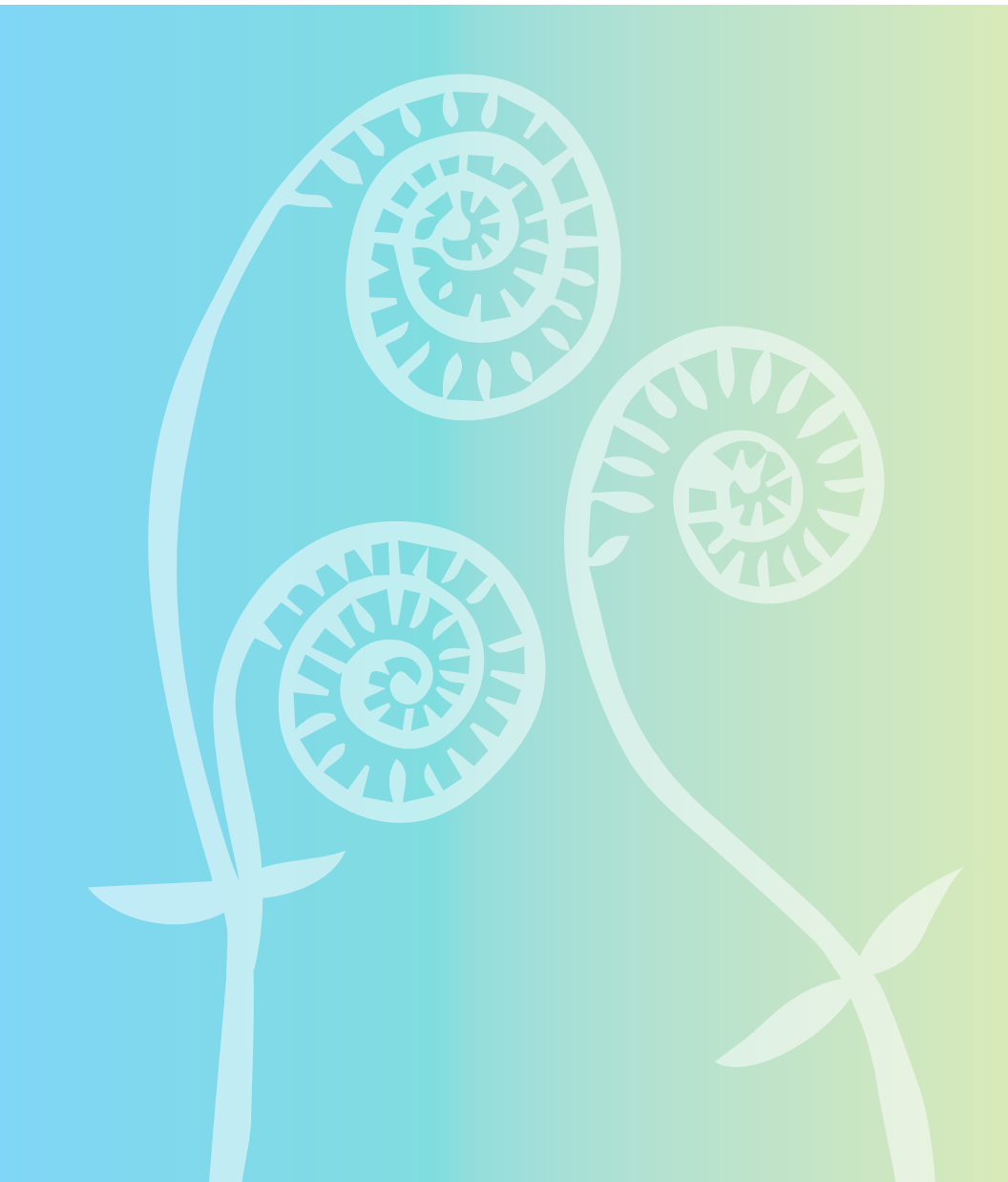
Do I Stay or Leave?



How safe is it to stay?

Before you can make positive choices about your life, you need to be safe.

It can be difficult to know how safe you are. For example, if you are in a relationship where the abuse has increased gradually over time, it can be hard to tell how dangerous your situation really is.

Sometimes you might not want to tell anyone how serious the danger is because you blame yourself or feel ashamed about what is happening. **Remember: the abuse is never your fault.**

Making the choice to stay or leave can be difficult. There are people who can help you decide what is right for you, your relationship, and your children. It can be helpful to talk with someone who has walked this journey with others.

Call or text the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia's 24-hour toll-free number to just talk: 1-855-225-0220.

SAFETY

The situation may be dangerous if you answer YES to any of these questions:

- Has your partner ever threatened to kill you or anyone else?
- Does your partner own a weapon?
- Has your partner tried to physically prevent you from leaving?
- Do you think your partner might hurt you or your children?
- Has your partner ever harmed or threatened your pets?
- Has your partner ever assaulted you when you were pregnant?
- Has your partner been violent toward people outside your family?
- Has your partner abused you or someone else when drinking alcohol or taking drugs?

