

SOS Détresse

What to do when my partner is violent?

First off, it is not acceptable to use violence against another person, no matter who they are. There is always the option not to resort to violence and it is therefore inexcusable. Every person, regardless of gender, age, social class, religion, skin colour ... has the right to be treated with respect. To denouncing violence changes lives.

Confronting the instability of your partner's behaviour places you in a fragile, unpredictable and uncontrollable situation. You know that s/he can explode at any moment for whatever reason. Feeling like you lack control can keep you from taking action. You may have even lost hope of your situation every changing. But things can change. The tips below can be the first steps towards change. They may help you to have more control over the situation and find new ways to deal with the situation.

Protection Scenarios

These will help you to plan how to behave in different situations. A number of these will help prepare you before a crisis and others can be used during a crisis. The objective is to protect yourself and your children.

Before a crisis and in case you need to leave your home quickly:

- Keep a bag in an easily and rapidly accessible place or leave it with someone you can trust. Place the following items in the bag: spare keys to your home, money, Identity documents or photocopies (ID card, passport, social security card, birth certificate, driving license, etc.) your own and those of your children. If you need to leave your home in a rush, take this bag with you.
- If you are a woman, ensure that your handbag is easily available and always contains everything you need: purse with your documents, bank / credit cards, your mobile phone and charger ...
- Open a separate account in your name only
- Prepare your children, tell them to call the police on 113, if they feel threatened. Agree on a meeting point in case they have to flee in a rush ...
- Talk about your situation to people around you that you trust. You can agree on code words or a coded language to let them know that you need help so that they can call the police if you are in need. You could also choose a code word with your children, so that they could run to a safe place in case of crisis.
- Go around each room of your home and imagine how you could escape and which

are the best escape routes. When your partner is at home, avoid the rooms without exit or where there are knives, weapons or other dangerous objects.

- Rely on your judgement and intuition.
- Review and verify your plans regularly.

If you are at home and a crisis breaks out, it is vital that you get you and your children to safety; e.g. by locking yourselves in one room and calling for help (police or close relations / friends). Always have a phone and the key to one room of your home with you, so that you can lock yourselves in should a crisis arise.

Looking for help

It is important to look for help. Nothing excuses violence. We all deserve to be respected. Thus, it is essential to act and make the violence to stop. In order to do this, you can look to people you trust and to institutions specialized in marital and domestic violence.

Keeping yourself in your distress will only prolong it. Talking to someone will certainly help you find the courage to search for support and steps towards change.

To call or write to SOS Détresse can serve as a first step in your endeavour. The calls are anonymous and our volunteers are prepared to listen, to give you support and to guide you in your experiences and your actions.

There are many institutions specialized in domestic violence that can inform you on your rights and can accompany and help you in your endeavours. You will find a list of these institutions at the end of the text.

If you have physical marks caused by acts of violence, it is important to see a doctor to check the seriousness of the consequences and to know how to care for them. Furthermore, the doctor can write a medical report that can be an invaluable piece of evidence.

It is difficult to make decisions, but talking about your situation to people you trust or contacting professionals doesn't commit you to anything. At first it just means expressing your feelings and what you think. Afterwards, and only if you feel ready steps can be taken. A professional will never force you to do something you don't want. You have to decide when and how to initiate change.

The laws and your rights

The law on domestic violence has been in force since 3rd September 2003. It applies to every person who suffers violence from someone close. It provides assistance, guidance and advice to those people as they decide what steps they might wish to take.

First of all, if you are a victim of threats or abuse from someone close to you, call the

police on 113. They will collect evidence and with the authorization of the ,procureur de l'état', retrieve the aggressor's home keys and expel him/her from the home. This expulsion is valid for 14 days and during this period, s/he will not have the right to return to the home, subject to prosecution. Following this expulsion, the service of assistance to the victims of domestic violence (SAVVD - service d'assistance aux victimes de violence domestique) will inform you of your rights and possible actions.

Additionally there are *counselling centres* (,centre de consultation') and *shelters* (,foyers') that will welcome you. You can stay in your time of need. Don't hesitate to go there if you are in a situation where you experience violence.