



Living in an Abusive Relationship:  
**Strategies for Staying Safer**

Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick (PLEIS-NB) is a non-profit charitable organization. Its goal is to provide New Brunswickers with information about the law. PLEIS-NB receives funding and in-kind support from the Department of Justice Canada; the New Brunswick Law Foundation and the New Brunswick Office of the Attorney General.

“My Strategies for Staying Safer” is a tool that has been designed to help women living with a partner who acts abusively to create a plan for staying safer. It may be particularly helpful for women living outside of large urban areas.

The tool offers women who stay in, or return to, an abusive relationship, an opportunity to reflect on the situations in their lives that may put them at risk of serious harm by their partner. Although the tool promotes a self-assessment of risk, women will benefit from having the support and assistance of a trusted helper, in many cases, that will be the local Victim Services Coordinator.

Each woman is the expert on the complexities of her life. This tool encourages women to develop strategies for safer staying by addressing those situations that she feels she can act on. The plan is not a static, one time blueprint. Situations change over time and so should the plan. Women should keep their plan someplace safe and revisit it when possible.

Developing strategies to mitigate risk does not replace risk assessments and danger assessments which may be used by police or professionals. Nor does it replace the need to have a traditional Emergency Leaving Plan for getting away safely in a violent or frightening situation.

#### **Acknowledgments:**

This safety planning tool was created by Dr. Deborah Doherty. It is based on her collaborative research of nearly twenty years with Dr. Jennie Hornosty who was the Chair of the former Family Violence on the Farm and in Rural Communities Research team. As one of the original teams of the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre, their ground breaking research led to recommendations on subjects such as responding to firearms victimization and abuse of pets, barriers to leaving abusive relationships and strategies for promoting rural women’s help-seeking behaviour.

A special thanks to the members of the New Brunswick Silent Witness Project ([www.silentwitness.ca](http://www.silentwitness.ca)) who encouraged Dr. Doherty to research and analyze female domestic homicides. The findings had a major impact on the development of the tool and they are being shared widely in order to create public awareness on the nature of risk factors in a largely rural province and potential remedies. The tool was also informed by the valuable work of researchers across Canada and elsewhere who are contributing to our growing knowledge of risk and danger assessments, risk management and safety planning. A special thanks to the research and knowledge mobilization provided by the Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative ([www.cdhipi.ca](http://www.cdhipi.ca)).

Finally, we acknowledge the contribution of the many women survivors of IPV as well as individuals from victim services, transition houses, outreach offices and community agencies and government departments who participated in focus groups and interviews and offered suggestions for implementing the Staying Safer tool. Funding for this safety planning initiative was provided by Victim Services, New Brunswick Department of Justice and Public Safety.

Published by:



**Public Legal Education  
and Information Service  
of New Brunswick**

P.O. Box 6000  
Fredericton, NB E3B 5H1  
Telephone: 506- 453-5369  
Family Law Information Line: 1-888-236-2444  
Fax: 506-462-5193  
Email: [pleisnb@web.ca](mailto:pleisnb@web.ca)

**[www.familylawnb.ca](http://www.familylawnb.ca)**

**[www.legal-info-legale.nb.ca](http://www.legal-info-legale.nb.ca)**

March 2017 (Pilot)

ISBN: 978-1-4605-0427-7

## What you should know about... Developing Strategies for Staying Safer

If you are living with an abusive partner, consider making a plan that helps you feel safer. Even if you are feeling safe now, research shows that abuse doesn't just go away. It typically gets worse over time. Your plan could include your personal strategies for managing risk. These strategies will reflect your unique experiences and social identity. Although you can't control your partner's violence and abuse, you do have choices about how you respond and get to safety.

For some women, leaving is the safest action for them. Safe leaving is very important. You will find an "Emergency Leaving Plan" at the end of this guide. Other women make a strategic decision to stay. In some situations, leaving the abuse may seem riskier than staying. Trust your intuition and make choices that you feel are best for your safety. Don't feel pressured to take action. However, do be aware that a violent partner poses a serious risk to your well-being and that of your children.

This safety planning tool will help you identify personal strategies to increase your safety. You don't have to address every potential risky situation all at once. Start with a few that you feel would make a difference in your life. The road to a safer and healthier life is a journey, not necessarily a one-stop destination.