If you answer yes to any of these questions, you may find it useful to talk to someone about how to stay as safe as possible while planning what to do next.

You should NOT tell your partner if you are planning to leave.

What if I am worried about my safety?

If you feel like you are in danger now, call 911 right away.

You can call police and report abuse at any time. It does not have to be an emergency.

If you don't feel comfortable calling police, you may want to call a friend, family member, or someone you trust. You can also call or text the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia any time of day for free at 1-855-225-0220. Call 211 for information about organizations that can help. Ask about the Women's Helpline, Men's Helpline, or All Genders Helpline.

But if you are afraid your partner will seriously hurt you, you should call police right away.

If you live with a partner who abuses you:

- tell someone you trust that your partner is abusing you
- think about ways your partner has hurt you in the past. This will help you predict the level of danger you and your children face and when it might be safest to leave
- plan where to go in an emergency
- create a plan to get out of your home safely. If you have children, practice getting out of your home safely with them
- ask neighbours, friends, and family you can trust to call the police if they hear the abuse
- if you and your partner are starting to argue, move to a place where you can get outside easily
- try to avoid rooms where there are potential weapons, like the kitchen, workshop, or bathroom

- always back your car into the driveway and keep it fuelled
- hide your keys, a cell phone, and some money near your escape route
- have a list of phone numbers to call for help. Call the police if itis an emergency

If you are worried your abusive partner will hurt you, you can also apply for an emergency protection order (EPO) or a peace bond.

Emergency protection orders

If your partner has already hurt you and you are worried it will happen again, or you can apply for an emergency protection order. Ask local police, someone at a transition house, or Victim Services office about applying for an EPO and making safety plans for you and your children.

LEGAL INFO

EPOs are short-term, temporary orders that help protect victims of abuse in a crisis.

An EPO can be put in place right away, and can last up to one year.

An EPO can

- give you the right to be in your home for up to one year, and can keep your partner out of your home for that time
- give you the sole right to use personal property, such as a car
- give you or someone else temporary possession or custody of your children

It can also tell a peace officer, like a police officer, to

- remove your partner from the home
- go with you to your home to get your personal things
- go with your partner while they get their personal things

An EPO can also tell your partner to

- stay away from certain places, such as your home and work
- not contact you or another person
- not take, sell, or damage property
- not abuse you

You can ask for an EPO over the phone by calling 1-866-816-6555. You can also go to a transition house. They have trained staff who can help you apply. Police and Victim Services officers can also help you apply for an EPO at any time. You may be able to get an interpreter if you need one.

If a judge agrees to give you an EPO, the police will tell the abusive person as soon as possible. Once they've been told, the abusive person must follow the rules in the EPO. This does not mean they will have a criminal record, but if they don't follow the rules in the EPO, they may be charged with a crime.

An EPO lasts one year. After this, you can ask for more time if you need it.

To apply for an EPO:

- you must be at least 16 years old
- you must have been abused by a person you are, or were, in an intimate relationship with
- you must live with the abusive partner now, or you must have lived with them in the past, or you must have a child together even if you have never lived with each other

Peace bonds

Anyone can apply for a peace bond any time they fear that someone will harm them. A peace bond is a court order the abusive person signs to say that they will not harm you, your family, or your property. A judge will hear your reasons for the peace bond and decide whether to give you one.

A peace bond says that your abusive partner must stay away from you for up to one year. It can say that they must:

- not have direct or indirect contact or communicate with you, your children, or others
- not drink alcohol or use non-prescription drugs
- not have or use firearms
- stay away from your home, workplace, or other places you go
- follow any other rules that the judge feels will help to keep you safe

Only a judge can give you a peace bond. Usually both you and the abusive person will go to a court hearing for a peace bond.

If you are deaf, hard of hearing, or need a translator, you may be able to have one with you at court.

Applying for a peace bond may take some time. If you have an emergency protection order and you think you might want to apply for a peace bond in the future, you may want to talk with a lawyer. In most cases, you can apply for a peace bond at Provincial Court. Family Courts and Supreme Court (Family Divisions) usually do not deal with peace bonds.

Unlike an EPO, when you apply for a peace bond, the person named is told that you have applied for a peace bond, and they have a chance to respond.

RESOURCES

If your situation is urgent you may want to talk with a lawyer, the police, Victim Services, or transition house staff about applying for an EPO. An EPO can help you in a crisis.

Once the crisis is over, you might want to think about a peace bond to give you some protection for a longer time. Peace bonds last for one year.

Deciding to stay

Understanding reasons for staying

Often people ask “Why don’t you just leave?”

There are many reasons you might stay, even if you do not love your partner or even if you believe your relationship will not get better. Often there is more to your relationship than just your partner’s abusive behaviour. Rather than judging you, others should try to understand your reasons for staying.

