

Gathering support



Safety for women

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Our relationships and families are meant to provide us with love, support and a sense of safety. But there are many women and children in Australia who live with someone who hurts, frightens or controls them.

This is not okay.

If you are afraid of a partner, a family member, or someone else, there are steps you can take to help keep you and your children safe.



Is this family violence?

Sometimes women are unsure if what is happening to them is family violence. Family violence is not always physical – it might be behaviour that puts you down, makes you feel worthless or controls you.

It can be hard to believe that a person you love and trust can hurt you.

These questions can help you recognise the warning signs.

Does your partner, husband, carer, or a family member:

- Make you feel uncomfortable or afraid?
- Often put you down or make you feel bad about yourself?
- Constantly call or text to find out what you're doing?
- Make you feel scared of saying 'no' to them?
- Get possessive and jealous if you talk to others?
- Stop you having any money?
- Try to control who you see and where you go?
- Constantly check what you do on your phone or online?
- Scare you or hurt you by being violent?
- Threaten to hurt you, your children, pets or others?
- Threaten that you will never see your children again if you leave?
- Make you do sexual things you don't want to?

If you answered 'yes' to any of these questions, then your safety and your children's safety may be at risk.

Family violence does affect children. Even if they do not see or hear the abuse, they know it is happening. They may feel frightened or helpless. They may try to protect you or even think it is their fault.



Remember, abuse is never your fault. Please don't feel ashamed and never blame yourself.





Gathering support

It can be hard to know what to do when someone is abusive.

It is understandable if you feel confused, frightened or overwhelmed.

You might hope the violence will stop, be afraid for your children, or worry about what will happen if you leave. You might feel that you don't have any options.

You are not alone.

There are people and services that can support you.

You can get information and resources to help you work out what your options are.

**If you are in
immediate danger,
call 000 and ask
for the police.**



In a relationship

There are many reasons why you might not be able to end a relationship.

You might choose to stay because you hope things will get better. You might not know how you can end it, or you might feel it is too dangerous to leave.

If you stay, it is important to know what options are available to keep you and your children safe.



*"Trust your feelings.
If you feel something
is wrong, there is
something wrong."*

What are my options?

Seek support

Speak to a trusted friend or family member, a medical professional or a family violence service. Having somebody to talk to can help you cope with the effects of family violence and help you work out how to be safe.

Gather information

Learn about family violence and the effects it might have on you and your children. Find out about the people and the services that may be able to help you.

Make a safety plan

Think about and write down the things that you can do to improve your safety and the safety of your children. [SEE PAGE 27](#)

Keep a record

It is important to keep a record or diary of the family violence. [SEE PAGE 13](#)



**Keep your safety plan
and diary in a safe place.**

If you are in immediate danger, call 000 and ask for the police.



How can the law help me?

The police and the legal system are there to help protect your right to live safely in your home.

The police

If someone has threatened you or used violence against you, you can call or go to your local police station. Even if you are not ready to end the relationship, the police can take action to protect you.

If the police believe that you are in immediate danger, they may take action to protect you even if you have not asked them to.

Tech tip

Trust your instincts. If you suspect the abusive person has information about you that you have not told them, it is possible that they are monitoring your phone, computer, email, car use or other activities.

Intervention Orders

Even if you still live together, an Intervention Order can order a person to stop using violence against you or your children.

A person does not get a criminal record if you take out an Intervention Order against them. But if they disobey the conditions of the order they can be charged with a crime.



A community lawyer can give you advice and help you apply for an intervention order.



"If things don't seem right and you are worried, talk to someone about it. Don't try to hide it. It's not right for someone to treat you like that, and it's not your fault."



Thinking about separating

Ending a relationship can be hard.

Deciding whether or not to separate can take time. Get advice, organise the practical things and work out how to separate safely.

What are my options?

Seek support

Speak to a trusted friend or family member, counsellor or medical professional. Having somebody to talk to can help you cope with the effects of family violence. Keep them up to date about what is going on.



"Fear can be crippling. It stops you from thinking clearly. Calling a support line helped me be more aware of what I can do."



Link in with a family violence service

A family violence service can offer you expert support and advice about your options when you are thinking about separating. They can also work with you to make a safety plan to help keep you safe.

