

SAFETY ALERT: Computer use leaves a trail and can be monitored. If this is a concern for you, please use a safer computer (for example, at a public library). If you are in immediate danger, call 9-1-1.

Philadelphia Domestic Violence Hotline:

1-866-723-3014

(24-hour hotline offering bilingual services to domestic violence victims, including referrals and crisis intervention)

Personal Safety: Domestic Violence

In the United States, more than one-third of women aged 18 and over — approximately 42.4 million women — have experienced physical violence, sexual violence, and/or stalking by a current or former intimate partner at some point in their lifetime. Men are also victims of domestic violence, but the vast majority of victims are women.

Victims of domestic violence come from all cultures, all income groups, all ages, and all religions.

Domestic violence can be lethal. On average, more than three women are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends each day in this country.

Recognizing Domestic Violence: Warning Signs of Abuse:

Does a current or former partner, household member, or family member...

- Hit, punch, slap, kick, or bite you or the children?
- Use or threaten to use a weapon against you?
- Threaten to hurt you or the children?
- Force you to have sex against your will?

Philadelphia Resources:

Philadelphia Police Department

- [Police Districts & Map](#)

Legal Services

- [Philadelphia Legal Assistance](#)
- [Women Against Abuse](#)

Specialized Legal Services

- [Mazzoni Center](#)
- [HIAS](#)
- [Legal Clinic for the Disabled](#)
- [Nationalities Service Center](#)
- [Senior Law Center](#)

Legal Information

- [Women’s Law Project](#)

Counseling Services

- [Congreso de Latinos Unidos](#)
- [Lutheran Settlement House](#)
- [Women in Transition](#)
- [Women Organized Against Rape](#)

Emergency Shelter Information

- Philadelphia DV Hotline:
1-866-723-3014

State & National Resources

- [Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#)
- [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#)
- [Futures Without Violence](#)
- [National Network to End Domestic Violence](#)
- [National Human Trafficking Hotline](#)

- Destroy personal property or sentimental items?
- Control all finances and force you to account in detail for what you spend?
- Humiliate you in front of others?
- Keep track of all of your time?
- Constantly accuse you of being unfaithful?
- Discourage your relationships with family and friends?
- Prevent you from working or attending school?
- Criticize you for little things?

If you find yourself saying yes to any of these questions, you may want to make a plan to stay safe and connect with resources in your community to help you.

If you are injured, what can you do?

- Call 9-1-1.
- Get medical attention from your doctor or a medical emergency room. The medical staff may find injuries you cannot see. Ask the staff to photograph your injuries and keep detailed records in case you decide to take legal action.
 - If you have been **sexually abused**, do not shower, change clothing, comb your hair, or use the bathroom before seeking medical attention so that evidence is not destroyed. You may want to take a change of clothing with you to the emergency room.
- Consider contacting community resources that can help you.

How can the Philadelphia Police Department help victims of domestic violence?

- If you experience domestic violence, call 9-1-1 and make a report to the police.
- It is the policy of the PPD:
 - To treat every act of domestic violence as a criminal offense that merits a strong and swift police response... all sworn personnel responding to calls regarding domestic abuse or violence will render every necessary assistance to the victim(s) and make arrests where warranted. *Directive 90.*
- If a responding police officer observes or has probable cause to believe that an abuser has committed a crime, including violating a Protection from Abuse Order (PFA), officers have the power to arrest the abuser. The officer does not need to have witnessed the abuse in order to make an arrest. [See Below, "How Can the Legal System Help Victims of Domestic Violence?"]
- If the abuser is arrested for violating a protection order, the police officer will seize all firearms, other weapons, and ammunition used or threatened to be used during the violation of a protection order and any other firearms in the defendant's possession.

- Police officers will inform you about community resources, including shelter information, and the procedure for seeking a civil protection from abuse order.
- Police officers enforce protection orders from other counties or states.

How can the legal system help victims of domestic violence?

- If you experience domestic violence, you may be eligible for a Protection From Abuse order (PFA). You may file a petition seeking a PFA with Philadelphia Family Court, located at 34 South 11th Street, Room 242. You may file on your own or with the help of an attorney.
- If you cannot afford an attorney, a legal services attorney may be able to help you. [See *Resources*]
- If you represent yourself, there is legal information to help you understand the PFA process. [Link to [EPFA](#) & [PFA Brochures](#)]
- In emergency situations after 5pm, before 8am, and any holidays when Family Court is closed, you may file a petition for an emergency PFA at the Emergency Filing Site, Room B-3, Criminal Justice Center, 13th & Filbert Streets.
- If you file a petition for a protection from abuse order, the police can assist you in serving the paperwork. Bring the paperwork to the [police district](#) where the defendant lives, works, or can be found. The officer may need to make several attempts at service before the paperwork is served. Whoever serves the paperwork will sign the Verification of Service and return it to you.
- Even if the defendant has not been served with papers, go to the hearing.
- At the filing unit and the hearing, language assistance is available. Ask about these services at the filing unit.
- If you have a protection order from another county or state, you do not need to file for another protection order in Philadelphia County.

Safety Planning Tips:

- Contact resources in your community for help.
- Memorize emergency phone numbers.
- Keep a cell phone with you and program 9-1-1 in your phone.
- Ask your neighbors to call 9-1-1 if they see the abuser at your home (and the abuser does not live there).
 - Establish a signal so they know when to call for help (for example, pulling a shade down or turning a light on and off).
- File for a Protection From Abuse order. [See Above, “How Can the Legal System Help Victims of Domestic Violence?”]
- If you have a Protection From Abuse order, keep it with you at all times.
- If you are still in an abusive relationship:
 - Plan an escape route out of your home in case your partner is violent.