Here are some common reasons someone might stay with an abusive partner.

Emotional reasons for staying

- afraid to live alone
- your partner has made threats toward people you love
- afraid that your partner will take revenge if you leave
- afraid to go to court or to call the police
- feel like you have failed
- feel like you are breaking up your family
- afraid you will be lonely
- you still love your partner and hope that they will change
- believe that you are to blame for your partner’s abuse
- afraid your family or friends will blame or reject you
- afraid you will lose your partner if you leave for a short time
- afraid your partner will keep the children
- afraid your partner will kill themself, you, or the children
- ashamed of being seen as a victim
- not recognizing that you are being abused
- afraid that your partner will “out” you

Financial reasons for staying

- no income of your own
- a lower income than your partner
- lack of job skills
- fear that government assistance will not be enough to live on
- feelings of shame if you need government assistance
- lack of affordable childcare and housing
- debt you share with your partner
- fear of leaving the family home
- fear of losing the family home if you leave
- a belief that your partner will not pay maintenance or support
- lack of information about your legal rights

Social, cultural, and religious reasons for staying

- fear of being blamed
- fear that friends or family will say the abuse didn't happen, or they don't recognize it as abuse
- social pressure on women to be responsible for things working out
- beliefs about gender roles or marriage
- cultural pressures such as concerns about shame and family honour
- services that don't understand your culture
- fear that family or friends will not approve of your separation or divorce
- belief that you can change your partner
- belief that you need a partner
- belief that children need parents who live together
- lack of support from family and friends
- being away from family and friends
- lack of support from or fear of police and the legal system
- fear of being away from your community

RESOURCES

Transition house staff can help you even if you are not staying at a transition house. They can give you support over the phone, or you can arrange to visit the transition house and speak with someone in person. Some transition houses have workers who can meet you in your home or somewhere safe. No one will tell your partner or family that you called, and you do not need to give your name. Call or text the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia any time of day for free at 1-855-225-0220.

You may feel more comfortable talking with people in your community about where to get help. You can get more information by calling 211. This information line can give information on nearly every service in many languages.

Deciding to leave

Making decisions and changes can be confusing and difficult. We need to remind ourselves that we are strong.

Reading this book is a start.

SAFETY

If you are in danger now, call 911.

If you need help or information on abuse, call 211 or call or text the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia's toll-free emergency line at 1-855-225-0220. You can call any time of day or night, and it's free anywhere in Nova Scotia.

The most dangerous time for someone in an abusive relationship is when they leave or are planning to leave.

If the abuse gets worse or you feel that you are in danger of being seriously hurt or killed, you may need to leave quickly.

Even if you are afraid your partner will kill you, you may also be afraid to leave or feel that you cannot leave.

You always have the option to leave for a while, or you can leave permanently. You have the option to leave even if it's not an emergency situation.

Leaving can be a very hard decision to make. You may find that leaving for a while and returning works for you. This may show your partner that you need them to change. However, your partner may promise to change, but keep abusing you.

If you leave, your abusive partner may try to convince you to return.

Your partner may:

- be very loving and generous
- shower you with gifts and attention
- try to scare you into returning
- use relatives or friends to pressure you

Sometimes the only way to stop the abuse is to leave for good. You can leave even if it's not an emergency.

Whether you leave in an emergency, for a short time, or for good, you have every right to take your children with you, especially if you think they will be in danger if they are left behind.

LEGAL INFO

If you take your children with you, there may be fewer problems later. Get legal advice if you want to take your children out of province. See the section called Your Children, starting on page 105, for more information.

Where can you go to be safe?

When you leave, you need to go somewhere safe. You may want to think about where your partner might look for you, and where your partner will not find you. You might be safe if you stay with a friend or a relative, or at a hotel or a transition house.

Some people may not feel comfortable going to a transition house. If this is true for you and you need to leave suddenly, go somewhere public where you feel safe so you can make a plan or call someone for help. Call 211 to talk about places you can go and organizations in your area that can help you.

Transition houses are emergency shelters for women and female- identifying individuals, with or without children, whose partners are abusing them.

There are transition houses in Nova Scotia. They all take children. Transition houses have staff who will help you understand your options. Some transition houses are wheelchair-accessible. Transition houses do not allow pets.

Transition houses usually keep their addresses secret. When you call a transition house, staff will plan to meet with you. If the police go to your home because of abuse, they can drive you to a transition house.

You can call the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia's free number (1-855-225-0220) to find the nearest transition house. You can also call 211. See the Resources section of this book for a list of transition houses and phone numbers.

Someone at the transition house will listen to you. They can give you advice about your medical, legal, and financial situation. They will help you figure out what you can do. They will not force you to do anything. You can decide what's best for you.

What you tell transition house staff is private. However, there are some things they must tell police or Child and Family Wellbeing Services. Ask them to tell you about these things.

