withholds from or deprives me:** \_\_\_\_\_

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*Threatening Behavior & Words*

**Why my abuser uses it:** Abusers use threatening words and behaviors to regain control of me and the situation. Threatening behaviors and words explicitly communicate or imply that I must do as told *or else*.

**Examples:** Abusers may mime a choking action, kick a chair or punch walls while saying, "Do you know what I could do to you?" Abusers will also threaten children, family, friends and pets to coerce victims into being controlled.

Many times, when using threatening words and behavior, the abuser will say things like, "Is this what you want? You wanted me to lose control, so this is what you get! You must want me to hurt you - why else would you do this to me?"

The abuser wants the victim to *think* he or she is out of control and therefore more threatening. But asking those types of questions of the victim shows that the abuser is very much in control of him- or herself. The abuser acts like that *on purpose*.

**Examples of how your partner shows and uses threatening behavior and words:** \_\_\_\_\_

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### *Lying*

Technically, lying does not have its own category because every type of verbal and emotional abuse listed above is in and of itself a lie.

- Ordering and demanding is the lie that tells me I'm to be subservient to my abuser, as if my abuser rightfully has power over me.
- Name calling is a lie about who I really am.
- Abusive joking is the lie that gives my abuser cover so he or she can abuse me in public. Joking permits the lie: "You're too sensitive!"
- Discounting my thoughts and feelings is the lie that my perspective is inferior, worthless or stupid.
- Accusing and blaming is the lie that allows my abuser to pretend that he or she is a victim and that throws the responsibility for problems onto me alone.
- Countering is the lie that nothing I say, think or believe is correct (even if it was correct when my abuser said, thought or believed it months or minutes before).

- Blocking and diverting is the lie that hides the truth. If my abuser can avoid answering questions or divert my attention to some other topic, then the truth stays hidden.
- Judging and criticizing me is the lie that his words and beliefs are superior to mine.
- Trivializing is the lie that disposes of me to make sure my abuser is the most important in our relationship.
- Undermining is the lie that my words and actions are meaningless and deserve to be ignored or manipulated; undermining makes it impossible to show who I am.
- Abusive forgetting is a lie that enables my abuser to hide behind a common human frailty that can't be disproved, and society demands it be forgiven.
- Denial is the lie that there is anything to lie about. The problem, whatever it is, doesn't exist.
- Withholding and deprivation are the lies that allow my abuser to manipulate without saying or doing anything.

Lying makes abuse possible.

## TYPES OF PHYSICAL ABUSE AND VIOLENCE

### *Abusive Anger*

Abusive anger is physical violence when the abuser throws or breaks things, bangs on walls or doors or in some way *shows* what could happen to *you* by using those props. If the abuser acts out violently on pets or things, then he or she is showing you what he or she wants to do to you. And that is one small step from doing it to you.

Your abuser saying to you, "What are you so afraid of?!" or "You have nothing to be afraid about!" or "I'm not going to hurt you!" is a sure sign that your abuser sees fear in your behavior. Even if you don't *feel* afraid, your innate body responses are signaling to you that you probably should be afraid. It's also another way for your abusive partner to convince you that your feelings and instincts are not real. But if you feel afraid, you are afraid, and you have every reason to find a way out.

***Why my abuser uses it:*** Abusers use abusive anger because it is very scary and threatens me emotionally and physically. My abuser hopes that I will back down in fear, giving over control of myself and the situation.

***Examples:*** When an abuser is abusively angry, he is loud, obscene, and may invade the victim's space with his or her face, pointed finger or hands. The abuser may hit walls or other solid surfaces to make loud noises. The abuser may block the victim from leaving a

room (which *is* physical violence). The abuser implies that he or she will hurt the victim physically. Later, the abuser may say or do something to remind the victim of times of abusive anger or physical violence.

**Examples of how my partner uses abusive anger:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Physical Violence*

Physical violence includes hands-on violence, the use of weapons, confinement and other types of violence. Below are some of the ways my abuser may have physically abused me.