To create your plan, go to **Step 1**. Start thinking about people you trust to tell about the abuse in your relationship. Then go to **Step 2**. Review the checklist of risk factors. Think about the kinds of situations that make you fearful or impact on your sense of safety. Who are the people and agencies that could help you with specific concerns? **Step 3** will help you to build your own personal safety plan based on the strategies (both existing and new) you selected for reducing the risk of harm to yourself, your children, your family, your pets and your property.

### Remember...

- Making a safety plan can help increase your safety
- Changing your safety plan often will keep it relevant to your needs
- Being aware of resources to help you cope and end your isolation is empowering
- Telling people and service providers you trust about the abuse may help to increase your safety
- Being aware that no safety plan or protection order is an absolute guarantee of safety is important

Keep your plan in a safe place  
where your partner will not find it.

You can find helpful information in the online resource *Directory of Services for Victims of Abuse*.



## Deciding to Tell About the Abuse in My Life

You can use this safety planning tool alone or with someone else you trust to play a role in your plan. Although you will have to decide for yourself if and when you will tell others about the abuse, consider that friends, family, neighbours and even co-workers can help protect you if they know what is happening.

If your partner has been charged with a crime because he harmed you, Victim Services, Justice and Public Safety, will help you with safety planning. If you are not involved with the police, consider talking to a domestic violence specialist – someone who can help you assess your risk. Trust your intuition and make choices that you feel are best for your safety – don't be pressured into action.

If you are reluctant to reach out for help, consider the following:

### What I might think about reaching out... Consider this...

*People won't want to help me. What happens in my home is really none of their business.*

- ◆ It could be a matter of life or death. Violence in the community is everyone's business – so do reach out. When someone is hurting you, your children or even your pets – **it's wrong and it is against the law.**

*I don't know what to say.*

- ◆ Just say that you are **living in an abusive relationship** and you need someone to talk to who will listen, be supportive and not blame you for the abuse.

*It might make things worse. If he finds out he will be really angry. He has even said that he would kill me.*

- ◆ Doing nothing could make things worse – **abuse often gets worse over time.** If he threatens you or the people helping you, let the police know. Be sure to say if there are weapons available.

*It's not serious enough to involve the police.*

- ◆ Police are trained to respond – and even if the behaviour is not criminal, they know about other resources to help families experiencing abuse.

*People won't believe me because I have lived with abuse for so long.*

- ◆ Maybe some people won't believe you. But some probably suspect that something is wrong. **Tell someone you trust.** Say you were afraid to speak out because you thought people might "take sides" or blame you. Explain your fears and concerns– like not having the support you need such as money, a place to live, a job, a babysitter, or transportation, etc.

What I might think about reaching out... Consider this...

*How can I tell my friends or neighbours; they are his friends too.*

- ◆ When they learn you are being abused and living in fear, they will likely be supportive. If not, turn to someone else.

*I should wait until somebody offers to help me.*

- ◆ Even people who care about you may not reach out because they don't know what to say. They may be afraid to insult you if they are wrong. Don't wait – they may be waiting for you.

*I don't want to start actions in my life that I have no control over.*

- ◆ It is understandable that you want to be in control and manage your risks how and when you need to. Seek out services and resources and that respond to your specific needs.

*He has threatened to take the kids or harms the pets or property – and he has all the rights.*

- ◆ Both parents have rights to custody and access so it is important to contact services that offer accurate legal information, advice and/or support.

*I want my marriage to work. He keeps promising he will change.*

- ◆ You can't change your partner, but if he is willing, encourage him to find appropriate counseling and services that help him to become accountable for his actions and stop abusing you.

*Best that I stay so that the children have a father.*

- ◆ Children who witness family violence are more likely to grow up and model the behavior that they have witnessed. You can talk to a counsellor about the impact of family violence on your children.

*If I tell people about the abuse, I'm afraid Child Protection will take away my children.*

- ◆ Child Protection will not blame you for your partner's actions. However, they will discuss with you various options for keeping your children safe.

Getting help as you create your safety plan is a good idea.

## Identifying Situations that Put Me at Risk

You can use the checklist below to help identify the situations in your relationship that may signal that the abuse you are experiencing will grow into serious physical harm. The left-hand column sets out a checklist of possible **risk factors**. These situations are referred to as risk factors because research shows they are linked to an increased risk for partner violence.