If someone knows a child is being abused, they must tell Child and Family Wellbeiing Services about it. This includes transition house staff.

At transition houses

- you can stay for up to six weeks
- they will give you food, clothing, and other things you need
- you can stay for free, but you are expected to help with cooking and housework, and to follow house rules

There will be other women, female-identifying individuals, and children at the transition house. It may help you to talk with someone who has had an experience like yours.

If you stay at a transition house, you and your children may be given a private room, or you may have to share a room with others.

All transition houses have programs and workers who can continue to help you once you leave the transition house.

If you decide not to stay at a transition house, their staff can still help you with information and referral services.

Some transition houses have wheelchair-accessible rooms and baths (see pages 153-155 for houses that are wheelchair-accessible).

If the abuse continues

Once you leave, your partner may keep abusing you. The abuse may get worse. Your abusive partner may try to control you financially, through the children, through the courts, through physical abuse, or by threatening and harassing you.

One way you can handle this is to have as little contact with your partner as possible. You can do this by only talking through your lawyer or the police if you need to. If you don't have a lawyer and don't feel comfortable asking the police for help, you can limit contact with your partner by only talking to them by text or email. Ask a friend or relative to go with you if you need to see your partner or talk to them in person.

If you are still afraid, you can apply for a peace bond if you don't have one yet.

If your partner keeps trying to contact you, they may be breaking the rules of their release, or they could be charged with criminal harassment. You should keep a written record of all contact with your abusive partner as well as what your partner does or says. You should also keep any written or recorded messages from your partner. You should tell the police, your partner's probation or parole officer (if your partner has one), and your lawyer if your partner contacts you.

Transition house staff, the police, the probation or parole officer, provincial and police victim services, your lawyer, a counsellor, or a supportive friend can help you get through this period. You shouldn't be afraid to ask for help. You don't deserve to be harassed. You deserve a better life free from violence.

RESOURCES

To find your nearest transition house, see pages 153–155, or visit thans.ca/our-members/

For provincial and police Victim Services contact information, see page 156.

You can learn more from the Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia at legalinfo.org

Internet and computer safety

Computers and mobile devices can store a lot of private information, including:

- emails
- texts
- instant messages
- web searches
- bookmarked webpages
- webpages viewed
- internet-based phone and IP-TTY calls
- online purchases
- banking

SAFETY

If you are in danger, it is important that you try to use a safe computer that your partner cannot access. You can use a computer at a public library, at a community centre, or at a trusted friend's house.

Learn more about how to keep yourself safe online at: sheltersafe.ca/about/staysafe/

It is not always possible to delete or clear all of your activity on your computer and online. Also, it may be dangerous to change your computer activity (for example, by suddenly deleting the entire internet history if that is not your regular habit).

Email, instant messaging, text messaging, and social media posts are not safe or confidential ways to talk to someone about the danger or abuse in your life. If possible, you should call a crisis line on a safe phone instead.

RESOURCES

If you need support, you can call or text the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia (THANS) provincial toll-free line: 1-855-225-0220. You can reach them every day, any time of day or night. **If it's an emergency, call 911**.

If you use email or messaging to communicate about the abuse, make sure to use a safe computer or mobile device, and an account your partner does not know about. On social media, be aware that someone may not be who they say they are. Some people make fake profiles to get personal information or bully others. This is sometimes called "catfishing."

Online harassment

If someone is harassing you online or sharing intimate images without your consent, you are protected under the law.

Cyberbullying means posting things online or sending messages intended to hurt someone. Some examples are:

- pretending to be someone else to embarrass them or cause trouble with friends and family
- sharing private information online
- threatening someone online
- sending pornography, intimate images (including images created using artificial intelligence (AI)), or sexual messages without consent
- claiming someone committed a crime without proof
- telling someone to hurt or kill themselves
- posting or sending racist or sexist messages

You can speak to someone at the CyberScan unit of Nova Scotia. CyberScan staff can help you find a solution to cyberbullying or the sharing of intimate images (including images created using AI). They can contact the person who shared the images or cyberbullied you to try to resolve the matter informally using negotiation, mediation, and restorative practices.

CyberScan staff can help you gather evidence that might help you stop the cyberbullying.

CyberScan can also answer questions about the justice system and help you understand your options. This is a free service.

RESOURCES

Call the CyberScan Unit at 1-855-702-8324, or 902-424-6990 in Halifax, for information or to report online bullying.

Visit novascotia.ca/cyberscan for more information.

LEGAL INFO

What you need to know about the Intimate Images and Cyber-Protection Act: nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/statutes/intimate%20images%20and%20cyber-protection.pdf

Cyber-protection orders

If you're a victim of cyberbullying or unwanted sharing of intimate images (including images created using AI), or if you are a parent or guardian of a victim under the age of 19, you can apply to the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia for a cyber- protection order under the Intimate Images and Cyber-protection Act.