*Pulled my hair, slapped, punched, kicked, bit or choked me.*

My experience: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Used weapons to hurt me.*

My experience: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Harmed my/our children.*

My experience: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Prevented me from calling the police or seeking medical attention.*

My experience: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Confined me, blocked the door, didn't allow me to move freely.*

My experience: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Kept me from eating or sleeping.*

My experience: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Abandoned me in unfamiliar places or far from home.*

My experience: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Drove recklessly or dangerously when I was in the car.*

My experience: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Forced me to use drugs or alcohol.*

My experience: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Forced me to have sex or perform sexual acts with anyone, to include my partner.*

My experience: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### RAPE: SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL COERCION

Rape, sexual violence or sexual coercion is never my fault.

Definition of sexual violence from JaneDoe.org:

Sexual violence or sexual assault is any unwanted sexual attention, contact, or activity. Sexual violence violates a person's trust, autonomy, and feeling of safety.

Sexual violence may involve one or more persons who coerce, manipulate, pressure, threaten, or force another person into acts of sexual activity that are against her or his will or without consent due to age, illness, physical or cognitive disability, being unconscious, or the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

Sexual violence is a term covering a wide range of unwanted sexual contacts and behaviors including sexual abuse, rape, attempted rape, incest, exhibitionism, voyeurism, obscene phone calls, fondling, and sexual harassment. Several terms such as sexual assault, rape, drug or alcohol facilitated sexual assault, and date rape have both legal and societal meanings.

It is rape any time my partner forces me to have sex against my will. Rape can occur if I'm married to or living with my abuser, and date rape is not a less serious crime.

My experience: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

My abuser might force me to into sexual behavior by using threats or coercion. Sexual coercion includes times when I go along with sexual activity because I feel to say no to sex would jeopardize my safety or sanity, or the safety of my children, other loved ones or pets. Forced pregnancy or forced abortion falls into the category of sexual coercion. Sexual coercion is never my fault.

My experience: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If I suspect or find evidence of sexual activity that I do not remember or only partially remember, it is possible my abuser assaulted or raped me and could have allowed others to do the same. Drug or alcohol facilitated rape is never my fault.

My experience: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### *About Reporting Rape and Sexual Assault*

- Reporting the rape to the police is my choice.
- Going to a hospital does not mean I must report the rape or sexual assault.
- I can go to the hospital and complete a physical exam at any time (for evidence collection, it's best to go to the hospital within five days after the assault).
- I can complete a rape kit even if I've showered or bathed.

At the hospital, I can have a domestic violence or sexual assault advocate present.

### WHAT TO DO WITH THIS INFORMATION

Now that I plainly see how my partner abuses me, I am far more likely to recognize abuse as it happens. This makes it easier to detach from verbal and emotional abuse because it's a lie designed to control me. I know more about physical abuse and can report it if I want to do that. Seeing all the ways my abuser hurts me makes it hard to deny that my partner abuses me. **Now that I know these things, I am no longer an abuse victim—I am an abuse survivor.**



## PERSONAL BOUNDARIES

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### WHAT ARE PERSONAL BOUNDARIES? WHY DO YOU NEED THEM?

Setting personal boundaries is the most important thing an abuse victim can do because boundaries enable you to stand up for yourself in a healthy, practical way.

A personal boundary is a rule that you say cannot be broken without consequence. Everyone has the right to set boundaries and act on them. People have all sorts of personal boundaries (rules) that help insulate them from other people's negative words and actions.

For example, a person may make rules for themselves things like:

- "If a person calls me ugly names, I will not hang out with them anymore."
- "If someone harasses me by phone, I will send their calls straight to voicemail."
- "If she wastes my time with gossip, I will interrupt her and excuse myself."

Then, that person follows through with their plan.

### BOUNDARIES HELP US OVERCOME VICTIMIZATION

Setting personal boundaries for yourself helps you realize that you do not have to remain victimized by abuse. Even if you still live with your abusive partner, personal boundaries keep you from being a victim. They empower you. They let you carve out a piece of the world for yourself and the identity you create with boundaries becomes worth defending.

Remember: Boundary setting is a fluid process. If a boundary doesn't work for some reason, try something different. You can revise your boundary later after figuring out where the boundary failed you. You can change them at any time to work better for you.

### WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU SET A PERSONAL BOUNDARY?

The most important result of setting a personal boundary is that you can now recognize abuse when it happens to you. After writing out even one boundary, you will experience red flags popping up all around you when your abuser steps over your line. The red flags alert you to follow through with your plan – what you said you would do to protect yourself. You will feel stronger and your abuser's influence over you will diminish.

One of the debilitating side-effects of domestic abuse is the loss of your ability to make decisions. Your abuser works hard to make you feel incapable of making choices – they berate you no matter what you choose to do. When you set and enforce a personal boundary, you are choosing to take an action right for you. Your personal boundaries are decisions about what you will and will not tolerate. Enforcing your boundaries encourages decision-making and follow through.

#### HOW DO I SET PERSONAL BOUNDARIES?

“How to set boundaries” is a code phrase for “how to stand up for yourself”. You’ve probably stood up for yourself in unhealthy ways in the past by yelling, trying to look intimidating, manipulating behind the scenes and whatnot. But you can’t fight fire with fire without becoming abusive yourself. Besides, your partner has much more experience with methods of abuse and most likely can out-yell and out-intimidate you every time.

Creating personal boundaries gives you an advantage over your abuser, even though he or she doesn’t respect the concept of a boundary. When your abuser rages but you can think or state your boundary *and follow through*, you’ll feel great! You’ll realize that although your partner is acting horribly, you can stand up for yourself and keep your self-respect.

Writing my boundaries in these four easy steps helps me think them through so they’re empowering, honest and effective.

*Step 1: Begin the sentence with “When you...”*

Define the behavior that causes your negative feeling. Does he narrow his eyes? Interrupt you? Tell you you’re living in a fantasy world? Turn red? Raise his voice?

What is your sign that something bad is about to happen? Describe your partner’s *behavior*. If anyone present could see or hear what he’s doing or saying, then you’re describing his behavior, and you’re on the right track.

*Step 2: Complete the first sentence with, “. . . I feel . . .”.*

Abuse causes victims to disconnect from their feelings because your abuser routinely tells you how you should feel. When the disconnection between your feelings and your self is in play, it is almost impossible to decide how you truly feel (Check the *Feelings Wheel* in the appendix if you get stuck.)

How does your abuser’s behavior make you feel? What is your gut reaction? Do you feel unheard? Attacked? Put-down? Unimportant? Belittled?

At this point, you'll have a sentence that reads something like this: "When you roll your eyes and interrupt me when I'm talking, I feel unheard and disrespected."

*Step 3: Begin a new sentence with, "I want . . ."*

Your "I want" sentence must be specific. "I want to know I am important to you," is too general.

How do you want your partner to show that you're important to him or her? Think of the behavior you want to see (something other people watching the conversation could describe – an action). Do you want your partner to look you in your eyes when you're talking? Do you want him or her to stop interrupting? What does the other person need to show – how could your partner best behave – for you to feel important?

*Step 4: Write down "Because I cannot control you, I will..."*

What are you willing to do in response to your abuser breaking your personal boundary? What are you willing to do to escape the abuse? Are you willing to leave the room? Leave the house temporarily or permanently? Sing a song in your head instead of listening to any more of the nonsense? Pretend to agree with your partner? What are you *willing* to do? Most importantly, what is *safe* for you to do?

Be careful as you decide what you will and won't do in response to your abuser breaking your rules. Personal boundaries are only as good as your desire and ability to enforce them, so decide on a consequence *that you are able and willing to do*. If you are not able to follow through, then your abuser will sense an empty threat (which increases his or her feelings of power over you).

It is important to understand that your abuser is as powerless over you as you are over him or her. No matter what your abuser does to you, you can choose how to react. Sometimes the situation may feel too dangerous to enforce a boundary. If that's the case, you can choose to change your boundary to react in a way that feels safer for you. Breaking your boundary is your choice.

*Here is my completed personal boundary:*

"When you roll your eyes and interrupt me when I'm talking, I feel unheard and disrespected. I want you to listen to what I have to say. Since I cannot control you, I will leave the room and the conversation temporarily until I feel comfortable enough to talk to you again."