Seek legal advice

Think about speaking to a lawyer about what the law says about your safety, relationship, children, money and property. This can help answer any questions or concerns that you may have about your rights and your options.

Make a safety plan

Write down the things you can do to improve your safety and the safety of your children while you are living with the abusive person, and for when you separate. Always keep your safety plan up to date. [SEE PAGE 27](#)

Collect evidence

Keep a record or diary of the family violence. [SEE PAGE 13](#)

If you are in immediate danger, call 000 and ask for the police.



Tech tip

Use a safer computer. If you are looking up information about family violence or services, use a computer at a public library, school or university, community centre, neighbourhood house or internet café.

Self-care tip

The most important thing you can do for yourself or your children is to look after yourself.

How can the law help me?

The police and the legal system are there to help protect your right to live safely in your home.

The police

Call or go to the police if someone has threatened you or used violence against you. Tell them about your fears for your own or others' safety. Ask them what they can do to help you separate from an abusive person safely.

Even if there is not enough evidence to charge the abusive person with a crime, the police can take action to protect you.

You can also ask to speak to the Victoria Police Family Violence Liaison Officer or the Specialist Family Violence Team for more advice about your situation.

Intervention Orders

An Intervention Order is a court order that can tell a person to stop using violence against you or your children, and to not go near you.

The Intervention Order has a set of conditions for how the abusive person can behave. You can have a say about what these conditions are.

The order may say that the person must stop:

- committing family violence against you
- approaching you (or your children) and your home, work or any other place
- locating or following you
- damaging your property.

The person will not get a criminal record if you get an Intervention Order against them. However, if they disobey the conditions of the order they can be charged with a crime.



Ending a relationship does not always mean that you need to leave your home. But for some people leaving may be the safest option. Speak to a family violence service or call the Victims of Crime Hotline 1800 819 817 to get help to improve your security at home.

Separating

Separating from an abusive person can be a scary and dangerous time. People who are abusive often manipulate or threaten their partners to stop them leaving. It is important to think about your safety.

Leaving the relationship may be something you have been thinking about for a long time. Or you may have needed to leave quickly because you were in danger, or it could be because police have taken action to protect you.

You do not have to do this alone. Support can make it easier to get through this difficult time safely.

"I grabbed my photo albums, a bag of clothes for us, took my dog and we left. Driving to meet the social worker early that morning, I was a little scared of the future, but not like I had been every day for the last five years."



What are my options?

Seek support

Speak to a trusted friend or family member, counsellor or medical professional about the support they can give you. Keep them up to date about what is going on.

Link in with services

Family violence services can offer you expert support, advice and practical assistance to help you when you are separating. They can also help you get financial assistance or link you in with other services that can help you separate safely. They will make sure that you have a safety plan that is up to date.

Make a safety plan

Write down the things that you can do to keep you safe and keep your children safe while you are separating and always keep it up to date. [SEE PAGE 27](#)

Get legal assistance

It is important to speak to a lawyer as soon as possible about what the law says about your safety, relationship, children, money and property. Ask them how they can help you with your legal rights and options.

Apply for an Intervention Order

An Intervention Order is a court order that tells a person to stop using violence against you and/or your children.

Collect evidence

Keep a record or diary of the family violence. You will need to be able to show this evidence to help you tell your story.

[SEE PAGE 13](#)

If you are in
immediate danger,
call 000 and ask
for the police.





How can the law help me?

Family violence is against the law.

The law states that family violence is behaviour that in any way controls or dominates a family member and causes them to feel fear for their safety, or that of another family member.

It can include physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or economic abuse, or behaviour that is threatening or coercive.

It also includes any such behaviour that a child hears or witnesses.



Get legal help as early as possible. A lawyer can help you understand the law, your options and help you with Court.

The police

Victoria Police must investigate every report of family violence made to them.

If you are in immediate danger, call 000 and ask for the police.

If you are not in immediate danger, you can call your local police station or go in person to make a report. The police officer will ask you some questions to help assess your immediate danger and work out what they need to do to protect you.

The police may be able to:

- arrest or hold the abusive person in custody
- charge the person with a criminal offence
- issue a family violence safety notice
- apply for an Intervention Order
- refer you to appropriate services.

They should take your complaint seriously and take action to protect you.

