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How To Escape An Abusive Husband

By Christina Rowe

There are many important things you should do if you are an abuse victim preparing to leave your spouse. These include: making copies of important records, papers, and bills; putting these records, some cash, and extra clothes in a safe place or a trusted friend's house; and leaving when you must. If you can, start your own bank account. Get credit cards in your own name.

If the threat of physical violence is imminent escape with your children as soon as you can.

In such a situation, have an escape plan. Figure out what room in your house is most secure, and has a reasonable exit to the outside. Be prepared to give in to verbal demands in order to buy time. Once you have determined that the moment has come, go immediately. If you see a dangerous situation arising, do whatever you must (short of increasing the physical danger to yourself or your children) to create an opportunity for escape.

Once you are away from the home, go to the nearest shelter, or to the home of someone you trust. Also consider whether your spouse will follow, and if so, where he is likely to look.

Using the Legal System to Escape an Abuser

As I noted above, often a divorce action provokes an abuser. His violence may escalate. Protective or restraining orders can help, but they can also further infuriate the abusive spouse. Law enforcement can't protect a victim or children around the clock. This is something you should discuss with your attorney.

Remember, when you ask for a protective or restraining order against your spouse, the judge will want as much evidence as possible. Document erratic behavior and any violent actions starting now. You can do this by writing everything down, or keeping a computer file, but be sure it is safe from discovery. Try to recall each detail. Ideally such records should be moved to wherever you are keeping your important papers in case of escape. One way to keep things written down, and retrievable from anywhere, is web based email, such as yahoo or hotmail, as long as you make sure the password is secure, and that you log off whenever you are finished. You can write things and save them as a draft,

How To Escape An Abusive Husband

and there is no risk of losing the hard drive if you have to leave in a hurry. Call others as soon as possible after an incident, and have them keep a record of it. If you have bruises, show them to others, and ask them to make a written note of what they've seen. Keep the paperwork on hospital visits. If you have made any 911 calls, get the tapes of them. Your attorney will need as much evidence as possible.

If you are representing yourself in a motion for a restraining order, and you have such proof, let the evidence speak for itself. There is nothing wrong with expressing your fears, but do not say more than you have to against your spouse. If there are witnesses to violence, and/or solid physical evidence (cuts, bruises, broken items), these will be the most convincing factors. Most judges will be impressed more by a victim who simply states the need for protection and then presents compelling evidence. If you have a lawyer, but still have to testify, do so without anger. Present yourself as a victim of deranged behavior, and in need of a sane, sensible solution. Concentrate on the violence of the abuse, rather than on the abuser.

Judges seek to be referees in divorce disputes, not favoring either side. A judge will often resent being manipulated into issuing a restraining order early in the proceedings, especially if the victim later uses it as evidence in the divorce trial. Show that your concerns are only for the safety of yourself and those around you. Demonstrate that the order will be a useful tool in cooling things down and producing a just settlement.

Another issue that will concern a judge is the children. Judges are prone to try to sustain contact between parents and children. If your children are subject to abuse, then any protective or restraining order should apply to them. If the abuse is not aimed at them, and you intend to allow your spouse any contact with the children, discuss this with your lawyer. Often a restraining order can be limited in a way that is designed to defuse the anger of the abuser.

There are also other options to protective and restraining orders. In most states, a party in a divorce action can ask that a no-contact order be a condition of the divorce proceedings. However, these usually expire with the final decree.

Settlements

The extent of abuse, and the potential for further abuse, should be the most important factors in any settlement. If there is an obvious threat of further abuse to a spouse and/or children, the contact should be limited or completely cut off. The safety of the victims must be the basis for settlement.

If the abuse is confined to the spouse, and isn't sustained or life threatening, a judge will often arrange for visitation rights with the children. If this is the case, make sure all conditions are met to ensure your own safety when exchanging children for a visit. Judges sometimes draw up conditions for these exchanges that include third parties (trusted friends or family members), performing the exchange in a public place, or other security measures.

Christina Rowe is the author of the new book *Seven Secrets To A Successful Divorce—What Every Woman Needs To Know*. Find out the survival skills that will save you time, money and heartache

How To Escape An Abusive Husband

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Call To Action

By Wayne and Tamara

Direct Answers – Column for the week of February 3, 2003

I need some advice, please! I've been married to the same man for 11 years. He's a nice person when he's not drinking. However that isn't very often.

He drinks on a daily basis. Sometimes it's four beers, sometimes it's 12 or more. He drinks alone and then gets verbally abusive. He tells me I could never make it without him. I would have to live in a cardboard box. He calls me names, then tells me he loves me and will never let me leave.

He had a terrible childhood. He was adopted and his dad left his mom for another woman. He hasn't gotten over his anger, but he won't seek any type of help. He denies there is a problem. My husband saves most of the good stuff for me, but he's verbally abusive to our two children as well.

I've been to Al-Anon and talked to counselors. I tried to draw him back into the family, but he keeps pushing us away. I feel it's best to separate from him. Maybe the realization will make him take control. It's sad when your children wake up in the morning and ask, "Is Dad in a better mood, or do we need to be careful?"

Esme

Esme, your kids are living in a crazy, unpredictable environment. Walking on eggshells is affecting their development, and it will damage their future.

Their emotions are cycling between fear, bewilderment, anger and embarrassment. Children raised in this environment often become people pleasers who judge themselves harshly and have a hard time following through on projects. They likely will have difficulty disclosing their feelings to others, and they likely will live with a constant feeling of dread.

You have no power to change your husband's behavior. Only he can change it, and if he ever changes, he will do it for his own sake. Until he is tired of being controlled by anger and alcohol, he will not change.

At present he can be abusive and drunk and still maintain his home and family. He has no incentive to change. There are no consequences for continuing as he is, and there is no reason to assume a separation will make him take control. If he changes, it may be long after you leave.

Your highest duty is to your children. They have done nothing to deserve living in this kind of home.

How To Escape An Abusive Husband

Your next duty is to yourself. You can't live a normal life with this man. There is one more duty. That is the duty your husband owes to himself not to waste his chance at life. But that is a duty only he can fulfill.

Proceed with your decision to leave, and take steps to ensure your safety and that of your children.

Wayne

Sexual Histories

I've been dating a lady for about a week. We really click. A few days ago we were talking about personal problems, and she told me she had herpes.

I am in my 30s and have never met anyone with herpes. I was married for two years, but before I was married I was a virgin and very naïve about sexual things. I don't know if I should avoid sexual contact with her or just walk away.

Manny

Manny, you have a serious decision to make. Unless and until you see this lady as a life partner, avoid sexual contact. Otherwise, if things don't work out, her situation could become your own.

We suggest sitting down with a physician or other health professional to discuss exactly what this can mean for your future. There is no reason to be embarrassed. Simply explain to them what you explained to us.

The reason to go to a medical source first is you will not only get an authoritative answer, but you will have laid the groundwork for future treatment if you decide to proceed.

Tamara

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