A cyber-protection order can be issued to stop the bullying or image- sharing.

These orders may tell someone to:

- stop sharing an intimate image (including images created using AI)
- stop posting communications that would be considered cyberbullying
- stop contacting the victim
- take down or block access to an intimate image (including images created using AI) or communication
- participate in dispute resolution
- pay damages to the victim

You must pay to apply for a cyber-protection order. The cost is $218.05. You must also get a law stamp from the Court Administration Office for $25 + HST.

If your income is below a certain amount, you may apply to have the court fees waived so you won't have to pay them. To do this, you will have to fill out a Waiver of Fees Application and take it to the Court Administration Office.

LEGAL INFO

Court Administration Offices: courts.ns.ca/locations

You can apply for a protection order from the Justice of the Peace Centre by calling 1-866-816-6555.

Abuse and the workplace

Abuse can affect every aspect of your life, including your job. You may:

- miss work
- be distracted
- be less productive
- be more stressed than usual
- worry that you will lose your job if you talk about the abuse

It might help to tell your employer about the abuse. Some employers handle tough situations like this well, and some might not. In smaller workplaces and smaller communities, people know each other, and those ties affect how businesses and organizations work. No matter where you live, your employers may be able to help you stay safer at work. Think about how your employer might respond if you talk about abuse.

If you feel safe telling your employer that your partner is hurting you, your employer may be able help you stay as safe as possible at work.

You could also do some things that will help them to keep you safe. You could:

- tell your employer if you have protection orders or restraining orders, and if the workplace is mentioned in the orders. It may also help to give your employer a copy of the orders
- give your employer a recent photo or description of your partner to help security and reception staff know who to look for or screen
- talk to your employer about scheduling or other practices that could help you

If your partner abuses you while you are at work, write about it somewhere safe. Say how the abuse affects your work. That way, you can tell your boss what you are going through if they think you are not working.

Your employer may be able to do other things to help keep you safer at work. Some of the items below might help you, depending on your situation. **You may want to ask:**

- if you could work where visitors or customers cannot see you or talk to you
- to give you shifts during the day or when other people are working
- to remove your contact information from public records and directories
- if someone else can answer phone calls
- for a new phone number
- to have your partner's email address blocked from the office system
- to have a panic button installed in your work area
- for a well-lit parking spot near your office building
- if a co-worker could escort you to and from your car or bus stop

If you work with your partner, your employer can take other steps to keep you as safe as possible. These steps could include:

- making sure that your partner does not work closely with you or have access to your workspace
- giving both employees different work schedules and work sites
- holding your abusive partner accountable for any unacceptable behaviour in the workplace
- calling the police if your partner engages in violence, stalking, or harassment
- making sure your job is not negatively impacted because you told your employer about the abuse

(This list was adapted from Safety Planning at Work, Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children: makeitourbusiness.ca/guidelines/safety-planning-at-work.html.)

Domestic violence leave

If your partner abuses you or your children, you have the right to take time off work to do things you need to do for yourself and your family.

You can take up to 10 days off. You can take them as separate days or all together. Your job must pay you for five of those days. The other days are unpaid.

If you need more time off, you have the right to take another 16 weeks of unpaid time off. These weeks must be taken all together.

You can take domestic violence leave from work to:

- get medical help for you or your child for physical or psychological harm, or disability caused by the domestic violence
- get other counselling for you or your child
- get services from a victim services organization, transition house, the Department of Justice, police, or a lawyer to get ready to go to court about the domestic violence
- to move or look for a place to live

As an employee, you have a right to take time off if:

- you have worked at your job for at least three months
- you or your child (under 18) experiences domestic violence

If you need to take domestic violence leave, let your boss know in writing as soon as you can.

RESOURCES

For more information, you can contact Nova Scotia Labour Standards: 902-424-4311

Toll-free: within NS 1-800-315-0110
Email: LabourStandards@novascotia.ca

Once you have left

Once you are safe, you can take some time to decide what to do next. You will need time and space to make decisions that are best for you and your children.

Some of the first things you may need to find out are:

- where you can stay to be safe
- your legal rights
- what to do if you don't have enough money
- how to get child support and child custody

The following sections tell you about these issues.

You will also want to think about the people who are most important to you and how to talk with them about what has happened. They may have expectations about what you should do and how you should live. Take your time to think about what is right for you and how you can talk with them about it.

Where can I live?

When you leave a relationship where your partner is abusing you, you might need somewhere else to live. You can go to a transition house, a motel, or you can stay with your friends or family. In some communities, you may be able to get low-cost housing.

RESOURCES

The Housing Nova Scotia website has information and application forms for low-cost housing. (beta.novascotia.ca/apply-funding-create-affordable-housing-affordable-housing-development-program). You can also call 211 to find out more about housing.

