

NOTES

CONTENTS

WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?	1
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN BUCKS COUNTY	1
LEGAL OPTIONS AND PROCEDURES	2
Protection through Civil Proceedings	2
After a PFA is Issued	6
Protection through Criminal Proceedings	9
SAFETY PLANNING	11
CHECKLIST	15
HOW CAN THE POLICE HELP?	16
PRIVATE CRIMINAL COMPLAINT	16
A WOMAN'S PLACE SERVICES	17
RESOURCES	19
Bucks County Resources	19
Hotlines	19
Counseling Options	19

NOTES

NOTES

WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Domestic violence is a specific and deliberate pattern of behavior for the sole purpose of establishing and maintaining power and control over another person in an intimate relationship. It is a universal societal problem that does not discriminate. It can happen to anyone, regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, marital status, sexual orientation, income, social status, education level, health status, or profession. Domestic violence is not limited to intimate heterosexual relationships. It also happens in lesbian and gay relationships.

Domestic violence is a chosen behavior. The abuser, and only the abuser, decides to use violent behavior to control a partner. A victim cannot make an abuser stop being violent or abusive. A victim of domestic violence has not asked for, invited, or provoked the abuser to be violent. Alcohol and drug abuse do not cause domestic violence. Abusers who drink or use drugs have two separate problems that need to be handled separately.

Abusers use violence to control their partners. Abuse, both physical and emotional, takes many forms: insults, name calling, humiliation and threats, economic deprivation, sexual violence, pushes, slaps and punches, severe beatings, and murder.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN BUCKS COUNTY

A Woman's Place (AWP), the only domestic violence agency in Bucks County, Pa., provides comprehensive **free, private, and confidential** domestic violence services, support, education, outreach, and advocacy to victims of abuse and their children. In 2005, more than 4,000 hotline calls were received; 78 victims and 153 children sought shelter as a result of abuse. Legal advocacy services were provided for 839 individuals.

Domestic violence is a serious problem in our community.

- One in four American women will be beaten or abused by a current or former partner, spouse, or lover at some point in their lives.
- Nearly one-third of the serious injuries to women treated at hospital emergency rooms are due to domestic violence, the leading causes of injury to women.
- One in 12 pregnant women in the United States is beaten by a partner, a spouse, or lover.

Ending an abusive relationship can be difficult, however, **NO ONE HAS TO LIVE WITH VIOLENCE**. This booklet offers information about safety planning, how you can get help from the police and the court system, and how you can find agencies to help you as you take steps toward ending the violence in your life.

LEGAL OPTIONS AND PROCEDURES

The following sections describe in detail the Pennsylvania Protection from Abuse Act. This includes relief available through the civil and criminal courts, and legal options and procedures in Bucks County, which are available to victims of domestic violence.

PROTECTION THROUGH CIVIL PROCEEDINGS

Protection from Abuse Orders

The Protection from Abuse Act enables victims of abuse to seek relief through the courts *pro se* (on their own), without having an attorney file the papers for them. AWP and Bucks County Legal Aid developed a joint project to assist victims of abuse in filing *pro se* for protection from abuse. The Legal Aid Domestic Abuse office is located at 100 Union St., Doylestown, Pa. AWP employs advocates to provide options counseling, technical assistance, and emotional support in filing a petition for protection from abuse. **AWP offers:**

- **Legal Advocacy**—information, education, options counseling, and referrals regarding legal options to victims of abuse in Bucks County
- **Court Accompaniment**—emotional support and empowerment counseling to victims of abuse during civil and criminal court hearings and trials

Bucks County Legal Aid assigns *pro bono* (free) attorneys to represent plaintiffs at their protection from abuse hearing.

What is a Protection from Abuse Order?

A Protection from Abuse Order (PFA) is a civil (non-criminal) court order that can protect a victim from being abused, harassed, threatened, or stalked. A civil procedure does not result in a criminal record for the defendant.

What is considered “abuse” under the Protection from Abuse Law?

