

Plan, Exit, Stabilise

A practical, step-by-step guide for survivors

Leaving is rarely simple, and rarely linear. This guide breaks it into small, manageable steps you can take when it's safe. You don't have to do everything, or do it perfectly — just what you can, one step at a time.

Safety first

Emergency: 999. Can't speak safely? Dial 999, then press 55 to alert police. **24/7 National Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0808 2000 247.**

Only complete the steps that are safe for you. Trust your instincts. If you think your devices may be monitored, seek specialist support before creating any digital records.

Why this guide exists

Many survivors plan to leave long before they actually do. A date may be set, a bag packed, a statement written — and still fear pulls them back. Trauma bonds are powerful and real, and a delayed departure is not a failure. It is part of how leaving so often works.

This guide grew out of that lived reality: the car-park moments, the false starts, and finally leaving with almost nothing — but with the most important things kept safe, including digital copies of key documents and, above all, the people who matter most. You can arrive at safety with very little and still have arrived.

What experience teaches

- Safety first, even when it's imperfect.
- Small preparations matter — a go-bag, digital copies, a clean phone.
- Expect setbacks. Trauma bonds are real, and leaving is rarely a straight line.
- Document simply and consistently.
- **If today isn't the day, secure one small win.** Tomorrow, add another.

High-risk warning signs

These factors are associated with increased risk of serious harm. If any apply, please seek specialist help as a priority — you can call the National Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0808 2000 247.

- Threats to kill or harm you, your children, or your pets.
- Access to weapons.
- A recent escalation in how often or how severe incidents are.
- Any incident of strangulation or choking.
- Stalking or monitoring behaviour.
- Substance misuse alongside violence.
- The person knowing, or suspecting, that you may separate.
- Pregnancy, or having recently given birth.

Strangulation in particular is a serious warning sign and a specific criminal offence — please tell professionals if it has happened.

Step 1 · Digital security (days 1–7)

Secure your communications	Build your evidence file
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a new email account (not linked to shared numbers), with multi-factor authentication. • Nominate two trusted contacts and agree on code words. • Change passwords and check account recovery settings. • Set a daily check-in time, with a rule for what happens if you miss it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit your tech: phones, tablets, laptops, smart-home devices, car systems. • Start a chronology: date, incident, witnesses, reference numbers. • Turn off location sharing, Find My, and Google Location History. • Email key chats to yourself (without large media files).

Also: stage a discreet go-bag off-site (a friend’s house, a work locker), and scan or photograph documents to store in the cloud and on an encrypted USB.

Step 2 · Prepare your go-bags

Store these off-site if you can. Pack only what’s safe to gather.

Your bag	Children’s bag	Pet bag	Digital bag
Passport, driving licence	Birth certificate copies	Vet records	Clean prepaid phone
Tenancy / mortgage docs	Medical info, comfort item	Carrier / lead	New email + MFA set up
Bank cards, cash, spare SIM	Clothes, snacks	Food / meds (3 days)	Emergency contacts on paper
Medication, glasses	School details, pickup password	Pet-friendly options list	Important app logins

Your bag	Children's bag	Pet bag	Digital bag
Clothes / toiletries (72 hrs)	—	—	—
Spare keys	—	—	—

Step 3 · Exit-day plan

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry a clean phone and emergency contacts; leave the old device switched off. • Wear practical clothing and flat shoes; keep your hands free. • Move items in small trips if it's safe — not one big, visible move. • Tell your trusted contact you're starting the agreed plan. • On arrival, change passwords on a safe device and enable MFA. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have confrontations or “final conversations.” • Post on social media or share your location. • Return alone for belongings — use police or advocate support. • Follow predictable patterns or leave digital breadcrumbs. • Rely on only one transport option or route.

Step 4 · The first 72 hours

Stabilise	Contain risk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Switch to a clean phone; keep old devices powered down. • Update privacy settings; revoke unknown app or device access. • Set bank alerts; consider a new account at a different bank. • Arrange mail redirection or a hold; use a trusted delivery address. • Notify school and GP: restricted pickup list, password release. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change locks where lawful; review lighting, windows, and any CCTV. • Vary routes and routines; sit near drivers or CCTV on transport. • Ask for no-information flags at work and reception. • Consider temporary accommodation the other person doesn't know. • Log any post-exit incidents — calls, sightings, messages — with dates and times.

