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DOMESTIC ABUSE: HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Domestic violence may include behaviors meant to scare, physically harm, or control a partner. While every relationship is different, domestic violence generally involves an unequal power dynamic in which one partner tries to assert control over the other in a variety of ways.

Some perpetrators may even use children, pets, or other family members as emotional leverage to get the victim to do what they want. Victims experience diminished self-worth, anxiety, depression, and a general sense of helplessness that can take time and often professional help to overcome.

Women are most of the battered in a relationship, though men are frequently victimized too in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships. More than 38 million American women have been victims of domestic violence.

The technological revolution has opened up new ways for abusers to dominate, intimidate, and control the people in their lives through manipulation, cyber-stalking, and emotional blackmail.

While you may or may not be ready to leave an abusive relationship, it's important to take precautions to keep yourself safe. To ensure your welfare, you should be alert, prepared, and educated. Your safety plan should include the following:

- Know the signs that your abuser is getting upset.
- Identify safe areas of your home—avoiding small spaces, rooms with weapons, and rooms without exits.
- Create several believable reasons to leave your home to avoid abuse (including day and night).
- Create a code word to let loved ones know you're in danger.
- Make and memorize a list of emergency contacts.

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