Everybody has the right to feel safe. The police and the court system are there to help protect your right to live safely.

Intervention Orders

An Intervention Order is a court order that tells a person they must not use violence against you or your children.

The Intervention Order has a set of conditions for how the person can behave. You can have a say about these, depending on whether you are still living together or have separated.

The order may say that the person must stop:

- committing family violence against you (and your children)
- damaging your property
- locating or following you or keeping you under surveillance
- approaching you (and your children) and your home, work or any other place
- publishing anything about you using technology
- contacting or communicating with you
- approaching or remaining within a certain distance of you
- coming near your house, your work, or your children's school
- getting another person to do any of the things listed above.

The person will not get a criminal record if you get an Intervention Order against them. However, if they do not follow the conditions of the order they can be charged with a crime.

For more information on Intervention Orders and how to apply visit:
www.familyviolence.courts.vic.gov.au



Resource

The Eastern Community Legal Centre has developed a video on the Intervention Order process. It's available in English, Arabic, Chin-Hakha, Chinese-Mandarin, Dinka and Punjabi. Visit www.eclc.org.au/steps2safety



Some courts have Court Applicant Support Workers who can help you with safety, support and information.

What happens if a person breaches an Intervention Order?

When a person disobeys an Intervention Order it is called a breach. This is against the law.

Each time the abusive person breaches the Intervention Order, report it to the police. Tell them the time and date, and what happened.

It is important you keep any evidence that shows the person has breached the order. This might include notes you've made, photos, text messages and details of any witnesses.

The police should investigate all reports of a breach of an Intervention Order.

Resource

The **Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria** has developed the **SmartSafe+ App** to help you safely collect and save evidence for court. Email smartsafeplus@dvrvc.org.au for further information and instructions on how to download the app. (It's done this way to keep you safe.)



If you are concerned that the police have not acted to protect you, ask to speak to the Victoria Police Family Violence Liaison Officer or the Specialist Family Violence Team.

Collecting evidence

When speaking to the police or the court to get an Intervention Order you may need to show that:

- you and/or your children have experienced family violence
- it is likely that family violence will happen again
- you need an intervention order to keep you and/or your children safe.

There are some things that might make it easier to tell your story, such as:

- a diary of the dates, times and details of what has happened to you and/or to your children
- photos, text messages, emails, phone call history, or letters that support what you are saying
- documents – such as medical reports, police reports/statements and legal documents
- witnesses – other people who have seen or heard things that confirm what you are saying.



Collecting evidence diary page

Date of incident ___/___/___

Location _____

What happened? _____

Were there children present?
(this includes anywhere in the home) Yes No

Did they directly see or hear the incident? Yes No

Did they see or hear the effects
of the incident? Yes No

What did they see or hear?

Were there witnesses?

Name _____

Contact _____

What did they witness?

Did you report this to the police? Yes No

Name and registered number _____

Location of police station _____

What actions were taken? _____

Did you attend any medical appointments as a result
of the incident?

Name _____

Type of appointment _____

Date attended ___/___/___

Include supporting evidence (photos, letters, documents,
reports, emails, texts, social media activity)

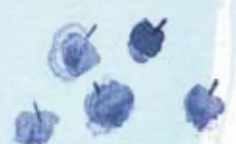
Include clear, short facts about exactly what happened as though you are telling the police or a magistrate. Write down the exact words, actions and behaviours used.

Children do not need to directly see or hear an incident to be affected. They may also see or hear the effects of an incident such as:

- comforting or helping the person affected
- cleaning up after an incident
- being present when the police attend.

Police action could include:

- talking with you or other people involved
- taking a statement
- referring you to a service
- issuing a Family Violence Safety Notice
- applying to court for an Intervention Order
- arresting or charging the offender.