Abuse can be any of the following acts or attempts at the following acts:

- Physical abuse including: hitting, slapping, punching, pushing, kicking, biting, throwing heavy objects, and threats of bodily injury
- Sexual abuse including: rape, spousal rape, sexual assault
- Assault with a weapon, not limited to a gun or knife

RESOURCES

BUCKS COUNTY RESOURCES

A Woman’s Place Administration Office	215-343-9241
Bucks County Legal Aid (Doylestown)	215-340-1818
Bucks County Legal Aid (Bristol)	215-781-1111
Bucks County Bar Association	215-348-9413
Bucks County Correctional Facility	215-345-3702
Bucks County Prison Records	215-345-3774
Bucks County District Attorney	215-348-6292
Bucks County District Attorney Victim Assistance	215-348-6144
Bucks County Domestic Relations	215-348-6822
Bucks County Domestic Relations Support Office	215-340-8068
District Justice:	
see telephone book for individual listings under “Bucks County District Court”	

HOTLINES

Bilingual Lutheran Settlement House	215-739-9999
Congreso De Latinos Unidos	215-763-8870
La Linea Directa (Spanish Hotline)	215-235-9992
Lesbian Hotline	1-800-224-0211
National Domestic Violence Hotline	1-800-333-7233
Network of Victim’s Assistance (NOVA)	1-800-675-6900
Phila. Lesbian/Gay Task Force	215-563-4581
TTY (For the Deaf)	215-860-1802
Women Against Abuse (Philadelphia)	215-386-1280
Laurel House (Montgomery County)	1-800-642-3150
Turning Point (Lehigh County)	610-437-3369

COUNSELING OPTIONS

Abuser Counseling	
Anthony Clark (Doylestown)	215-348-8212
Menergy (Mt. Airy)	215-242-2235
Contact (Crisis, Suicide)	
Lower Bucks	215-355-6689
Central Bucks	215-340-1998
TTY	215-741-4443
Family Services	
Bristol	215-781-8160
Doylestown (Day)	215-345-5300
Doylestown (Night)	215-345-2273
Langhorne	215-757-6916
Quakertown	215-538-1616
Women in Transition (Montgomery County)	215-751-1111

How do I obtain a PFA?

Step 1 If you would like **free, private, and confidential** legal options and assistance, telephone the AWP Legal Advocacy Project at **215-348-0445**. Please call for information and/or to schedule an appointment. Appointments are not mandatory, but suggested. If you do not want the assistance of an AWP Legal Advocate, you may file on your own at the Family Court Building, Prothonotary's Office, 30 E. Court St., Doylestown.

Step 2 You should allow yourself ample time to complete the petition (approximately 2 hours) with the assistance of an AWP Legal Advocate. It is helpful to bring photos, police reports, and/or medical reports if you have them. However, reports to police or medical attention are not required to file a PFA.

Step 3 When your petition is complete, it is filed with the Prothonotary's Office at the Domestic Relations Court House, 30 E. Court Street, Doylestown. You will be given a copy for your records. After the Judge reviews your petition a hearing will be scheduled. Once a petition is filed it becomes public record and can not be retracted, unless you come to court and request that it be withdrawn.

Step 4 Once a hearing date is granted by the Court, the defendant must be served with a petition. Your AWP Legal Advocate will discuss the different options for service on the defendant.

Step 5 Legal Aid will provide an attorney to represent you at the PFA hearing at no cost. If you wish, you may retain a private attorney to represent you.

Are there additional protections under the law?

- **Temporary Order** - If there is an immediate and present danger, you may request a Temporary Order of Protection. The Court will decide whether or not to enter a temporary order based on the information included in your petition. You do not need a temporary order to qualify for a final order.
- **Emergency Order** – An Emergency PFA is a very time-limited order that can be granted only by the District Justice. The District Justice may issue an emergency order when the Court of Common Pleas is closed, such as holidays, weekends, and evenings. The police can assist you in contacting the District Justice on-call. If an emergency order is granted, an additional hearing in the Court of Common Pleas will be scheduled within 10 days on a Wednesday morning in Doylestown. You are required to attend. If an emergency order is not granted, you may still file a petition through the normal process and request a temporary order and a final order through the Court of Common Pleas.

Note: An Emergency PFA is only valid until the close of business on the next business day.

A WOMAN'S PLACE SERVICES

24-HOUR HOTLINE Free, **private, and confidential**, AWP's 24-hour hotline is available to anyone in the community who has questions about any issue relating to domestic violence. Callers can receive counseling, information, and referrals. Calls to the hotline will not appear on your phone bill.

SHELTER AWP provides a safe place for victims of domestic violence and their children whose safety is being threatened by an intimate partner. The shelter's location is confidential and secure, with a staff person on duty 24-hours a day.

LEGAL ADVOCACY PROJECT AWP provides support and advocacy for clients seeking relief through the civil legal system. Assistance is available in filing a Protection from Abuse Order. Advocates also provide legal options, safety planning, and court accompaniment.