**Ask yourself:** *Which of these factors could put me at harm?* Then, consider who might offer support. In addition to trusted friends and family, professionals can help you to assess your risk. Put a check in the circle beside the ones you would like to work on in your plan. You don't have to do everything at once. Come back often when you are ready to develop some other strategies. As you develop your safety plan in Step 3, you can tailor your actions for improving your safety in your own ways.

### CHECKLIST

#### Could I be at risk?



#### Threats of suicide

When a partner or ex-partner is suicidal, it can be a dangerous time for both partners and the children. Research shows that the most common form of domestic murder-suicide in Canada involves a man killing his current or former spouse. Between 2010 and 2015, three-quarters of the women killed by an intimate partner in New Brunswick were victims of murder-suicides.

#### **Ask Yourself:**

Is your partner depressed, anxious or overwhelmed by life events or financial problems?

Does he threaten suicide?

Does he blame you? How does this affect your ability to stay safe?

Are there weapons in the house that make you more fearful?

Who could you turn to for help?

*A service, agency, or individual I trust to help me:*

**Suicide Prevention  
Crisis line:  
800-667-5005**



#### Personal perception of risk

Research shows that women can often predict that their partner will become more abusive at certain times of the day, or month, or year. Violence may be associated with certain places like the camp, the bedroom, or visiting certain friends.

#### **Ask Yourself:**

Does the abuse get worse at certain predictable times – like the weekend, when he's drinking, payday, holidays, summer, when kids are away, during harvest, when he is unemployed, during hunting season, etc.?

Is it more difficult to think about your safety at these times? Does location change the strategies you might use to feel safer? What would help?

*A service, agency, or individual I trust to help me:*

## CHECKLIST

### Could I be at risk?

#### Life events

Research shows that abuse and violence sometimes gets worse when a couple is dealing with a change in their life such as a new baby, separation, failing health, and financial problems.

**Ask Yourself:**

Is the stress of a certain life event(s) associated with abuse?

Has the abuse worsened when you were pregnant? After the birth of a child?

Is it related to job loss, financial problems, retirement, or ill-health?

Are you dealing with any life events that make you concerned for your safety?

What strategies could you use to feel safer? Who could help?

*A service, agency, or individual I trust to help me:*

#### Attitudes and values that reinforce the way he treats me

Sometimes attitudes about women's role in the family reinforce controlling behaviour by her partner. Friends and families may blame women experiencing abuse for what is happening. They may make excuses for the abusive partner.

**Ask Yourself:**

Does he tell you you're worthless and stupid? What about family and friends?

Do service providers in your community have attitudes or beliefs that make it difficult for you to deal with the abuse or stay safe?

Who would understand and support you?

*A service, agency, or individual I trust to help me:*

#### My Notes

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## Personal supports

Victims of abuse are most resilient when they have strong, positive support persons in their lives. Abusive partners may resent your personal supports. Increasing social and physical isolation can signal the potential for serious harm.

### *Ask Yourself:*

Has he isolated you from family and friends?

Do you have people you can turn to for support?

Is getting personal support a barrier to leaving or making a safety plan?

Think about what would help – access to computer, a babysitter, a drive to town, money for a taxi?”

*A service, agency, or individual I trust to help me:*

## Emotional responses

Emotional responses to living with abuse are part of your personal history. Thus, each woman will have a unique set of individual risk and protective factors that make her feel scared and alone, or supported and happy.

### *Ask Yourself:*

Are there emotions and feelings that keep you in the relationship?

Do you feel helpless, ashamed, or sad because of the abuse?

Do you feel others will reject you if you leave the relationship?

Are you depressed?

Who could help you think about how your emotional responses affect your safety?

*A service, agency, or individual I trust to help me:*

## Available resources and access to services

Many women are not aware of the services and supports available to help them such as transition houses, mental health clinics, family doctors.

### *Ask Yourself:*

What kind of services would you like to use?

Does he stop you from seeking help?

What are the issues with access to services that you could address when developing a strategy for staying safer?