Step 5 · The next 30 days: hardening and privacy

Security & privacy	Legal & admin
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace predictable routines — commute, shops, gym. • Tighten social media privacy; remove mutual contacts you don't trust. • Adjust delivery addresses; consider a PO Box. • Clear sat-nav history and car profiles; check for trackers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Store a certified copy of any orders with a trusted contact. • Document economic abuse; ring-fence finances; update benefits. • Update schools and employers on any orders; provide copies. • Review electoral and directory listings; request removal. Monitor your credit report.

Step 6 · Children and dependants

Setting up safety measures

- **School / childcare:** password-protected pickup, photo-ID checks, an agreed safe-contact sequence.
- **Healthcare:** GP notes on safeguarding; emergency medication in the go-bag; current medical info held at school and with trusted contacts.
- Share the school-run plan with a trusted adult, and name a backup.

During the move

- Use calm, age-appropriate explanations; avoid blame.
- Pre-pack comfort items — headphones or entertainment for the journey.
- If a pickup may be contested, seek police or advocate support — never go alone.
- Keep routines where you can, to give children a sense of stability.

Step 7 · Workplace and transport

Workplace safety	Transport safety
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief HR or security: new contact routes, no information to callers. • Use a buddy system at opening and closing times; ask for an escort to your car. • Set up visitor alerts; hold post and parcels; use private parking if possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-book taxis via an app; share your live trip with a trusted contact. • Change parking spots and times; avoid predictable patterns. • Carry a small torch or whistle; keep your phone and keys to hand. • Sit near drivers or CCTV on public transport; travel at busier times.

Workplace safety	Transport safety
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vary arrival and departure times; request a different work area if needed. 	

Step 8 • Your evidence pack

Keep it simple and authentic — unaltered records carry the most weight.

What to include	How to store it
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chronology: date and time, what happened, witnesses, reference numbers. • Digital evidence: original message exports (unaltered) and screenshots. • Official records: medical notes, police reference numbers, witness names. • Financial records: evidence of economic abuse or controlled spending. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two locations: secure cloud (via your safe email) plus an encrypted USB kept off-site. • Keep originals intact — don't edit timestamps or message content. • Date everything clearly to maintain a chain of evidence. • Organise it so it's easy to find if you need it later.

Step 9 • Communications plan

Simple code words

- **GREEN** — “I am safe.”
- **AMBER** — “Need contact soon, not an emergency.”
- **RED** — “Call emergency services immediately.”

Check-in protocol

- Agree a daily check-in time; escalate if it's missed twice.
- Share travel plans only with trusted contacts.
- Use a neutral phrase to confirm arrival, e.g. “The blue folder is delivered.”
- Keep messages brief and factual; avoid sharing location.

Step 10 • Quick reference

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep plans need-to-know only; use code words. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announce plans or engage in “closure” conversations.

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move documents and items gradually, if safe. • Practise your route; have a Plan B and C ready. • Tell one trusted person; agree on escalation steps. • Document everything, with dates and times. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rely on one transport option or route. • Leave digital breadcrumbs — posts, check-ins, location tags. • Return alone to retrieve belongings. • Share your new address widely or on social media.

Key UK contacts

- **999** — emergency (police, ambulance, fire). Press 55 after dialling if you can't speak safely.
- **0808 2000 247** — National Domestic Abuse Helpline, free, 24 hours a day.
- **IDVA** — Independent Domestic Violence Advocate, via your local council or police.
- **ISVA** — Independent Sexual Violence Advocate.
- **Legal advice** — Rights of Women, and Citizens Advice.
- **Housing options** — through your local council.

A final word

If you're reading this, you're considering one of the bravest things a person can do. You don't have to do everything perfectly — just what you can, when it's safe, one small step at a time. If today isn't the day, secure one small win. Tomorrow, add another.

You are brave. You are strong. You can do this.

Before you close this

On a shared device, clear your browser history, use private or incognito mode, and delete any downloads — then read this only on a device you trust.

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