FIRST RESPONSE TEAM First Response Advocates provide 24-hour, in-person crisis counseling. These services may be accessed immediately following an incident of domestic violence, when requested by the local police department. Advocates provide emotional support, information, education, and referrals to community resources to victims who request these services. Advocates also provide accompaniment to criminal court proceedings and follow-up services.

MEDICAL ADVOCACY PROJECT AWP's Medical Advocacy Project is on the forefront of training and advocacy in Bucks County's healthcare system. Medical Advocates provide training for healthcare workers and staffs at area hospitals and clinics. Victims of domestic violence can access AWP's 24-hour counseling services from the safety of the hospital or healthcare clinic.

PREVENTION EDUCATION PROJECT AWP's Prevention Educators present programs at the elementary, middle, and high school levels throughout Bucks County. These programs provide students with information and skills for healthy relationships as well as raise awareness about resources and options available to students experiencing violence in their relationships.

FULL CIRCLE THRIFT STORE Located in the Towne Centre Shopping Center in New Britain, Pa., the Full Circle Thrift Store features a great selection of women's, men's, and children's gently used clothing and accessories. A variety of gently used household items are also for sale. **Donations are accepted at this location.** All proceeds from the store benefit AWP.

HOW CAN THE POLICE HELP?

When an incident of abuse happens, call the police—911. Explain what happened and be sure to say if the abuser is armed or if someone is seriously hurt. Be aware that there is no way of knowing how quickly the police will respond to your call, and that there is no way of knowing how the police will handle the situation. There is not any guarantee that the abuser will be arrested. Unless an arrest is made, and the bail conditions specify such, the abuser cannot be made to leave the residence.

While police are on the scene the police should inform you that an AWP First Response Advocate is available to immediately speak with you about your options. If they do not offer you this resource, you may ask that the police contact an AWP First Response Advocate to meet with you. It does not matter what time it is.

PRIVATE CRIMINAL COMPLAINT

If you have been assaulted by your abuser or are receiving harassing or threatening telephone calls and the police have not made an arrest, you may file a private criminal complaint at your local District Justice. You will complete a complaint which will be forwarded to the District Attorney's office for review. If it meets the standards for criminal charges, the private complaint will be approved and a preliminary hearing set. This process takes approximately six weeks from filing to approval.

How long does it take to get a PFA?

According to the Protection from Abuse Act, a hearing of your petition must take place within 10 business days of filing. PFA hearings are held on Wednesdays, at 9:30 a.m., on the 3rd floor of the Domestic Relations Court House, 30 E. Court Street, Doylestown.

- The plaintiff must attend the hearing. Failure to attend the hearing may result in dismissal of the petition and may affect future petitions. The Judge may also impose court costs on the plaintiff for failing to be present.
- If the defendant has not yet been served by the scheduled court date, the hearing may be continued for a week or two until service is completed.
- If the defendant has been served, both parties need to appear.
- If the defendant has been served and does not appear at court, the petitioner may be granted the PFA by default.
- On occasion, the defendant will agree to a PFA and a hearing will not be necessary. If this happens, the Protection from Abuse agreement will be entered as an Order of Court.

A Final PFA is effective immediately. You will take it with you and deliver it to the police department in your community. You will also receive copies to be distributed where needed.

How long does a PFA last? Can I get it renewed?

PFA's can last for a maximum of three years. A judge may not grant this maximum in all circumstances.

PFA's are not renewable. If further abuse occurs after the order expires, you must come in to file another Protection from Abuse Petition. If the court finds that there were one or more acts of abuse during the time the PFA was in place, or if the defendant has engaged in a pattern of behavior that showed continued risk or harm to you or your children, the Court may grant an extension of your protection order.

Who does the order protect?

The order protects you, the petitioner/plaintiff. It can also protect minor children if there has been abuse to them. A judge may also grant protection for witnesses who testify against the defendant on your behalf.

How much does all of this cost?

There is **no** charge to the petitioner for any part of the process of filing for a PFA.

AFTER A PFA IS ISSUED

After I get a PFA, what should I do?

- Obtain several certified copies from the Prothonotary
- Take a copy to the police department where you live, work, or frequent
- Provide a copy to school(s) or daycare if custody or protection of your children is included
- Keep a copy in your car, at your work place, in your home, in your purse, and, if possible, with a relative or friend

If my defendant is excluded from our residence, how does he/she get his/her personal possessions?