## TWO WARNINGS ABOUT USING PERSONAL BOUNDARIES WITH YOUR ABUSER

*Your new strength will confuse and anger your abuser.*

When we strip away the pretending that goes into an abusive relationship, your abuser sees that he or she is powerless over your actions. Your partner uses intimidation and manipulation to pretend he or she has control over you; when you begin to rebel against your partner's methods, you threaten the façade. Your abuser most likely will strike out at you in a stronger way, in hope that you will fall back, intimidated.

By creating personal boundaries, you resist your partner's efforts to control you. Your abuser will not like that, so be ready with an escape plan, just in case.

*Boundaries Can Be Manipulative*

Your abuser could try to turn your boundaries around on you by setting his or her own. Here's an important warning from Joy2MeU.com:

*Setting boundaries is not a more sophisticated way of manipulation – although some people will say they are setting boundaries, when in fact they are attempting to manipulate. The difference between setting a boundary in a healthy way and manipulating is: when we set a [healthy] boundary we let go of the outcome.*

This means that you know your abuser may not respect your boundary. Using my example, when I leave the room my abuser may follow me. I will have to enact another boundary (possibly leave the house) to enforce my first one.

*Here's a manipulative boundary:*

"When you leave the room when I'm talking to you, I feel enraged and disrespected. Since I cannot control you, I will follow you around until you agree to sit down and listen to me."

Read over your boundaries. Are you trying to control your abuser's behavior? Remember, the only person you control is you. As much as you may want your abuser to change, you cannot force change. Make sure the "I will" part of your boundary describes what you will do to escape the abuse.

## DO I TELL MY ABUSER HE OR SHE CROSSED MY BOUNDARY OR SIMPLY ACT ON IT?

Saying a boundary aloud or only acting on it is your choice. Once you have set a personal boundary, you do not have to tell the person who crosses your line why you're doing what you're doing, or even how their behavior makes you feel. You can follow your rule without stating it aloud. Or, you can choose to state your boundary aloud. You can tell the person what they're doing, how it makes you feel, and what you're doing for yourself to counteract that feeling. In a healthy relationship, it is often critical that you explain what you're feeling and doing if you want to support your connection.

