

For some parents and their children, the back-to-school season is exciting.

It is full of gathering new school supplies, a new backpack, meeting new teachers and perhaps navigating a new school; for others experiencing domestic violence (DV), back to school can be stressful, full of fear and unknowns. With schools opening their doors all over the country these next few weeks, it is crucial to ensure all families have what they need to feel safe and supported heading into the school year. To help prepare families for this transition, we are giving you four ways to be ready to head back-to-school safely.

First, any parent experiencing intimate partner violence should reach out to their local advocacy organization. Connecting with an advocate will ensure a support person outside of family and friends, and advocates are specifically trained to provide resources and help create a safety plan.

A safety plan that accounts for the school year transition will include tactics on how to engage with school personnel and review any agreements regarding parenting time. Advocates can also assist parents with young children in creating a safety plan for the child or help older children develop their own. Having a clear safety plan will ease some of the stresses and unknowns that back-to-school season presents. Start [here](#) if you aren't sure where to start.

Second, don't be hesitant to access community resources. In addition to providing safety planning services, advocates can help parents connect with community resources that can help provide school supplies, clothing, medical and dental check-ups, food, and some even offer financial assistance. Financial stress can increase safety risks if the survivor parent must solely rely on the abusive parent for financial assistance. Find community resources in your area by reaching out to [United Way Worldwide](#).

Third, if a parent wants to change something about an existing court order – such as a holiday schedule – prepare your court documents sooner rather than later. Family courts move through cases slowly and there may be a mediation requirement in your current court order. Your local advocacy organization can help you create a plan for moving forward. A plan may include contacting a local attorney or legal aid, attending a self-representation clinic, and might involve the preparing for mediation. Another great resource is the law library at your local courthouse. Law librarians can help direct you to legal information that you can use in your case.

Fourth, the most important thing you can do as a parent experiencing intimate partner violence during back-to-school time is to provide the best support to your child, and plan for your safety by leveraging the support systems around you.

Get Ready: Back-to-School Toolkit



Safety Planning

- Create a safety plan for yourself.
- Create a safety plan for your child(ren).
- Share the child's safety plan with any support people named in the child's plan, including teachers, school administrators, and friend's parents.
- Know the school start and end times, as well as the bus schedule (if applicable).
- Be aware of school closure protocols.



Preparation of Documents

- Provide a copy of any civil protective order to the administrative office and teachers.
- Provide a copy of any custody or parenting time order(s) to the administrative office and teachers. Include a summary of the important pieces such as can the school give information to the other parent and who can pick up the children.



Open Communication

- Communicate who has access to school records directly to administrative office and teachers.
- Communicate who has pick up privileges directly to administrative office and teachers.



Support Systems

- Reach out to any mental health professionals if necessary to help ease the school year transition for the child(ren).
- Identify a caregiver for the child in the event the safe parent is unavailable (illness, work schedule).
- Leverage community resources such as your local DV organization, food bank, and United Way.

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