If the defendant is ordered to leave the residence, a mutually agreed upon time for retrieving personal possessions should be entered into the order. It is recommended that a police officer stand by for safety issues. If possible, you may want to gather the defendant's possessions and have them ready for pick-up.

If my partner is not excluded from the residence and I plan to leave, how do I get my possessions?

Arrangements for a specific date and time should be made at the time of the hearing and should be included in the order. If not, ask the police to accompany you or take a friend.

If my partner is excluded from the residence, may I change the locks and/or the lease?

You may change the locks and have the defendant's name taken off the lease if the apartment or house is rented. You will be responsible for paying the rent and other expenses.

If the defendant has been excluded from the marital-owned home, you may change the locks.

If we own the house, does my partner have to pay the mortgage?

You are both responsible for the mortgage. If you have not reached an agreement about this, ask your attorney how to proceed.

CHECKLIST

WHAT TO TAKE WHEN YOU LEAVE OR KEEP WITH A FRIEND/NEIGHBOR.

- √ **Immunization records**
- √ **Medication**
- √ **Food stamps and special foods**
- √ **Favorite toys for children**
- √ **Personal address/telephone book with important phone numbers**
- √ **Financial papers, checkbook, and bank statements**
- √ **Originals or photocopies of: deeds, apartment leases, mortgages, loans, tax returns, pay stubs, Department of Public Assistance (DPA) cards, health insurance cards, and insurance policies**
- √ **Legal documents including: PFA, social security cards for you and your children, birth certificates, marriage and divorce documents, child custody papers, driver license/photo ID, owner and insurance cards for the car, auto leases, passports**

- AWP Medical Advocates are available in all seven acute care hospitals and many clinics in Bucks County. They provide **free, private and confidential** crisis counseling and follow-up services to all patients who disclose domestic violence. Patients can request to speak with an AWP Medical Advocate at any of the hospitals listed below.

Grand View Hospital – Sellersville

St. Luke’s Hospital – Quakertown

Warminster General Hospital

St. Mary Medical Center - Langhorne

Doylestown Hospital

Frankford Hospital - Langhorne

Lower Bucks Hospital - Bristol

Planned Parenthood – Bensalem, Bristol, Doylestown, Quakertown, and Warminster

HealthLink Medical Center – Southampton

Doylestown Free Clinic

St. Mary Children’s Health Center - Bensalem

Mother Bachmann Maternity Center - Bensalem

If I have custody, may the defendant see his/her children?

If you receive temporary physical custody of the children within the PFA, a judge may grant visitation or temporary physical custody to the defendant. A schedule is agreed upon and the defendant has the children during those times only, except for other times as agreed to by the parties. If the defendant chooses not to exercise his/her custodial rights, he/she **cannot** be held in contempt of the PFA. The Protection from Abuse Hearing does not decide custody.

If custody is not included in the PFA, what should I do?

You should call a private attorney immediately for guidance. If you cannot afford a private attorney, and you qualify for Legal Aid’s assistance, call 215-340-1818 or 215-781-1111 (Legal Aid’s Bristol office). They will explain the custody process to you. Then you may file a *pro se* (on your own) Custody Petition with the Court. The librarian in the Law Library (on the bottom level of the Court House) will help you find the forms.

If I don’t have a custody order, is the defendant allowed to take the children?

Yes. Both parents have equal rights and either parent can file for custody.

If I change my mind and decide I no longer need the PFA, may I drop it?

PFA’s can be modified or vacated. It is important for you to understand all the ramifications of doing this. It is suggested that you speak to one of the AWP Legal Advocates prior to doing so. It is possible for a Legal Aid attorney to assist in a modification of the PFA in certain circumstances.

If the defendant violates the order by calling, stalking, threatening, or abusing me, what should I do?

- Immediately notify the police of any violation of the order.
- If the defendant is arrested, attend the violation hearing (contempt hearing) on the next Wednesday.
- If the defendant is not arrested, contact the AWP Legal Aid Domestic Abuse office to make an appointment to file a Contempt Petition yourself. An AWP Legal Advocate will assist you with completing the necessary paperwork.
- Attend the hearing, where you will be represented by an assistant district attorney; you do not need a private attorney.
- If the defendant is found guilty of contempt of the PFA (an indirect criminal offense), he/she may be fined, receive a suspended sentence (the sentence would be served if a further violation occurs), placed on probation, or be put in jail immediately. The current PFA may be extended at this time.

Can I drop the contempt charges if I decide I don't want to proceed?

If the police filed the contempt charges, the case will proceed. If you filed a contempt petition, then you can ask the Judge for permission to withdraw the charge.