- Think of a place to go if you need to escape your home.
- Pack a bag with important items you would need in case you need to escape your home. Keep this bag in a safe place or give it to a friend you trust.
- If you have left an abusive relationship, the following actions may make you safer:
 - Avoid staying home alone.
 - Cancel shared credit cards or bank accounts; choose a new bank and open a new account.
 - Change the locks on the door.
 - Change your phone number and make it unlisted.
 - Screen calls using caller ID and/or an answering machine.
 - Vary your daily routine so it is more difficult for an abuser to follow you.
 - Inform work and school contacts so they can help if the abuser tries to make contact with you or your children.
 - Install steel doors instead of wooden doors.
 - Install window bars.
 - Install a security system.
 - Get outside lighting.
 - Get smoke detectors and make sure they are working.
 - Place a fire extinguisher on every floor of your home.
 - If you must meet the abuser, do it in a public location.

Making Your Children Safer:

- Tell the school principal, day care director, or any other care provider for your children not to release your children to anyone. Give them a copy of your court order.
- Make sure the children know who to tell at school if they see the abuser.
- Make sure the school or child care provider knows not to give your phone number or address to ANYONE.

Making Yourself Safer at the Courthouse:

- Sit as far away from the abuser as you can.
- Bring someone you trust to wait with you until your case is heard.
 - For a witness, get a blue subpoena so they can come into Family Court at 34 S. 11th Street). A blue subpoena is also known as a “friendly witness” subpoena. It is available in both English and Spanish at Family Court at 34 S. 11th Street in Customer Service, Clerk’s Office, Domestic Violence Unit, Custody Intake, Custody Master’s Unit, and all courtrooms. Pick up all of the copies you need on the day you file.
- Tell a sheriff or the judge’s clerk that you are afraid of the abuser and ask him/her to look out for you.
- Make sure you have your court order before you leave.
- Ask the judge or the sheriff to keep the abuser in the courthouse for awhile when the hearing is over; leave quickly.
- Call police if you think the abuser is following you.

*adapted in part from *Domestic Violence Safety Plan: Safety Tips for You and Your Family*, a joint project of the American Bar Association Tort Trial and Insurance Practice Section and the ABA Commission on Domestic Violence.

Tech Safety Tips:

An abuser could be monitoring your computer use, checking your phone records, listening to your phone calls, or tracking your whereabouts without you knowing about it.

If you feel like your abuser knows too much about your activities or your abuser is familiar with computers/technology, here are steps that may help you protect yourself:

- **Computers**

Computer use leaves a trail that is impossible to erase completely. If an abuser has access to your computer, your computer use may be monitored through keystroke software or Spyware. To help protect yourself, consider these tips:

- Use a safer computer instead of your personal computer, such as a computer at a public library.
- Clear internet history, which is usually located under “Tools.”
- Do not open attachments or links in emails from an abuser or unknown senders because doing so may infect your computer with spyware.
- Update computer virus programs regularly.
- Be suspicious if an abuser has done repair work on your computer or has had access to your computer.
- Contact an expert to check your computer for monitoring programs.
- Be aware that it is impossible to guarantee the security of a computer after it has been infected with spyware.
- Email:
 - Keep in mind that email is not a confidential way to talk about information you want to keep private. Abusers may be monitoring email, stealing passwords, and viewing emails through spyware.
 - Create a new email account that is not tied to your identity.
 - Empty your “deleted email folder.”
 - Avoid passwords that are easy to guess.
 - Change passwords and pin numbers frequently.
 - Do not use the “remember me” or “auto log-in” feature on your computer.
 - If you must send an email to an abuser, use a Gmail account. Gmail automatically masks your IP (internet protocol) address, thereby preventing an abuser from using this information to

identify your geographic location.

- Phone:

Phone calls may be monitored, especially if there are features like caller ID, text messaging, call history, and voicemail. Phone calls on cordless phones can be intercepted by scanners, CB radios, and baby monitors. If you think your phone calls are being monitored, consider these tips:

- Do not use a family or shared plan that could give an abuser access to your account.
- Be aware that an abuser may use a “spoofing” service to make the caller ID on your telephone display a fake number or the number of trusted individuals, such as family members or law enforcement.
- Cell phone:
 - Lock your cell phone with a pass code and don’t share the passcode with anyone.
 - Use a new or donated cell phone with a different carrier or a prepaid calling card purchased with cash.
 - Turn off your cell phone and remove battery when not in use for location privacy.
 - Set Bluetooth to “hidden.”
 - Set GPS to “E-911” only. Contact your cell phone provider to ensure that GPS is not enabled.
 - Run anti-virus software on your phone.
 - Check to make sure you are not running apps that are pulling your location and publishing it online.
- Home Phone:
 - Minimize use of cordless phones or baby monitors.
- Voicemail:
 - Change passwords frequently.
- Phone Records:
 - Call your local phone company to request that your records be locked down and that information only be released to someone with a special code you have selected.
- Keep your phone number confidential.
 - Keep your phone number unlisted.
 - Dial *67 prior to making a call to block your number from showing up on someone else’s caller ID. (However, be aware that an abuser may subscribe to internet-based services that will reveal blocked telephone numbers.)

- Tracking/Surveillance

Cameras and/or GPS transmitters can track your location and can be hidden without you knowing about it. If you think someone is tracking your whereabouts, consider these tips:

- Get a private mailbox address to give when asked for an address by doctors, businesses, and other people you trust. Do not give out your real address.
- Look for patterns in the information an abuser appears to know. Patterns may help you identify possible camera locations.
- Find a mechanic or law enforcement officer willing to search your car for a GPS device. Keep in mind that immediately removing a device could destroy evidence or possibly escalate the abuser by alerting the abuser.

Think about your safety when taking any of the above safety measures. Some abusers may escalate their abusive behavior if they think the survivor is removing their control or access.