



1 Safety Concerns

Safety First

If you feel your safety is at risk, or that the safety of your children is at risk, making sure you and your children are safe is the top priority. All adults have the responsibility to protect children from being victims of abuse or witnessing violence.

If you are in immediate danger:

- Call the police right away
- If you don't feel safe at home, ask the police to take you and your children to the local transition house/shelter, a friend's or a relative's house
- You can ask the police about getting protection order for you and your children
- In addition to calling the police, be sure to call your local counselling agency or individual/s to give you support and guidance

If you are not in immediate danger but your partner has:

- Ever physically abused you or your children
- Ever sexually abused you or your children
- Ever threatened to hurt you or your children in any way
- Ever made you feel that if you left, or he/she left, your children would not be safe
- Ever threatened to take your children away
- Ever said or done anything else that has made you feel that you and your children are not safe

then contact one of the agencies or individuals on your 'Contact Card'

Develop a safety plan

You do not have to wait until there is a crisis before you make a safety plan - do it now. It can include such things as:

- Keeping a small suitcase packed with necessities for yourself and your children in case you need to leave quickly
- Keeping a copy of any court orders with you at all times
- Making sure that all doors and windows have secure locks
- Having a safe place to go quickly if you need to

Safety Issues

If you have concerns about the other parent's mental health

The other parent's mental illness may be a factor in the conflict during and after the separation. You may have concerns about the other parent's ability to look after the children if there is crisis in his or her mental illness. For example, you may worry that he or she may not be able to manage the children's safety and security. In many communities, there are support groups for family members of mentally ill people. It can be extremely helpful to share your concerns with others and to get more information about the illness.

Problems related to drugs and alcohol

You may be doing every thing you can to be the best parent possible, but the other parent's problems with drugs or alcohol are putting the children at risk. When this happens, remember: you are not responsible for the other parent's behaviour. Your job is to take whatever action possible to make sure the children are safe. If you have grounds to believe that the other parent is drinking a considerable amount of alcohol during visits, or engaging in any other type of inappropriate behaviour, you can ask a judge for an order that states the other parent must stop this behaviour during the access visits. Even though one parent may need help looking after the children, having at least one parent doing a good job is great support for them. While you are busy making sure your children are safe, a trusted friend or counsellor may be able to give you the added support you need.

Suspected abuse

If you suspect the other parent is abusing a child in any way, take the child to see a doctor or counsellor. Doing this is for the well-being of the child and can provide evidence of the abuse if it is actually taking place. Your suspicions of abuse, without further evidence, is rarely enough to prove abuse. You need evidence from a professional such as a doctor, psychologist, or counsellor, or from anyone who may have witnessed the abuse. If there is proof of abuse, a judge can make an order to restrict or supervise the other parent's access to the child.

Fear of abduction

If you are afraid your child will be abducted, you need legal advice and assistance. If you can show reasonable grounds that the child may be abducted, a judge can make an order that the other parent cannot remove the child from the city or town without your written permission or a court order. The court can also ask for the other parent's passport so they cannot leave the country with the child. The court may also order that there be no visits or that visits be supervised.