When I take the children to the defendant's home, he/she often insults me. What can I do?

The Court may not consider this behavior to be in contempt of the order. If possible, choose a safe, public location for the exchange of the children. You may arrange for a friend or family member to accompany you for safety, or actually pick-up and drop off the children.

For safety reasons a judge may order curbside pickup to avoid a violation of the PFA. Avoid having the other parent enter your home or you entering his/her home. It is important at all times to protect your safety.

If I've suffered severe financial loss due to medical expenses or loss of work as a result of the abuse, what can I do?

AWP's Legal Advocacy Project can assist you in filing for Victim's Compensation or you may file a civil action against the defendant and attempt to recover these expenses.

If criminal charges are brought, restitution from the defendant can be requested as part of the sentence.

A Victim's Compensation Claim is a reimbursable program for victims of a crime; domestic violence is a crime. To apply for victim's compensation an abuser does not have to be arrested. If a police report or PFA is filed within 72 hours, you may qualify for victim's compensation. Contact AWP's Legal Advocates for further information or questions.

Is there community support if I need help?

AWP offers comprehensive services to victims of domestic violence and their children. A 24-hour hotline is always available. **Call 1-800-220-8116** to access all services. In addition to the 24-hour hotline, AWP services include; shelter, individual and support group counseling, the Legal Advocacy Project, a First Response Team working 24-hours a day with the police, the Medical Advocacy Project, an Outreach Office in Bristol, and a Community and Prevention Education Project. AWP can also refer you to other agencies. All AWP services are **free, private, and confidential.**

AT WORK

- Devise a safety plan for when you leave work. Ask someone to escort you to your car, bus, or train. If possible, devise this plan with your supervisor or human resources manager using a variety of routes. Think about what you would do if something happened while you were on your way home.

EVIDENCE

- Keep any evidence of physical abuse (ripped clothes, photos of bruises and injuries, etc.).
- If you are injured, go to a hospital emergency room or doctor and report what has happened to you. Ask that they document the visit or ask to speak to an AWP Medical Advocate.
- Keep a log/diary in a safe place. Get a blank notebook and keep track of what is happening to you. Log incidents—the date, time, place, what happened, any injuries you received, names of doctors, hospitals, names and badge numbers of police. Record all contacts you make; be sure to note the names of people you talk to, their telephone numbers, and dates and times of these contacts.

OTHER

- Plan to attend a woman's support group for at least two weeks to gain support from others and learn more about yourself and the relationship. Information about AWP's support groups and individual empowerment counseling can be accessed by calling 1-800-220-8116.
- If the police have responded to a call regarding a domestic violence incident at your home, ask them to speak with AWP's on-call First Response Advocate. Advocates are on-call 24-hours a day to speak with victims of domestic violence. This communication may occur either by telephone or in person.

TELEPHONE/INTERNET SAFETY

- Consider purchasing a remote or cell phone that can be reached safely.
- Arrange to have an answering machine, caller ID, or a trusted friend or relative screen your calls. If you have to communicate with your partner, think about the safest way to do so.
- You may need to change your phone number and have the new number unlisted, or you may be able to use Caller ID services to have your abuser's telephone number blocked and/or the harassing calls traced. Call the telephone company and discuss your situation to find out what services are available to help keep you safe. Use an answering machine to screen your calls. Any threats made to you and recorded on the answering machine may be used as evidence in court.
- Be careful about using the Internet at home. If an abuser has access to your email account, he/she may be able to read your incoming/outgoing mail. If your abuser knows how to read your computer's history or cache file (automatically saved web pages and graphics), he/she may be able to see information you have viewed recently on the Internet. The safest way to find information on the Internet would be at a local library, a friend's house, or at work. (See <http://www.abanet.org/domviol/internet.html>).

CHILDREN

- Plan with your children and identify a safe place for them: a room with a lock or a neighbor's house where they can go for help. Reassure them that their job is to stay safe, not to protect you.
- Inform your children's school, daycare workers, and babysitters about your situation so that your abuser cannot use them to gain access to you or your children. Abusers frequently use children as bait to regain access to victims. Teach your children:
 - How to use the telephone to call the police—911
 - Their own telephone number and area code
 - Their address and your full name

PROTECTION THROUGH CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS

Domestic violence is a crime. Crimes are defined and listed in the Pennsylvania Crimes Code. Crimes are divided into three categories: summary offenses, misdemeanors, and felonies. When a crime is committed, it is deemed to be a wrong against society. A criminal complaint is filed, and the perpetrator is arrested. A District Justice then arraigns the perpetrator. Bail may be set and a preliminary hearing is scheduled. The purpose of the preliminary hearing is to determine if there is sufficient evidence for trial and if the proper charges were filed. At this point, the victim is summoned by the court to act as a witness for the Commonwealth. AWP provides support and court accompaniment through the criminal process. An AWP Advocate can attend the preliminary hearing if you choose. We can also offer support through the trial.

