

Sexual Assault Safety Planning

If you or someone you know has been sexually assaulted or is in an abusive relationship, there are things to consider when thinking about safety. It may be helpful to create a safety plan or to think about some ways to stay and feel safer. Depending on where you live, there may be unique circumstances to think about. The following information is divided up into rural, suburban and urban, and college campus safety tips. There is a lot of overlap but there are also things that are unique to each location. Please review the one that is closest to your situation.

Safety Planning in Rural Communities

In rural communities, there are fewer services that provide support for victims of sexual assault and dating and domestic violence. It can also be a challenge to maintain privacy due to the small community size.

Things to think about:

- How to get away if there is an emergency
- Be conscious of exits or other escape routes
- Think about options for transportation (car, bus, train, etc.)

Who can help

- Friends, family
- Support centers in your area:
 - Sexual Assault Crisis Line at 1-866-956-1099
 - Central Alberta Sexual Assault Support Centre 403-340-1124

Where to go

- Friend's house
- Relative's house
- A domestic violence or homeless shelter (if there are not any domestic violence shelters in your area, and you are contemplating leaving the town, you may want to consider going to a homeless shelter)
- The police (even if the police know both you and the perpetrator—they are still responsible for doing their job).
- Important: If the dangerous situation involves a partner, go to the police or a shelter first.

What to bring:

- Important papers and documents: birth certificate, social security card, license, passport, medical records, lease, bills, etc.
- House keys, car keys, cash, credit cards, medicine, important numbers, cell phone

- If you are bringing children with you, remember to bring their important papers and legal documents
- Keep all of these things in an emergency bag
- Hide the bag—best if not in house or car
- If the bag is discovered, can call it a “hurricane”, “tornado” or “fire” bag

How to anticipate and respond to a perpetrator’s actions

- Be conscious of places the perpetrator frequents (work schedule, favorite places to go, etc.)
- Plan what you would say and do if you came into contact with him or her

Traveling Safety:

If you need to get away and there is no public transportation in your area, try to find someone who will allow you to use his or her car if you do not have one at your disposal.

Driving

- Keep your doors locked
- Have extra car necessities (oil, jumper cables, etc.)
- Try not to wait until the last minute to fill your gas tank; always keep it half-way full if you can
- Have your keys ready when you go to unlock your car
- Plan your route and know what “safe” places are on it (police stations, hospitals, etc.)

Home Safety:

- Change the locks on doors and windows
- Keep your doors locked, even when you are at home
- Install a security system
- Install outside lighting system (with motion detectors)
- Do not prop doors
- Close blinds/curtains at night
- Keep car doors locked, even in your own driveway

Tips to Remember

- Keep cash with you at all times
- Keep some change accessible just in case you need to use a pay phone
- Memorize all important numbers/have important numbers easily accessible on your cell phone (if you have one)
- Establish a code word so that family, friends, etc. know when to call for help
- Have a backup plan in case the first fails
- Carry a small noisemaker (like a whistle) and/or flashlight on your keychain
- Be aware of your routine and try to alter it sometimes, if possible

- Have an extra copy of keys
- Try to keep in contact with people/organizations who are helping you

Safety Planning in Urban or Suburban Areas

Things to think about:

How to get away if there is an emergency

- Be conscious of exits or other escape routes
- Think about options for transportation (car, bus, subway, etc.)

Who can help

- Friends, family
- Support centers if there are any in your area
- National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-HOPE(4673), the National Sexual Assault Online Hotline(LINK TO: /ohl-bridge.php) or, if you are in a dating or domestic violence situation, the National Domestic Violence Hotline 1.800.799.SAFE(7233)

Where to go

- Friend's house
- Relative's house
- A domestic violence or homeless shelter (if there are not any domestic violence shelters in your area, and you are contemplating leaving the town, you may want to consider going to a homeless shelter)
- The police
- Important Safety Note: If the dangerous situation involves a partner, go to the police or a shelter first.

What to bring

- Important papers and documents: birth certificate, social security card, license, passport, medical records, lease, bills, etc.
- House keys, car keys, cash, credit cards, medicine, important numbers, cell phone
- If you are bringing children with you, remember to bring their important papers and legal documents
- Keep all of these things in an emergency bag
- Hide the bag—best if not in house or car
- If the bag is discovered, can call it a “hurricane”, “tornado” or “fire” bag

How to anticipate and respond to a perpetrator's actions

- Be conscious of places the perpetrator frequents (work schedule, favorite places to go, etc.)
- Plan what you would say and do if you came into contact with him or her

Traveling Safety:

Walking

- Make sure your cell phone (if you have one) is easily accessible
- Keep some change accessible just in case you need to use a pay phone
- Take major, public streets and paths rather than less populated shortcuts
- Avoid dimly lit places and talk to authorities if lights need to be installed in an area
- Avoid walking alone whenever possible
- Carry a small noisemaker (like a whistle) and/or flashlight on your keychain
- Remain mentally alert and aware of your surroundings
- Plan your route and know what "safe" places are on it (police stations, hospitals, etc.)

Driving

- Keep your doors locked
- Have extra car necessities (oil, jumper cables, etc.)
- Try not to wait until the last minute to fill your gas tank; always keep it at least half full if you can
- Have your keys ready when you go to unlock your car
- Plan your route and know what "safe" places are on it (police stations, hospitals, etc.)