Safety tips - making a safety plan

At home

In a relationship

- Prepare a way to escape in case you need to leave quickly
- Be aware of where the safest room in the house may be and what household items could be used as weapons
- Prepare and keep a bag of important items in a safe place or with a trusted person, such as: money, keys, bank cards, documents, clothes, toiletries, medication, toys

Separated

- Change the locks and consider putting in deadlocks, window locks, security screens, sensor lights, or alarms) and make sure everyone in the house uses the security
- Be aware of anybody following you when you are driving home
- Ask neighbours to tell you if they notice strange activity around your house
- Have your mail sent to another address or PO Box
- If possible, do not park on the street and be careful moving between your car and house
- Keep a record or diary of the family violence or any strange events



If you have children

- Talk with your children about how to keep safe in an emergency. Children should only need to worry about their own safety (like having a hiding place or a neighbour's house they can go to) unless they are older and can handle more responsibility
- Make sure your children know their address, how to phone the police, and what to do if they feel scared or upset
- Speak to a lawyer as soon as possible about your rights and responsibilities
- Give copies of court orders to your children's school or preschool
- Arrange handover of children to the other parent in a public place, and take along a supportive person
- Speak to a lawyer if you're concerned about safety during contact visits

At work

- Tell your employer (if you feel comfortable), they may be able to help you keep safer
- Talk to a manager you trust about your options such as: 'family violence leave', flexible work hours/arrangements, changing your roster or working at another site
- Let your workplace know that they should not give out your contact details
- You could ask your workplace to block calls from the abusive person

If you are in immediate danger, call 000 and ask for the police.



With family and friends

- Agree on a code word/sentence to use with supportive friends/family if you feel in danger
- Let supportive friends, family and/or neighbours know about what is happening
- Prepare and keep a bag of important items in a safe place or with a trusted person, such as: money, keys, bank cards, documents, clothes, toiletries, medication and toys
- Include trusted friends/family in your safety plan

Out and about

- Change regular appointments and routines that the abusive person knows about (such as where you do your shopping, or how you get to school to pick up the children)
- Carry a personal alarm and use it if you feel threatened
- Keep your car locked
- Park in well-lit public areas or a secured garage
- Be aware of anybody following you and have a plan in case you are followed
- If you need to attend court, ask the court, police, lawyer or support service how you can stay safe getting to Court, at Court and leaving Court
- If you still need to see the abusive person, have a supportive person with you

Other tips

- Take threats seriously and report them to the police
- Keep a record or diary of the family violence or any strange events
- Open new bank accounts
- Keep a list of important telephone numbers that you might need
- Keep important papers (or certified copies) in a safe place or with a trusted person, such as: birth certificates, passports, licence, Medicare card, Health Care card, bank account details, prescriptions, children's immunisation records, immigration documents, Intervention Orders and family court paperwork etc.
- Make sure doctors, lawyers, banks, telephone companies, the Australian Electoral Commission and other services know they must keep your personal information safe
- Ask Centrelink whether you can apply for a crisis payment, what other payments you can apply for and how they can help keep you safe
- If necessary, talk to a lawyer or to the Department of Births, Deaths and Marriages about changing your identity



Using technology safely

How do I stay safe online and on my phone?

Your computer and phone, social networks and email services can be helpful and useful, but they can also be used by an abusive person to monitor, control or harass you.

Finding ways to use technology more safely is important.

Using a computer

Use a safer computer

Use the computer at a public library, school or university, community centre, neighbourhood house or internet café. This way, the abusive person cannot access your browsing history or install spyware.

Create a new email account

A safe email account is important as it often acts as the contact point for your online accounts. Create new accounts on a safer computer – do not create or check these accounts from a computer that the abusive person could access. Make sure you sign out of all your accounts completely when you have finished.

Change your passwords and passcodes

Choose a new, 'strong' password that cannot be guessed (a mix of letters, numbers and special characters) and provide security questions and answers that no one else knows.

Keep anti-virus software up-to-date

This can help you identify and remove any unknown programs that may be used to monitor you.

Tech tip

When using your home computer, it's not possible to completely delete your browsing history. Also, the abusive person may notice that you have deleted it.



Using a mobile phone

Get a new phone

Be careful using a phone that the abusive person has had access to or that was part of a shared plan (including your children's phones). If you can, think about getting a new phone.

Change your PIN

Change your PIN regularly and set your phone to 'lock' the handset when you are not using it.



*Talk to your support worker.
The WESNET Telstra Safe
Connections program may be able
to provide family violence services
with safe smartphones for clients.
www.wesnet.org.au*

Check your phone settings

Understand the privacy and security settings of the phones and apps you and your children use. You might want to:

- switch off phone functions that someone can use to track you such as mobile data, wireless internet, location tracking, GPS and Bluetooth – maybe turn off your phone when you are not using it
- turn off settings on your phone's camera that show your location
- turn off or delete the 'find my phone' function
- say 'no' when an app requests your location.w

Clear your 'Recent calls' list

You can clear these so that they do not appear in your mobile phone.