*A service, agency, or individual I trust to help me:*

**Love** **Shouldn't Hurt**  
END INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

[www.gnb.ca/violence](http://www.gnb.ca/violence)



## CHECKLIST

### Could I be at risk?

#### Presence of children (and possibly pets and other family members)

Research shows that disputes over custody, contact with the children, primary care and control of the children, or the presence of step-children may increase the risk for violence. Many women cannot afford a lawyer and they don't know their legal rights or services to help them with their family law issues.

**Ask Yourself:**

How does the presence of children and loved ones affect your decisions when he gets abusive?

Does he threaten to harm them?

Is he more violent when the children are away or present?

How could you address your family law concerns?

What strategies could you put in place for the safety of your children, pets or property?

*A service, agency, or individual I trust to help me:*

Toll-free family law information line:  
**888-236-2444**

#### Alcohol and/or drug use

Alcohol and drug use have serious implications for personal safety. Research in New Brunswick found that alcohol or drug use occurred in nearly three quarters of the cases of partner homicide. Including ways to stay in control and deal with situations involving drugs and excessive drinking may keep you out of a potentially risky situation.

**Ask Yourself:**

Does his use of alcohol/ drugs affect the way he treats you?

Does your use of alcohol/drugs affect your ability to stay safe?

Who could you talk to about staying safe when alcohol/drugs are being consumed?

*A service, agency, or individual I trust to help me:*

My Notes

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### Physical and mental health

Some of the New Brunswick women killed by their partners had recently become ill and this contributed to the stress in the family. The courts also noted that many of the men who killed their partners suffered from depression or health problems.

**Ask Yourself:**

Do you have health issues, physical or mental, that make it difficult to make a safety plan?

Does your partner have mental health issues that affect your safety?

*A service, agency, or individual I trust to help me:*

### Economic stressors – unemployment, financial worries

Research shows that unemployment and financial problems in an abusive relationship may be associated with increased risk for harm to female partners.

**Ask Yourself:**

Does your financial situation affect your decision to stay or leave?

Do you have your own income source?

Do you have your own bank account?

Is your partner unemployed?

Are financial problems causing problems and stress?

Could someone help you develop some strategies for coping with your financial situation?

*A service, agency, or individual I trust to help me:*

### Extreme Jealousy

Extreme jealousy can be a warning sign of potential violence.

**Ask Yourself:**

Does he accuse you of being unfaithful for no reason?

Does he tell you he can't live without you?

Does he threaten to kill himself if you leave him?

Does he threaten to kill you if you ever find someone else?

How does extreme jealousy impact on your safety plans? What could you do about it?

*A service, agency, or individual I trust to help me:*

## CHECKLIST

### Could I be at risk?

#### ○ Presence of weapons, especially long guns

Research on domestic homicide in New Brunswick found that over half of the women were shot by their partners with hunting rifles or shot guns. In other provinces, only about 20% of female domestic homicide victims are killed with hunting rifles.

**Ask Yourself:**

Are you fearful of the guns in the home?

Has he threatened (directly or indirectly) to shoot you?

Is dealing with firearms in the home a part of your safety plan?

*A service, agency, or individual I trust to help me:*

Canada Firearms Program  
(Spousal Abuse)

1-800-731-4000

#### ○ Fear - Warning signs

Sometimes an abusive partner does not give any signals before an abusive incident – but many do. Listen to your instincts.

**Ask Yourself:**

Can you sometimes predict when he will hurt you?

Does he look a certain way, say certain things or get angry when discussing certain subjects?

Does he get depressed, talk about suicide, or have angry outbursts?

Can you think of strategies for responding to these warning signs.

*A service, agency, or individual I trust to help me:*

My Notes

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# Strategies for Staying Safer

## CHECKLIST

### Could I be at risk?

#### Increasing physical violence

Once violence happens in a relationship, it usually gets worse over time. Research shows that many women killed by their partners had been increasingly subjected to choking, sexual assault and abuse.

#### *Ask Yourself:*

Has he recently become more physically violent?

Has he started to choke you?

Do you feel you have to give in when he wants to have sex?

Does increased physical violence affect your strategies for staying safe?

Who could you talk to about this?

*A service, agency, or individual I trust to help me:*

#### Reaction to past attempts to leave

Past violent behaviour is a strong predictor that it will happen again. Many women harmed by their partners had a prior history of abuse and violence in the relationship.