Taking the bus or subway

- Be alert at bus or subway stops when waiting for them to arrive
- Use the bus or subway schedule to avoid waiting for a long time at a stop
- Plan your route to use the busiest, best-lighted stop possible
- If someone is bothering you on the bus or subway, tell the driver or use the emergency signal
- If you feel uneasy about getting off at your usual stop, stay on until the next stop or wait until the safest stop

Home Safety:

- Change the locks on doors and windows
- Keep house doors locked, even when you are at home
- Install a security system
- Install outside lighting system (with motion detectors)
- Do not prop doors or windows
- Close blinds/curtains at night
- Keep car doors locked, even in your own driveway or garage

Tips to Remember

- Keep change/cash with you at all times
- Memorize all important numbers/have important numbers easily accessible on your cell phone (if you have one)
- Establish a code word so that family, friends, etc. know when to call for help
- Have a backup plan in case the first fails
- Be aware of your daily routine and try to alter it sometimes, if possible
- Keep in contact with people/organizations who are helping you
- Trust your instincts. If you feel uncomfortable or threatened, leave the situation and go to a safe place

Safety Planning on a College Campus

Things to think about:

How to get away if there is an emergency

- Be conscious of exits or other escape routes
- Think about options for transportation (car, bus, train, etc.)

Who can help

- Friends, family
- Support centers if there are any in your area
- Campus safety or local police
- Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-866-956-1099
- CASASC Central Alberta Sexual Assault Support Center 403-340-1124

Where to go

- Friend's dorm room or apartment
- Relative's house
- A domestic violence or homeless shelter (if there are not any domestic violence shelters in your area, and you are contemplating leaving the town, you may want to consider going to a homeless shelter)
- The police or campus safety (even if campus safety knows both you and the perpetrator—they are still responsible for doing their jobs)
- Important Safety Note: If the dangerous situation involves a partner go to the police or a shelter first.

What to bring

- Important papers and documents: birth certificate, social security card, license, passport, medical records, bills, etc.
- House or dorm room keys, car keys, cash, credit cards, medicine, important numbers, cell phone
- Keep all of these things in an emergency bag
- Hide the bag—best if not in house or car
- If the bag is discovered, can call it a “hurricane”, “tornado” or “fire” bag

At parties

- Be aware of rape drugs
- Try not to leave your drink unattended
- Only drink from un-opened containers or from drinks you have watched being made and poured
- Avoid group drinks like punch bowls
- Cover your drink. It is easy to slip in a small pill even while you are holding your drink. Hold a cup with your hand over the top, or choose drinks that are contained in a bottle and keep your thumb over the nozzle
- If you feel extremely tired or drunk for no apparent reason, you may have been drugged. Find your friends and ask them to leave with you as soon as possible
- If you suspect you have been drugged, go to a hospital and ask to be tested
- Keep track of how many drinks you have had
- Try to come and leave with a group of people you trust
- Avoid giving out your personal information (phone number, where you live, etc.). If someone asks for your number, take his/her number instead of giving out yours

Traveling around campus

Walking

- Make sure your cell phone is easily accessible and fully charged
- Be familiar with where emergency phones are installed on the campus
- Be aware of open buildings where you can use a phone
- Keep some change accessible just in case you need to use a pay phone
- Take major, public paths rather than less populated shortcuts
- Avoid dimly lit places and talk to campus services if lights need to be installed in an area
- Avoid putting music headphones in both ears so that you can be more aware of your surroundings, especially if you are walking alone.
- Walking back from the library very late at night is sometimes unavoidable, so try to walk with a friend
- Carry a noisemaker (like a whistle) on your keychain
- Carry a small flashlight on your keychain
- If walking feels unsafe, try calling campus security. Many campuses offer safe ride programs
- Driving**

- Keep your doors locked
- Have extra car necessities (oil, jumper cables, etc.)
- Try not to wait until the last minute to fill your gas tank; always keep it at least half full if you can
- Have your keys ready when you go to unlock your car

Taking the bus

- Be alert at bus stops when waiting for the bus to arrive
- Use the bus schedule to avoid waiting for a long time at a stop
- Plan your route to use the busiest, best-lighted stop possible
- If someone is bothering you on the bus, tell the driver
- If you feel uneasy about getting off at your usual stop, stay on the bus until the next stop or wait until the bus goes around to your usual stop the second time

Dorm safety

- Lock your door when you go to sleep and when you are not in the room
- Keep your window locked (especially if it is easy to enter from the ground)
- If people constantly prop open the main dorm door, talk to an authority about it
- If your dorm has an elevator, try to stay near the button dashboard when are you riding in it so that you have easy access to the emergency button. Also, if you feel threatened, you can push the button for the next floor and leave immediately instead of waiting for the elevator to reach the floor where you live
- Avoid isolated areas (stairways, laundry rooms, basement, etc.) when you are alone

If you have been sexually assaulted there are some additional steps you can take to help feel safer:

How to anticipate and respond to perpetrator's actions

- Be conscious of places the perpetrator frequents (work schedule, class schedule, where s/he likes to eat, what club meetings s/he has, what sports practices s/he has, etc.)
- Know which people the perpetrator usually hangs out with and what social events s/he likes to attend
- Plan what you would say and do if you came into contact with him or her

General tips

- Use the resources that your campus offers (sexual assault services, psychological services, health services, campus police force, escort service, etc.)

- If you are concerned about anonymity, use any resources that the neighboring community provides
- Trust your instincts. If you feel uncomfortable or threatened, leave the situation and go to a safe place

Finally...

Remember: it is not your fault.

References:

1. Seattle University Campus Public Safety. CPS Handbook.