Consider using a prepaid phone

If the abusive person can access your mobile phone bills, they may be able to see who you have called. Consider using a prepaid phone card.

Tech tip

To increase your tech safety and knowledge visit
www.smartsafe.org.au



Using social networking sites

Create new social networking accounts

Don't use a computer that the abuser can access, and make sure you sign out of all your accounts when you have finished.

Change your passwords and passcodes (and your children's)

Choose a new, 'strong' password that cannot be guessed (a mix of letters, numbers and special characters) and provide security questions and answers that no one else knows.

Check your privacy and security settings (and your children's)

Set your privacy settings as high as you can to stop people seeing what you post or what others post about you, and check these settings regularly. Block unwanted people.

Think about what you post

Be aware of the information that you post and tell family and friends not to post information about you. Things like the background in photos, or school uniforms, may reveal your location. Make sure children understand how and why to keep safe online.

Google yourself

See what private information about you can be found online. Go to Google and do a search for your name in quotation marks: "your full name".

Report abuse

Take screen shots of abusive messages or harassment and save this. Report the abuse to police and to the social networking site.



If it's a time of high risk, it may be safer for the whole family to stop using social networking for a while, until the crisis passes.



A safe device is one that the abusive person does not, will not, and has never has had access to.

Tech safety checklist

Mobile phone

- Safe phone
- Safe passcode
- Checked my phone settings

Computer

- Safe computer
- Safe email address
- Safe passwords and passcodes

Social networking

- Safe accounts
- Safe passwords
- Checked my privacy and security settings

Children

- Safe mobile phone
- Computer
- Social networking accounts

Tech tip

If you suspect the abusive person has information about you that you have not told them, it is possible that they are monitoring your phone, computer, email, car use or other activities. Trust your instincts.

Caring for yourself

Being in a relationship with someone who hurts, frightens or controls you can affect your health and wellbeing – even after you have separated.

Perhaps you've noticed:

- tense muscles, headaches, rapid breathing and heart rate
- difficulties sleeping, fatigue, nightmares
- withdrawing from others, avoiding situations that you think are stressful
- feeling worried or confused, angry or irritable, overwhelmed or helpless
- feeling like you can't cope
- losing your self-confidence
- struggling to concentrate, remember or make decisions
- smoking, drinking or using more drugs than usual
- having a negative attitude towards yourself and your life.

These are normal reactions. But over time they can lead to depression, anxiety or other mental health issues. It is important to get help.

Think about speaking to a medical professional, or a counsellor – there are free, confidential services available.



"I realised that caring for me wasn't being selfish, it was necessary to get through."



Self care

The most important thing you can do for you or your children is to look after yourself.

It can be hard to find time and energy, but it will help you cope with and heal from the effects of family violence.

Here are some ideas:

Relaxation

Take the time to do the things you enjoy, such as reading, gardening or listening to music. Walk in the fresh air, or try meditation, breathing or relaxation exercises.

Healthy eating

Eating wholesome foods and drinking plenty of water will help support your mental and physical health and give you energy to get through the day. Avoid alcohol or drugs.

Support

Spend time with people who make you feel good, find a support group of other women who meet regularly or get involved with community activities or courses.

Exercise

Anything from walking, swimming, dancing or going to the gym can help relieve the tension in your muscles and relax your mind.

Sleep

Getting enough sleep is essential and will help your mind and body repair.

Be kind to yourself

A simple rule can be: "Don't say anything to yourself that you wouldn't say to anyone else."



Why do I still feel bad?

Feelings of loss and grief are normal after you have separated, even if the person was abusive.

You might feel as though you have lost:

- a part of yourself
- the good parts of your relationship
- your trust
- your life plans
- the plans for your children
- family or friends
- your personal things and property.



These feelings are normal. But if you feel that it is too difficult or these emotions continue over a long time it is important to get help.

You might also feel emotions such as:

Denial

It may not seem real that the relationship is over.

Anger

You may feel anger towards your ex-partner or your situation.