When does an abusive incident become criminal?

This occurs when the Commonwealth determines that there is probable cause (reasonable belief) to believe a crime has been committed.

Can I drop the criminal charges?

Criminal charges are pressed by the arresting police department, not the victim. At times the police ask if you want to press charges. In reality, they are asking if you will cooperate if charges are pressed. Since you are not the one pressing the criminal charges, you may not drop the charges. Many police departments have mandatory arrest policies that mandate them to make an arrest when there is evidence of domestic violence.

If it becomes a criminal case, do I need a lawyer?

No. An assistant district attorney will prosecute on behalf of the Commonwealth. There is no fee.

If the defendant is arrested and pays bail, will I know when he/she is released from jail?

You may ask the police to notify you if the defendant is released, or you may call Prison Records to ask if he/she has been released. If you have a PFA you may complete a Release Notification Form, which will entitle you to be informed of the defendant's release. This form is available from the arresting police officer, district attorney's victim assistance staff, and the AWP Legal Aid Domestic Abuse office.

What is a Preliminary Hearing and do I have to go?

A Preliminary Hearing takes place at the District Court level. The Commonwealth has the burden of presenting *prima facie* (preliminary) evidence that a crime has been committed and that the defendant is more than likely the person responsible. The victim must appear at the preliminary hearing. The prosecutor may or may not appear. If the prosecutor does not appear, then the arresting officer will usually present the case. If the charges are upheld, the case will be listed with the Court of Common Pleas. A trial or plea agreement will take place at that level in several weeks.

What is the Victim Impact Statement?

The Victim Impact Statement is a statement that you prepare to express to a judge how you have been affected by the incident. You may present your Victim Impact Statement at the time of sentencing.

Victims of domestic violence confront many barriers to safe participation as victim-witnesses in the criminal justice process. Victims often fear physical, emotional, and mental retaliation; economic consequences; and consequences to children. They may be reluctant to testify against a partner. Criminal justice personnel understand this reluctance.

With the assistance of an AWP Legal Advocate, support can be given to overcome some of these issues. AWP Legal Advocates can provide you with emotional support, information, and education throughout the criminal process, along with accompaniment to all hearings.

SAFETY PLANNING

A PFA may not be enough to keep you and your children safe. It is important to talk with others about the abuse because breaking the silence will build your courage to keep you strong and safe. **You are not alone.**

What is a Safety Plan?

A safety plan is a personal plan developed by you in the event of an emergency. Some things you may wish to consider in case you need to leave quickly could be:

EMERGENCY PLAN

- Identify someone you trust and ask them to keep: a spare set of keys, a set of clothes, important papers, prescriptions, social security numbers, some cash which you can accumulate over time, and some of the items from the **Checklist: What to Take with You When You Leave** on page 15.
- Plan the safest time to get away.
- Know where you can go for help; tell someone what is happening to you. Have phone numbers of friends, relatives, and domestic violence programs with you.
- Develop a code word or phrase to use with a friend if you need help.
- Call 911 or the police when an incident of abuse happens. Depending on the seriousness of the incident, your abuser may be arrested, charged with a crime, and brought to trial. Even if the abuser is not arrested, it may help you later to have a record of calls to the police.
- Plan an emergency escape route and plan. In the event you must immediately flee your home, make and practice an escape plan just like you would for a fire emergency. Again, it is helpful to gather a bag of clothing for you and your children, important papers, and other items from the **Checklist**, and store them in a fire-proof box. These items can then be kept in an accessible, safe place or away from your home in case you need to make a quick exit.
- Arrange a signal with a neighbor (i.e., if the porch light is on) to call the police.

If your abuser is not living with you or has been evicted, change the locks or add locks to all your windows and doors, including garage, basement, patio doors, and windows. Change the car locks or add security systems such as The Club or an alarm. Be sure to check your car and trunk before entering to make sure no one is hiding in it. Change the time you leave and come from places regularly such as your job, the bank, the hairdresser, dropping your children off for school, the supermarket, religious services, and relatives' and friends' homes.