

## Getting Out? Why Don't you just Leave?

Domestic violence is cyclical, occurring in three repeating phases. In the tension building phase, the abuser's behavior starts escalating. For example, he may become moody or overly critical, swear, yell and make threats. Knowing what comes next, the victim becomes hypervigilant and tries to keep peace at all costs. She believes that if she keeps things in order, under control, she can avoid another crisis. But she can never be perfect in the eyes of her abuser, she cannot defuse the situation.

For stalking victims, the Stalking Model looks much the same.

In the second phase and the shortest phase is the explosion, an emotionally traumatic episode including physical abuse. The victim may fight back during this phase.

The third phase, calm, is what keeps the victim stuck in the relationship. The partner will apologize profusely, promising never to do this again. Gifts ensue, peace begins. She tells herself that she is not really crazy, and makes every excuse in the book for his behavior.

With stalking victims, the victim goes in and out a type of insanity, preferring to live in denial rather than reality. The propensity for lethality increases greatly. Increased awareness of your surroundings and your safety are called on NOW more than ever. Denial with a stalker and this predator behavior kills.

What you can do

Contact a victims advocate, domestic violence unit and contact the police NOW. Find a stalking expert in your area. They can make the difference just by asking the right questions, documenting their findings, assisting you in your own ability to document evidence, and offering appropriate referral and assistance.

## Making a Safety Plan

You can make a workable safety plan to protect yourself and your children. These are suggested safety guidelines. Please contact a professional to assist you in customizing your plan.

1. Know and identify your partner's levels of violence so you can assess possible danger and use proactive measures for your own safety.

Remove all weapons from your home.

Talk to neighbors- make sure that they know the truth about your domestic violence or stalking situation.

Teach children if possible to call 911.

Notify your workplace. Domestic violence and stalking may begin outside the work area, but increasing statistics are showing that the violent individual is appearing at work with increasing frequency and committing homicide.

### During an assault

Leave IMMEDIATELY if possible. Stay out of confined areas (such as the bathroom) and places where weapons are available like the workshop, kitchen and garage.

Get to a phone. Carry a cell phone.

If you leave by car, lock the doors immediately and don't unlock them till you get to your destination. If you are being followed, head for a police station or any area with SCTV, like a 7-11 where an imminent assault can be taped. Do not get out- honk your horn till you get help.

Six Items you will need to make an escape:

1 Money- hidden away from the home. Enough for motel, food, gas and phone calls. Have coins available for phone booths.

2. Keys. Make 2 extra sets for home and car. Hide one set; give one to a trusted friend.

3. Extra clothing. Pack a bag suitable for the season for yourself and children.
4. Important documents. Have copies:
5. Restraining orders
6. journals
7. social security (yours, his and the children's)
8. protective orders
9. insurance policies
10. driver's license
11. divorce and child custody papers
12. pay stubs, bank statements
13. marriage license
14. ownership papers for mutual property
15. medical prescriptions
16. and monthly bills.
17. Passport and immigration papers if applicable.

Important phone numbers. Local police, victim's advocates hot lines, and trusted friend and social services counselor. Stalking Rescue has provided an easy referral list for victims.

Other personal items. Jewelry, prescriptions, eyeglasses and your children's favorite toys.

Each step you take is a win, no matter how small. You are accountable for your own safety and survival. This may be the scariest time of your life, and once you realize that you have made a decision for yourself and your children to leave a violent situation, your strength and self-esteem will begin to grow.

Free Legal Services Clinics are held in Denver Colorado through the Denver College of Law, Domestic Violence Civil Justice Project. Please call 303-871-6140. Contact your nearest college of law in your area for information about services like these.