#### *Ask Yourself:*

In the past, have you told him you wanted to leave?

How has he reacted?

Has he stalked you, threatened to commit suicide, kill you, harm the children or destroy pets? How does this affect your safety planning?

Have you created an Emergency Leaving Plan in case you decide to leave?

*A service, agency, or individual I trust to help me:*


### Emergency Leaving:

If you decide to leave the abusive relationship, even if it is not an emergency, you should not tell your partner about your plans. Get to safety and then call or text or have someone else explain that you have left.

# Strategies for Staying Safer

## STEP 3: My Safety Plan

Your “**Safety Plan**” is a response to your checklist and notes from **Step 2** where you identified the risk factors in your relationship. You have also identified agencies and people who you trust to help you. Include them in your safety plan. You may not be ready to take action in all areas of your life all at once. Deal with the ones that you know you can do something about – and work on the others over time. Nobody can predict every possible scenario, but if you plan and think ahead about what you might do in case your partner becomes violent to you, the children, the pets, your property or others you love, you may be prepared to protect yourself.



**Each strategy you create  
may help to reduce risk  
and increase your safety.**



**Keep your plan in a safe place  
where your partner will not find it.**

# My Safety Plan



## Threats of suicide

**I will take his threats of suicide seriously.**

**MY STRATEGY...** I will talk to:

\_\_\_\_\_

about removing firearms/ammunition from the house.

I will call Chimo Helpline at 1-800-667-5005.

I will seek advice from:

\_\_\_\_\_

*(doctor, emergency room)*

## Personal perception of risk

**I will be alert** to the potential that he will become more violent when:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Outside my home, he is most likely to abuse me:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**MY STRATEGY...** for dealing with abuse that tends to happen at certain predictable times is:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**MY STRATEGY...** for dealing with abuse when it happens outside my home is:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# My Safety Plan



## Life events

He is upset lately because of:

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*(a life event like pregnancy, retirement, illness, etc.)*

**MY STRATEGY...** for dealing with abuse that tends to happen at certain predictable times is:

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## Attitudes and values that reinforce the way he treats me

I will talk to a family violence professional:

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*(someone who can help me talk about the abuse that is happening)*

I will explain my situation to:

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*(someone who will not condone the abuse or make excuses for my partner. If they do, I will look for support from another person.)*

## Personal supports

I will contact:

*(A friend, family member, neighbor, co-worker, minister, doctor who tells me they believe me and says that **NO ONE deserves to be abused – it's not your fault!**)*

I will ask if they can help me when I need support. I will ask for specific help with:

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transportation  
using a computer/accessing the Internet  
money (for taxis, groceries, etc.)  
babysitting  
petsitting  
other

about the **services and supports** in my area such as the transition house, family violence outreach, health and mental health services, legal services, and so on.

# My Safety Plan



## Emotional responses

I will make an appointment with \_\_\_\_\_  
and/or \_\_\_\_\_  
to discuss my feelings and mental health issues that relate to abuse that I am experiencing.

## Available resources and access to services

I will find the contact numbers for services that can help me.

Local transition house \_\_\_\_\_ Mental Health Clinic \_\_\_\_\_  
Victim Services \_\_\_\_\_ Family Law NB 1-888-236-2444  
Family Violence Outreach \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

I will learn some strategies for staying safe when using the Internet and social media. (See *My Safety Plan: On the Internet*)

## Presence of children (and possibly pets, other family members)

If I have children, I will contact:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(an agency that works with children)

to ask about the impact of family violence on children and services that can help them.

If I am concerned for my children's emotional well-being, I will reach out for help from:

\_\_\_\_\_  
If I am concerned for my children's safety, I will contact:

\_\_\_\_\_

I will work with my children to help them to create and practice their own emergency safety plans. (See *My Child's Safety Plan: Someone is Hurting My Mom*) I will make sure they know the abuse is not their fault – I just want them to get to safety.

If I have concerns for the safety of my pets, I will call the nearest transition house to ask about safe shelter programs for pets.  
Or, I can ask:

\_\_\_\_\_  
to help look after them.

