

11 things you should do when you separate from an abusive relationship

Slater & Gordon Lawyers. Written by Maria Monastiriotis, 2014.

1. **Change all your passwords.** It's important that you change your bank PIN numbers, internet and telephonic banking passcodes and email passwords to ensure money can't be withdrawn from your account.
2. **Check your bank accounts regularly.** Financial abuse is a common feature of relationship break-ups. Inform your bank in writing that you are separated and do not consent to any money being withdrawn from your redraw facility. If you are concerned that large sums will be withdrawn without your consent, talk to your bank and find out what rights you have. Get written advice, and keep the records.
3. **Social media.** You should change your social media passwords and have strict privacy settings in place. Do not use your social media to make negative comments or remarks, or character assassinate your ex partner or his family, especially if there are children of the relationship. Similarly, should you become aware of posts detrimental to you; you can record and print them for potential evidence.
4. **Put your financial documents and other valuable documents somewhere safe.** You may take them to your workplace or leave them with someone you trust. Make copies and keep them somewhere different. It is not uncommon for these important documents to disappear after separation. Birth Certificates, Marriage Certificates, Deeds of Property, Share Certificates, Bank details, Superannuation details, Passports for the children, Protection Orders, Special Photos.
5. **Put your sentimental or valuable things somewhere safe.** If that trinket box that your grandmother gave you is sentimental or you can't live without that signed copy of football memorabilia, put it somewhere safe so it can't be broken in a 'War of the Roses' style feud. Possessions can be nine points of the law, so make sure anything you value is safe from harm, and you have records to prove ownership and who paid for various things. Jewellery purchased during a relationship may be property of the relationship, such as engagement rings, and other valuable assets.
6. **Change your will.** Most people don't realise that separations does not affect Wills, which means your partner may still be the beneficiary of your assets if you pass away. You should also consider whether you want to change the beneficiaries listed in your insurance policies and superannuation fund.



7. **Revoke any power of attorney.** If you have appointed your spouse or partner as your Attorney, then it is preferable that you revoke that Power of Attorney as soon as possible.
8. **Keep a diary.** You may need to recount events to a lawyer including conversations you had with your partner. Maintaining a proper diary will help you with that task. Make the notes as soon as they happen, use the exact words, time and date the entry and sign it. Don't include emotional comments in this diary.
9. **Keep things as civil as possible.** Most people don't want to spend a lifetime fighting with a former partner. The biggest victims are the children. Keep things as friendly as possible for the sake of your children. However, if domestic or family violence or child abuse was a feature of the relationship, see professional advice as to how to recover, and how to prepare for extended litigation, as abusive personality types often create litigious opportunities, just to make sure they have control over you.
10. **Consider where you need to change your postal address.** If you are concerned that your former partner will read your mail, consider obtaining a postal box or redirecting your mail to a friend or family member. Australia Post offers 12 month free mail redirection and 22 month free PO Box for family violence victims.
11. **Get legal advice.** You may need to use a lawyer but make sure you are fully informed before making a life altering decision.

Slightly amended by VOCAL Inc NSW 2020 to make it specific to clients who are escaping a dangerous relationship.