



FROM  
YOUR DOCTOR

# Plan to be safe from family violence

Although those closest to you should love and protect you, it doesn't always work out that way. Men often hurt the women they say they care about. In fact, abuse between husbands and wives, boyfriends and girlfriends, and parents and children is so common that it's described by a standard term: family violence.

## What you have to do

If you are being hurt by someone, you can take steps to stay safe. Here are some important things to know:

### What counts as violence?

Violence may be physical, such as hitting, kicking, pinching, and slapping. Or somebody may touch you in places you don't want to be touched or force you to have sex when you don't want to. Force is always wrong, even when you're married to the person using it.

Words can also be violent. Anyone who is calling you names, making fun of you, or somehow making you feel afraid is abusing you—whether you're being hit or not. *Remember that the person who is mistreating you is always to blame for the violence.* It's not your fault—no matter what that person says you've done.

- If your abuser is determined to have a fight, try to have it in a room where nothing can be used as a weapon. Stay close to an exit.

- Tell a neighbor you trust that you're being hurt. Plan a signal that means you need help. For example, if you blink your lights or stamp on the floor, your neighbor should call the police.

- Ask your neighbor to call the police if a commotion can be heard from your home.

- Make arrangements to stay somewhere else in case staying in your home becomes too dangerous. It is important for you to make these plans *before*

you may need to use them.

- Set aside items you might need if you have to leave home. Prepare to take at least \$50 in cash, a checkbook, a bank card, and credit cards. Important documents, such as bank-

books, birth certificates, insurance policies, and social security numbers, should be collected as well. Take extra clothes, keys, medicine, and, if you have children, some favorite toys and their immunization records.

- Remember the phone number for the National Domestic Violence Hotline—(800) 799-SAFE. If you call, someone will connect you with places in your community that can help you.

- When your abuser moves out, change your locks and add extra ones. Tell your neighbors that that person no longer lives there and that the police should be called if he is seen on the premises. Make a safety plan for your children to follow when you're not with them. Tell baby-sitters and teachers who is—and isn't—allowed to pick up your children.

- If you have a protective order, carry it everywhere. Ask a friend or relative to store a copy for you. Let those around you know you have it, and call the police anytime your abuser comes near you.

- Tell someone at your job what is going on. Security people should know about it also. Try not to leave your workplace alone, and try not to go home the same way every day. □

**National Domestic  
Violence Hotline**

**(800) 799-SAFE**