If you need somewhere to live for a longer time after abuse, you may be able to stay at second-stage housing. Second-stage housing is safe and affordable housing where people leaving abuse can stay for up to two years. Your local transition house will have information about second-stage housing. You can call 211 for more information.

The process for getting a place in second-stage housing is different depending on the organization. For example, to get the support you need, you may have a telephone interview and then a follow-up meeting. Some second-stage housing organizations have a support worker who will work with you to figure out your housing needs. You may have to go through an application process. For more information, you can contact the second-stage housing organization nearest you. Call 211 for the best telephone number for you.

Renting an apartment or house

This section aims to help you find a new place to live without someone taking advantage of you. Websites like Kijiji and Facebook Marketplace are good places to start looking for an apartment. The classified ads in newspapers may also contain information about what is available, the cost of rent, and what is included.

When you rent an apartment, you usually sign a lease. A lease is a contract saying who is renting the place, how long it will be rented for, the cost of rent each month, and which services will be paid by the tenant and landlord. By law the landlord must give the tenant a copy of the lease.

You usually have to pay a damage deposit when you sign a lease. A damage deposit cannot be more than half a month's rent. If the apartment is not damaged when you move out, the landlord must return this money to you. If the apartment is damaged when you move out, the landlord may keep all or some of the money to pay for the damage. If the landlord does not give you this money when you move out, you can apply to the Residential Tenancies Board to get your damage deposit back.

For information on tenancy issues and contact information for Residential Tenancies, visit novascotia.ca/residential-tenancies-tenants-and-landlords/.

LEGAL INFO

The law says that a landlord cannot refuse to rent an apartment to someone because they have children. They can, however, refuse to rent to people with pets.

If a landlord refuses to rent to you because you have children, you have the right to file a human rights complaint. You can learn more at the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission website: humanrights.novascotia.ca.

If you are receiving Income Assistance, ESIA may pay the damage deposit if the health and safety of you or your family are in question. YWCA Halifax's December 6th fund may also be able to help: ywcahalifax.com/programs/gender-based-violence-supports.

APARTMENT CHECKLIST

What do I want in an apartment?

When you call to ask about an apartment, you should ask about the safety of the building, the cost, whether heat and lights are included, the damage deposit fee, the amount of space, and how close the building is to schools.

You should ask yourself some questions such as:

Safety

What do you need to be safe from your partner?

_____

_____

Do you need to be on the third floor or higher?

○ yes ○ no

Do you need a building with security?

○ yes ○ no

Cost

How much can you pay for rent?

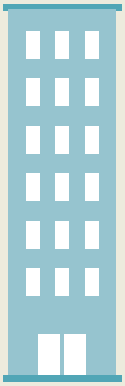
_____

How much can you pay for heat and lights?

_____

Are heat and lights included in the rent?

○ yes ○ no



Space

How many bedrooms do you need?

_____

How much space do you need?

_____

Location

How close do you need to be to work?

_____

Do you need to be close to schools?

○ yes ○ no

Other options

Do you want to live alone or share an apartment?

_____

If you have children, would you like to share with another single parent?

○ yes ○ no

My apartment list:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

If you receive Income Assistance, you may pay only a certain amount for rent. You can visit the Income Assistance website to find out how much assistance is available: novascotia.ca/coms/employment/income_assistance/index.html

You can learn more about the government's Income Assistance program by calling 211 or reading the section "What if I do not have enough money?" in this book.

Adsum's Housing Advocacy and Eviction Prevention program provides one-time emergency funding to eligible community members who are at risk of eviction, or to folks who are in the process of securing permanent housing. Adsum also supports women and gender-diverse individuals experiencing gender-based violence in applying for the Survivors of GBV Benefit through the government. For more information, visit: adsumforwomen.org/eviction-prevention/

Ending a lease early

If you are renting a home or apartment and your partner is abusing you, you may be able to end your lease with only one month's notice and without paying extra money to your landlord.

RESOURCES

For information on how to end your lease early, or to begin your application for a Domestic Violence Certificate, you can contact the Nova Scotia Victim Services office in your area: visit novascotia.ca/just/victim_services/contact.asp, or call their toll- free line: 1-888-470-0773. They will help you with the application process to get a Domestic Violence Certificate and explain how you should submit the notice to your landlord.

For more information about ending a lease early because of abuse, visit: nsfamilylaw.ca/family-violence/ending-lease-early-domestic-violence-certificates

What happens to our house?

If you are married or in a registered domestic partnership, you and your partner have equal legal rights to the house. If you are in a common-law relationship, you may also have some right to a property that you and your partner share.

You should talk with a lawyer about your property rights.

RESOURCES

For information about the differences between a marriage, a registered domestic partnership, and a common-law relationship, visit the Nova Scotia Family Law website: www.nsfamilylaw.ca/separation-divorce/common-law/common-law-relationships-registered-domestic-partnerships

Unless there is a court order or written agreement saying otherwise, both partners have a right to live in the matrimonial home. This is the home you lived in as a married couple, even if only one person's name is on the deed.

