

Safety in Court

After you have left an abusive relationship, there may be occasions where you will have to see the abuser in court to deal with a protection order, custody, child support, divorce, or criminal proceedings. Since you are in a courthouse surrounded by people and even court officers, you may feel like it is okay to let your guard down. However, remember that any time you come into contact with the abuser, you have to take steps to protect yourself.

Here are some tips to help keep you as safe as possible.

Following these suggestions can't guarantee your safety, but it could help make you safer. Not all of these suggestions will work for everyone, and some could even place you in greater danger. You have to do what you think is best to keep yourself and your children safe.

Getting to the courthouse

- Try to get to court at a different time than you think the abuser will arrive to avoid seeing him/her on the street or in line to enter the court. If the abuser is always late, try arriving early. If the abuser always arrives early, try arriving closer to your hearing time or come with a friend. If you are late, the case may be called without you and dismissed.
- Once in the courtroom, try to sit near the court officers or security guards if you can.
- Bring a friend or family member with you so you won't have to be alone at all during the day.
- If your friend or family member cannot spend the day in court with you, ask that person to drive you to court. It's best to get someone whose car the abuser doesn't know. Ask him/her/they to drop you off at the courthouse entrance so you don't have to walk alone through the parking lot.

Leaving the courthouse

- At the end of your hearing, ask the judge or the court officer/bailiff to "detain" the abuser. In other words, to hold him/her/they until you can leave.
- If the judge or court officer won't detain the abuser, think about letting the abuser leave the courthouse first, then wait a long time before leaving and try to leave out of a different exit than the main exit. However, even if you wait a long time, be aware that the abuser could still be out there waiting for you so be observant.
- Have a police officer or sheriff walk out of the courthouse with you and walk you to your car if possible.
- Have a friend pick you up at the exit or if you had a friend/family member come with you, make sure that she/he/they walks to your car with you.

Tips courtesy of www.womenslaw.org