

DAY 8 – 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

Leaving Without Dying –Understanding the Risk



Many security experts say that abusers are more dangerous than any other type of attacker, especially when a survivor leaves. There is a group of professionals whose job is to assess the level of danger individuals are in when it appears someone is out to get them. They help protect myriad celebrities—whose stalkers are often strangers who think they have formed some connection with this famous person. Many Americans read about one stalker who was under the impression he was receiving secret messages from a celebrity through the star's TV appearances. These otherwise ordinary-people-turned-would-be-assailants might sound like loose cannons, but in many experts' opinions, another group is a far greater threat than the unknown stalkers—abusers.

Studies show that in intimate partner violence, the victim and abuser know each other. With that level of intimacy, the abuser knows the pressure points, the ways to manipulate the victim emotionally, and the triggers that set them off. Further, in most cases, the abuser has already expressed and displayed violence, and is ready to escalate it. And the most common time to do so is when the survivor decides to leave.

Experts state that when the victim attempts to leave, the abuser needs to escalate to a higher level to reclaim the control, and that is when the greatest levels of homicide occur.

Many domestic violence advocacy and prevention organizations have experts that advise on strategies that survivors who contact the group can use when the victim is ready to leave their abuser. In order to do so safely, the victim must be ready to leave permanently.

Unfortunately, they are not always ready to do so. The survivor cannot be leaving to try and get the abuser's attention, in hopes that he or she might be apologetic and end their behavior. Statistics show that if the victim returns to the home with the abuser, the abuse will be much, much worse, and the abuser will be more manipulative and will try to make things more unbearable for the victim. Statistics also indicate that a significant barrier to these survivors leaving is the avoidance of change. A majority of the victims have been restricted from financial and social independence. Professionals, family and friends must convince victims that their future is brighter than their present darkness. They deserve better. What can victims do in an effort to be safe?

Before You Go

Survivors should always consider a safety plan before leaving their abuser. Safety planning is important for all survivors, regardless of what type of abuse is occurring. There are many online sources that outline good, proven safety plans. Additionally, the following four points are instrumental in helping to prevent a lethal outcome before a survivor walks out the door:

- **Only you, the survivor know when the best time is to leave.** A lot of the struggle of survivors comes from the public perception that "everyone else knows best." While others in a survivor's support circle may pointedly ask, "Why don't you leave now?" a survivor should always trust his or her gut instinct when it comes to timing.
- **Find an advocate you can trust.** History has shown that survivors should not attempt to leave on their own. Call a domestic violence hotline or a shelter and talk options. Even if the survivor is not ready to go, they should begin making a plan for "someday."
- **Plan for a permanent change.** When you are safety planning, you want to make sure you covertly assemble all the essential items you will need in order to never have to return to your abuser again, lowering your risk of being harmed or killed. This can include everything from important paperwork to necessary medications. If you are afraid packing all of these items at once will arouse suspicion in your abuser, take what can hide in your purse, a diaper bag or your lunch. Have a trusted friend, co-worker or professional help you assemble the items.
- **Create emergency words or signals.** This could be a secret code word or message that you send to friends or family members when you're in danger and need help, but don't want to cause your abuser to notice. A signal could be something like leaving the curtain up in the front window of your house, which signals to a neighbor in the know to call police.

Friends, family and co-workers can help victims by giving them contact information for professionals, shelters and domestic violence hotlines. Pressuring the victim to leave immediately is not necessarily the best choice, for safety reasons. Be there to listen and give important information and support. A lecture will not help.

