

PERINATAL IPV SAFETY PLANNING GUIDE



GENERAL

- Some partners become abusive or increase abuse during pregnancy for a variety of reasons. Abuse is always about power and control. A partner who is abusive may become resentful that the focus of the relationship is shifting from them to the pregnancy.

EMOTIONAL

- Pregnancy is a period of extreme change. It's natural to depend on emotional support from a partner during this time, as well as financial assistance if necessary, to help prepare for the baby. Creating social connections with other expecting parents and creating a plan to protect your emotional energy can be helpful.
 - o Create a [self-care](#) plan.
 - o Consider exercise, walking in nature, journaling, art, or spending time with loved ones.
 - o [Meetup.com](#) is a website where you can connect with a group of parents expecting children with a similar due date.
 - o Seeking support from a counselor may be another way to get your needs met during this time.
 - o [The Hotline](#) website can provide information about local domestic violence programs that offer counseling and support groups.
 - o [GoodTherapy](#) is a website that helps in finding a counselor near you.

PHYSICAL

- Pregnancy is the 2nd most dangerous time to be in an abusive relationship. These are tips you can consider to promote your physical safety. You are the best person to determine which tips are right for you.
 - o Map the safest routes out of the home or around the rooms where you spend the most time.
 - o Avoid rooms with weapons or hard surfaces.
 - o If you can no longer drive, identify safe people to contact for transportation.
 - o If you live in a home with stairs, try to spend your time on the first floor.
 - o If violence is unavoidable, assuming the fetal position and covering your stomach with your arms can help protect you and your pregnancy.

HEALTHCARE

- Doctor's visits can be an opportunity to discuss your unsafe relationship, and a health care provider can become an active participant in your safety planning efforts if you choose. What tips you utilize and how much you share with a healthcare provider is your choice.
 - o If your partner goes to the doctor with you, try to make a private phone call to the provider ahead of time and ask them to create an opportunity to be alone with you during your appointment. Consider using a loved one's phone to do so while your partner is not around.
 - o You may be able to find a prenatal class that limits attendance to those giving birth. This can be a comfortable space to find support or speak to the instructor one-on-one.
 - o You can ask your healthcare provider to use their office phone to call a domestic violence hotline.

BIRTH

- Many people create a [birth plan](#). If you are in an unsafe relationship, consider creating a birth plan that includes measures for your physical, emotional, and financial safety.
 - o You may be able to include your healthcare professionals in your safety planning efforts. Your doctors, nurses, midwives and more can be allies to you during your labor.
 - o Consider partnering with a [doula](#) for support at your birth. Birth doulas provide support at a variety of birthing locations and unlike a doctor or nurse, who will have many patients every day, a birth doula will focus solely on you at your birth. Many, but not all, doulas accept insurance or offer sliding scale fees.

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- Identify a family member or friend to provide labor support. When considering who to ask, think about who will *help* you safety plan, rather than try to take control.
- Consider different strategies to help you stay calm, focused, and energized at birth, especially if you suspect your partner may attempt to add stress to your process. Some possibilities are stretching, breathing exercises, guided meditation, listening or singing to music, and repeating positive affirmations.
- If you are in an unsafe relationship, you may find that preventing your partner from being present at your birth is the safest option for you. Consider only alerting your labor support team when you go into labor and discuss with them ahead of time about keeping this information private.
- Consider your birthing location and work with available staff to ensure they know not to share your location with your partner if they call on the phone or arrive to where you are. You may want to provide staff with a photo of your partner so they can be aware of their possible arrival.
- If you will be leaving your home to give birth, consider taking a cab or ride hailing service, or have a support person take you in a car your partner/ex will not recognize.
- If your abuser will be present during labor, consider creating activities to occupy them, such as asking them to contact friends and family, and purchase food, clothing, or baby items at the store.

POSTPARTUM

- Intimate partner violence can exacerbate postpartum mental health issues. Consider researching information on symptoms, finding support, and how to promote your safety during this very sensitive time. An abusive partner may try to maintain power and control by dismissing the importance of your need to refrain from sexual activity. They may use guilt, threats, or force to coerce you into sexual activity. These behaviors are [sexual abuse](#). Consider contacting your healthcare provider or a domestic violence program to discuss increasing your sexual and physical safety. Possible strategies may be:
 - Having a support person stay in your home during the length of your healing.
 - Staying with your baby at a supportive family member or friend's home or a shelter while you heal.
 - Sleeping in a separate room from the abuser.
 - Adjusting your sleep schedule to when your partner is away from home.
 - If your partner might try to get you pregnant again before you're ready, you can try identifying safe and undetectable contraceptive methods that don't interfere with your child feeding choices with a healthcare provider.
 - Browse [Postpartum Support International](#), which has accurate information on [pregnancy and postpartum mental health](#), a [local support search](#), and online support groups.

LEGAL RIGHTS AND SAFETY

- Pregnancy is a time when financial and legal options shift. Knowing your rights around these issues is a step toward keeping you and your baby safe.
 - Different kinds of workplaces offer different kinds of support to pregnant employees, but they must follow specific employment laws.
 - The [Department of Labor's Women's Bureau](#) has a website where you can review what your rights are during pregnancy and as a parent.
 - Child custody options can be confusing. The [WomensLaw](#) website has information on [custody](#) and [parental kidnapping](#). You may also consider contacting your local domestic violence program for information on custody and family court.
- "Safety Planning during Pregnancy." *The Hotline*, National Domestic Violence Hotline, 28 Sept. 2020, www.thehotline.org/resources/safety-planning-during-pregnancy/.

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- “Planning a Safe Childbirth.” *The Hotline*, National Domestic Violence Hotline, 26 Jan. 2024, www.thehotline.org/resources/pregnancy-and-abuse-planning-a-safe-child-birth/.
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- “Pregnancy and Abuse: How to Stay Safe for Your 9 Months.” *The Hotline*, National Domestic Violence Hotline, 12 Apr. 2022, www.thehotline.org/resources/pregnancy-and-abuse-how-to-stay-safe-for-your-9-months/.
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- “How to Stay Physically, Emotionally, and Financially Safe during Pregnancy.” *The Hotline*, National Domestic Violence Hotline, 21 June 2023, www.thehotline.org/resources/staying-physically-emotionally-and-financially-safe-during-pregnancy/.
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- “Pregnancy and Abuse: Safety during Postpartum.” *The Hotline*, National Domestic Violence Hotline, 6 Mar. 2025, www.thehotline.org/resources/pregnancy-and-abuse-safety-during-postpartum/.