I will find out about family law issues and my legal rights and protections.  
I can contact a family law lawyer \_\_\_\_\_ or call the  
Family Law Information Line: 1-888-236-2444



# My Safety Plan



## Alcohol and/or drug use

**I will be alert** to the situations where he might become more violent because he is using alcohol/drugs.

**MY STRATEGY...** for dealing with abuse that tends to happen when he is drinking or taking drugs, is:

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**I will be alert** to the situations where I am using alcohol/drugs and my ability to activate my safety plan might be put at risk.

**MY STRATEGY...** for dealing with abuse that tends to happen when both of us are drinking or taking drugs, is:

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## Physical and mental health

I will let \_\_\_\_\_ know that my health issues, physical or mental, are putting me at risk of abuse.

I will talk to: \_\_\_\_\_ about my partner's mental health issues because they affect my safety.

## Economic stressors – unemployment, poverty

**I will be aware** that the stress related to being out of work or not having money for transportation, etc., puts me at greater risk of being abused.

I will seek help from:

\_\_\_\_\_  
*(agency that provides training, job skill training, etc.)*

# My Safety Plan



## Extreme jealousy

I will learn to recognize the signs of an unhealthy relationship.

I will not confuse jealousy and control with love.

I will talk to \_\_\_\_\_

*(service providers who can explain power and control, and how to respond to jealous outbursts.)*

## Presence of weapons, especially long guns

**I will be aware** that his threats to shoot me are a sign that I am at increased risk of being seriously harmed or killed.

I will let \_\_\_\_\_  
*(any service providers that you have contacted)* know I am more fearful because of the firearms.

I can also report my fears about his firearms misuse by contacting the **Canada Firearms Program** at 1-800-731-4000.

I can call the police and let them know I am fearful. I will mention that there are firearms in the house.

## Fear: warning signs

**I will be aware** of warning signs that seem to predict that he is going to assault me. When I see these signs, I will:

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I will keep my cell phone with me at all times. In an emergency, I will call 911.

I will not say I am leaving or do anything during the argument that might make him more violent. I will use my judgment and wait until it is safe to leave without telling him.

# My Safety Plan



## Increasing physical violence

When we are having a serious argument, I will contact:

\_\_\_\_\_

or \_\_\_\_\_

I will keep my cell phone with me at all times.

In an emergency, I will call 911.

I will go to \_\_\_\_\_

*(a room where I can easily leave the house – someplace close to the front or back door).*

I will stay away from \_\_\_\_\_

*(places I could be trapped like the bathroom).*

I will not go to \_\_\_\_\_

*(places that have knives, guns or things that can be used as weapons).*

If I need to get away quickly, I will not say I am leaving or do anything during an argument that might increase his violence. I will wait until it is safe and then leave without telling him.

## Reaction to past attempts to leave

**I will be aware** that leaving an abusive relationship can be very dangerous.

I will get advice about leaving from:

\_\_\_\_\_

If I decide to leave the situation, even if it is not an emergency, I will not tell my partner about my plans. Once I get to safety I will call or text or have someone else explain that I have left.

If I have concerns about leaving my pets behind, I will call the nearest transition house to ask about safe shelter programs for pets.

Or, I can ask: \_\_\_\_\_

to help look after them.

I will prepare to get out quickly by making a safety plan for *Leaving in an Emergency*. I will also make a safety plan with strategies for *After Leaving*.

## Important Safety Planning Resources in New Brunswick

You may need to use some, or all, of these resources which are available on the Internet.

- [Living in an Abusive Relationship: Strategies for Staying Safer](#)
- [My Safety Plan: On the Internet](#)
- [My Child's Safety Plan: Someone is Hurting my Mom](#)
- [My Safety Plan: Leaving in an Emergency](#)
- [My Safety Plan: After Leaving](#)
- [Leaving Abuse: Tips for Your Safety](#)
- [Directory of Services for Victims of Abuse](#)
- [Directory of Services for Abusive Partners](#)
- [Strategies for Staying Safer: My Contact List](#)



These resources are produced by Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick (PLEIS-NB). You can email [pleis@web.ca](mailto:pleis@web.ca) or find them online at [www.legal-info-legale-nb.ca](http://www.legal-info-legale-nb.ca) – just search “Abuse and Violence”. You can also call the PLEIS-NB toll-free **Family Law information line** at 1-888-236-2444 to get a copy.