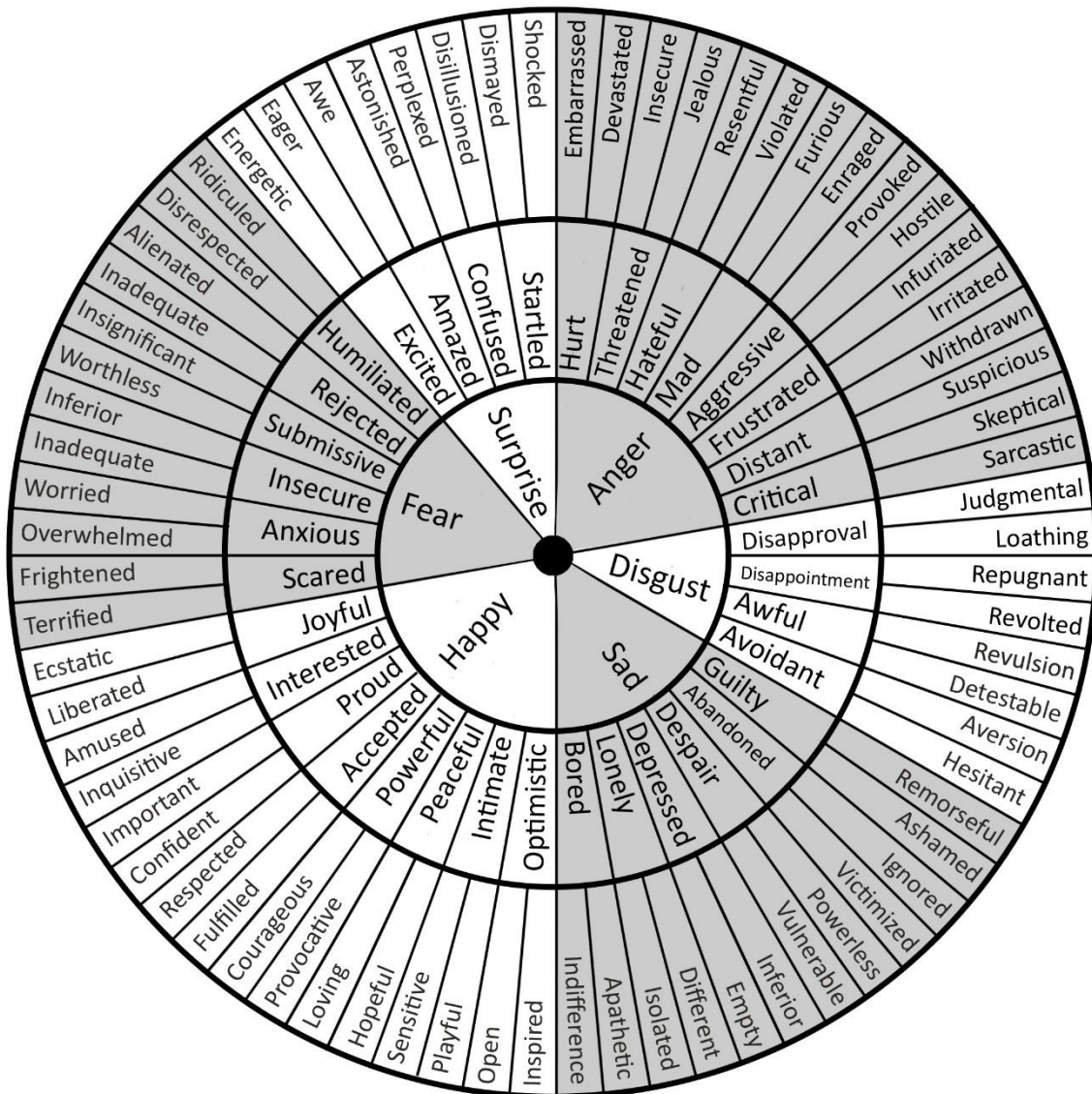
Stating your boundary aloud to your abuser, telling him or her exactly what you're doing and why you're doing it, is also an option. Hopefully, your partner will catch on and modify his or her behavior from that point forward. Usually, they won't. Remember, your boundaries will not change your abuser. He or she must decide to change. Your personal boundaries are meant to help you feel stronger and more confident.

Many abusers will not respect nor respond to your boundaries as a healthy person would. Your abuser may try to entice you into breaking your boundaries. It can be extremely difficult to ignore the abuser's bellows, insults and tears. Don't beat yourself up if you succumb to your abuser's tricks in the beginning. Over time you will become stronger and your boundaries will become stronger too.

## EMOTIONS WHEEL

Abuse victims often lose touch with their emotions because the abuser is constantly denying emotions, making fun of them, and generally attempting to control a victim's emotions. Additionally, abuse victims are often in tune with the abuser's emotions over their own. Knowing what the abuser feels is paramount to personal safety and avoiding abuse.

Use this emotions wheel to reconnect with how you really feel.



## RECOMMENDED READING

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## RECOMMENDED WEBSITES AND WEB PAGES

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- National Domestic Violence Hotline. (n.d.) Retrieved August 6, 2018 from <http://www.thehotline.org/>
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Kellie Jo Holly passionately advocates against domestic violence and abuse through her writing and the mentoring service offered at VerbalAbuseJournals.com and RelationshipAbuse-Recovery.com. She and her team of peer support mentors help men and women mentally and emotionally cope with abuse while living in abusive relationships and supports them when they leave the relationship and begin to heal.

**You can find Kellie Jo Holly online at:**

**Amazon Author Page** at <http://www.amazon.com/Kellie-Jo-Holly/e/B009UYGMIG>

**Verbal Abuse Journals website** at <http://VerbalAbuseJournals.com>

**Relationship Abuse Recovery website** at <https://RelationshipAbuse-Recovery.com>

**Facebook** at <https://www.facebook.com/VerbalAbuseJournals>

**Twitter** at [https://twitter.com/abuse\\_journals](https://twitter.com/abuse_journals)

**Email** at [kholly@verbalabusejournals.com](mailto:kholly@verbalabusejournals.com)