Depression

You may be sad. You may eat or sleep more – or less – or feel a sense of hopelessness. You might also spend a lot of time crying, working through the trauma.

Acceptance

Eventually the pain will ease and you will feel ready to move on.

What support is available?

Family violence services

1800RESPECT

National sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service

- Tel: 1800 737 732
(telephone counselling, 24 hours)
- www.1800respect.org.au
(online counselling, 24 hours)

safe steps Family Violence Response Centre

Telephone counselling and referral to safe accommodation

- Tel: 03 9322 3555 or
1800 015 188 (24 hours)

Centres Against Sexual Assault (CASA)

Crisis service for victim/survivors who have been sexually assaulted

- Tel: 1800 806 292 (24 hours)
- www.casa.org.au

InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence

Support and information for immigrant women in their language

- Tel: 03 9413 6500 or
toll free 1800 755 988
(Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm)

Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women's Services

Support, accommodation and information for Aboriginal women

- Tel: 03 9482 5744
(Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm)
- Emergency refuge referral,
via safe steps 1800 015 188

Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV)

Support and information and the number of your local outreach service

- Tel: 03 9486 9866
(Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm)

In an emergency,
call police
on 000.



Legal services

Women's Legal Service of Victoria

Legal advice and information for women experiencing family violence

- Tel: 1800 133 302
- www.womenslegal.org.au

Victoria Legal Aid

Free legal information over the phone

- Tel: 1300 792 387
(8.45am to 5.15pm, Monday–Friday)

Federation of Community Legal Centres

To find your local Community Legal Centre for free legal advice

- www.communitylaw.org.au

Aboriginal Family Violence and Prevention Legal Service

Assistance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors of family violence and sexual assault

- Tel: 1800 105 303
- www.fvpls.org

Other services

Women's Information & Referral Exchange (WIRE)

Information, support and referrals including live chat online

- Tel: 1300 134 130
- www.wire.org.au

Victims of Crime Helpline

Free information and support to help you recover from the effects of crime and guide you through the legal process

- Tel: 1800 819 817
(8am–11pm, 7 days)

Court Network

Non-legal court support, information and referral – before, during and after court

- Tel: 1800 681 614

Australian Childhood Foundation

Information about children and young people affected by abuse

- Tel: 1800 176 453

Websites

www.dvrcv.org.au

Information and support for women and children experiencing family violence

www.smartsafe.org.au

Information on technology abuse and your safety

www.burstingthebubble.com

Quizzes, stories and advice for young people experiencing family violence at home

www.familyviolence.courts.vic.gov.au

Information about Intervention Orders

My safety plan

Keep in a safe place



Important numbers

Police: **000**

safe steps Family Violence Response Centre (24 hours): **1800 015 188**

My local family violence outreach service

Other emergency contacts

What other services or people can help me? (e.g. family violence services, support workers, police)

Safe place

Where to go if I'm in danger (24/7 options)

How to get there

The safest place in the house if I'm unable to leave

Emergency support person

People who can help or support me in a crisis (e.g. family, friend, neighbour)

How I will contact them

Safety plan for child/children *(Children should only need to worry about their own safety, unless they are older and can handle more responsibility)*

People who can help my children in an emergency and places they can go

Do they know what to do if they feel unsafe?

Instructions for key contact people (e.g. school teacher, childcare worker)



Checklist of important items

- Contents for my emergency escape bag
 - Money
 - Transport (myki, taxi vouchers)
 - Safe mobile phone or change for public phone
 - Spare set of house/car/other keys
 - Important documents or certified copies (identification, licences, bank account details and cards, copies of birth certificates, Medicare card, passports, immigration documents, Health Care card, Centrelink information, Intervention Orders and family court paperwork, children's immunisation records, prescriptions etc.)
 - Medication
- A safe, accessible place I can hide these items _____
- Safe location to store this safety plan _____

Tech safety checklist

- Safe mobile phone
- Safe passcode
- Safe phone settings
- Safe computer
Where _____
- Safe email account
- Safe social networking use
- Safe passwords (bank, online services, email, social networking sites)
- Children – safe mobile phone, computer, email and social networking accounts

My notes



*Thank you to the many women who helped us develop this booklet.
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you are brave & strong
be kind to yourself