If you are married or in a registered domestic partnership, your partner cannot sell the house without your consent even if it is in your partner's name. You should still get advice from a lawyer as soon as you can.

If you are not married or in a registered domestic partnership, you might not have the right to stay in the home if your name is not on the deed or lease. If this is the case, you still have the right to remove anything that you owned before the relationship or bought during the relationship. Your personal things are still yours. This includes clothing, jewellery, furniture, electronics, and other personal items. Things you bought with your partner must be shared or split evenly.

If your children are with you, you may also take their things.

For information about taking the children with you, see page 110.

If you cannot agree about what happens to the house, you will have to go to court. A judge will decide what will happen with your house.

Can I keep my partner out of our shared home?

You can apply to the Nova Scotia Supreme Court or Supreme Court (Family Division) to get an "exclusive possession order." The laws that apply to homes on reserves also allow you to apply for an exclusive possession order. If you live on a reserve and your partner is a member of a First Nation and you are not, you can still apply for an order. It is a good idea to speak with a lawyer about your options.

You cannot keep your spouse or partner out of a matrimonial home without a court order such as a family court order, a peace bond, or an emergency protection order.

Your spouse or partner has no right to enter a property you have rented if their name is not on the lease.

For information about ending a lease early because of abuse, see page 82.

RESOURCES

For more information on abuse and your rights, visit The Nova Scotia Legal Information Society's factsheet on Domestic Violence: legalinfo.org/i-have-a-legal-question/family-law#family-violence-2

You can also find general information, legal FAQs, and resources concerning abuse at the Family Law Nova Scotia website: legalinfo.org/i-have-a-legal-question/family-law

What happens if our house is located on a reserve?

If you or your partner is a member of a First Nation and you live in a property on a reserve, different laws apply for dividing matrimonial property.

Under Canadian law, First Nation communities are allowed to create their own matrimonial property laws. If the First Nation has not made its own matrimonial property laws, there are federal laws that apply. These federal laws also apply to common-law couples.

The division of property on a reserve depends on whether a spouse or common-law partner is a member of the First Nation where the house is located. You should speak with a lawyer who can tell you how the law applies to your situation.

What if I do not have enough money?

If you don't have enough money, you may have a few options:

- you may be able to get support from your partner
- you may be able to get a job
- you may be able to get income assistance from the government
- if your partner is not paying support they owe you, you can sign up for the Maintenance Enforcement Program

Learn more about the **Maintenance Enforcement Program** (MEP) at: mep.novascotia.ca

You can also ask for help from friends or faith organizations or other community programs, like Schools Plus or food banks.

Support from your partner

Money your partner gives you to help you with costs is called "spousal support" or "spousal maintenance." Often the partner with a higher income pays money to the partner who has a lower income. A person is not automatically entitled to spousal support, and only a few common-law partners pay spousal support. The laws about spousal support are complicated, and courts think about many different factors when they decide to order spousal support. Ask a lawyer about whether you should apply for spousal support.

Learn more about spousal support at:
nsfamilylaw.ca/spousal-support/general-information

Getting a job

Many agencies in Nova Scotia provide support for career planning and job searching. Some agencies work only with women. Call 211 and see the Resources section at the back of this book for a list.

These agencies can help you prepare to go back to paid work, including helping you figure out:

- how to look for work
- what skills you have
- the type of work you would like
- what jobs exist
- what job training courses are available

It can help to tell everyone you know that you are looking for a job. Sometimes people know about jobs you can apply for. Public libraries also can help in many ways. Their resources can help you learn a new skill, search for a job, or improve your language skills.

RESOURCES

The government of Nova Scotia has resources to help you find a job: novascotia.ca/coms/employment/employment_services/index.html

The government of Canada also has information to help you find a job: canada.ca/en/services/jobs/opportunities.html

YWCA Halifax provides small loans with no interest, and other help, to women who want to leave abuse, but feel they need to stay because they don't have enough money or they can't find the housing they need, among other reasons.

Visit ywcahalifax.com/programs/violence-against-women or call 902-423-6162 to find out how to apply.

Income assistance

If you don't have enough money to pay for the things you need, you may qualify for the Employment Support and Income Assistance (ESIA) program. The ESIA program helps with money for basic living needs and medication. It can also help you work towards being able to pay for things yourself. You may qualify for help from ESIA right away in an emergency.

RESOURCES

To apply for ESIA, you can contact the local Department of Opportunities and Social Development office. You can find a list of offices at novascotia.ca/coms/department/contact, and in the Resources section of this book, or by calling 211. Any information you give to ESIA will be kept confidential. A caseworker will meet with you to fill out an application and consent form and let you know if you are eligible. You can appeal any decision made about your eligibility.

If you are able to work, ESIA staff will help you make and follow an employment plan. If you cannot work, they will help you receive money to support yourself and your family.

You may be eligible for basic income assistance. The amount of assistance you receive depends on your circumstances. Find out more at: novascotia.ca/coms/employment/income_assistance/index.html

Income Assistance only allows a certain amount of money for housing. Find out more at: novascotia.ca/coms/employment/income_assistance/what-you-receive.html

If you do not get the Nova Scotia Child Benefit or the National Child Benefit Equivalent for a dependent child under the age of 18, you can ask for a Child Benefit Adjustment. You must file your income tax each year to get your Child Tax Benefits. Ask your caseworker for more information.

If you receive Income Assistance from the Government of Nova Scotia and your partner is not making support payments, you can register for the Maintenance Enforcement Program. This program will track and collect your maintenance payments for you. This means that if your partner is not making payments regularly or not making payments at all, ESIA will not include the support payments as income towards the income assistance that you receive.

Maintenance Enforcement Program

Once you get a child support order, your partner should send you money for the children regularly (usually every month). If they are not making payments, you can register your court order with the Nova Scotia Maintenance Enforcement Program (MEP).

MEP aims to make sure you get your child support or spousal support payments.

The Maintenance Enforcement Program will register your file as a "caution" case if they are aware that:

- your partner has abused you
- there are concerns for your safety
- you have a peace bond in place

This means they will tell you when they contact your partner.

If your partner threatens you or tells you to leave the program, you can contact the police and tell Maintenance Enforcement. Staff will work with you to make sure you get your payments.

You may want to open a personal bank account at a new bank and arrange for your cheques to be deposited directly. Your partner will not be able to access the money in your personal account.

You can learn more about the Maintenance Enforcement Program at mep.novascotia.ca/en/my-account.

RESOURCES

If you move

If you receive government benefits and you move or make other changes, you must tell those offices and the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA).

This includes changes to:

- your address
- your marital status
- your income
- how many children you have

Government benefits include:

- Nova Scotia Child Benefit (NSCB)
- National Child Benefit (NCB)
- Goods and Service Tax Credit (GST Credit)
- Nova Scotia Affordable Living Tax Credit (ALTC)

You can update your information with the Canadian Revenue Agency online (www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/e-services/digital-services-individuals.html), or by phone.

Canada Revenue Agency benefits contacts

Individual income tax and trust enquiries: 1-800-959-8281
Universal Child Care Benefit,
Canada Child Tax Benefit: 1-800-387-1193
GST/HST credit for individuals: 1-800-387-1193

If you leave your home and are expecting a cheque in the mail, call the office that sends those cheques. You can ask them not to mail them to your home address. You should call as soon as possible. You can also ask Canada Post to send your mail to a new address for a fee. It takes 5 to 10 days for the post office to start sending your mail to your new address.

Cut or tear along this line. Fold up and keep in a safe place.

Safety Alert

If you have experienced domestic abuse, know that you are not alone, and that there are a variety of supports available to you.

If you are in immediate danger, call 911.

If you are seeking help or are looking for information about abuse, you can call the **Transition House Association of Nova Scotia 24-hour toll-free line**: 1-855-225-0220

Women's, Men's, and All Genders Helplines: 211

Help Lines

Crime Stoppers 1-800-222-8477

Kids Help Phone 1-800-668-6868

Mental Health Crisis Line
Serves all of Nova Scotia (24/7)1-888-429-8167

Avalon Sexual Assault Centre
Crisis Line 902-422-4240

Your local number:

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Quick connect

Community and social services 211
ns.211.ca

HealthLink 811
Hearing impaired 711
811.novascotia.ca

Women's, Men's, and All Genders Helplines:211

Mi'kmaw Family Healing Centres

Millbrook 902-756-3440
Toll-free: 1-800-565-4741

We'koqma'q 902-756-3440
Toll-free: 1-800-565-3440

Transition Houses and Shelters Crisis Lines

Amherst, Autumn House 902-667-1200

Antigonish, Naomi Society. 902-863-3807

Bridgewater, Harbour House 902-543-3999

Digby, Juniper House 902-742-8689
Toll-free: 1-800-266-4087

Halifax, Bryony House 902-422-7650

Kentville, Chrysalis House 902-679-1922
Toll-free: 1-800-264-8682

New Glasgow, Tearmann House . 902-752-0132
Toll-free: 1-800-831-0330

Port Hawkesbury, Leeside Transition House
. 902-625-2444
Toll-free: 1-800-565-3390

Shelburne, Juniper House 902-742-8689
Toll-free: 1-800-266-4087

Sydney, Cape Breton Transition House
. 902-539-2945
Toll-free: 1-800-563-2945

Truro, Third Place 902-893-3232
Toll-free: 1-800-565-4878

Yarmouth, Juniper House 902-742-8689
Toll-free: 1-800-266-4087

Cut or tear along this line. Fold up and keep in a safe place.