

# SHOUT THE SECRET

## *Survivor Action Plan*

Works in Conjunction with the book

**“Shout the Secret: A Survivor’s Guide *Through* Domestic Violence and How to Thrive In Its Aftermath”**

- Decide whether you’re staying or leaving

Whether staying or leaving, do the following next. If you’ve decided to stay, you may be wondering why I’m suggesting that you still do these next few things. Let me tell you. It’s because I know, from experience and what I’ve seen, that the situation almost always escalates, and I want you to be prepared... just in case you find yourself in a situation where you need to act quickly and don’t have time to go back and review this action plan.

- Get a few notebooks, legal pads, or other paper that’s not all loose.

One is for incident documentation, which means that every time there’s an abusive incident, you need to document it with as much detail as possible – even if the police are called and a report is filed. (Get the case number; you may need it later.)

One is to become your Success Journal – not a diary; don’t get confused. Start this one with at least three entries of success, achievement, or recognition in your life to-date. (It may NOT be “having my kids” or things of that nature. These are YOUR successes.) This one will serve to bolster your self-esteem and act as a “reset” whenever life serves you a proverbial blow – and it will; it happens to us all at one point or another. When these times occur and you question what you’re doing or your ability to follow-through or your ability to get done what you need to... read through this journal, and it will remind you just how capable you truly are.

A third, should you choose to extend this exercise (I highly recommend you do.), will be a logging – every day – of at least one thing you’re grateful for. Some days it may be more difficult than others to find something. It won’t take long, though, before you find that you’ve had lots to be thankful for all along. This will help to keep your mind in a positive state instead of focusing on situations, chaos, and “what ifs”.

- Make a list of at least four places you can go – in an emergency or under planned conditions. These should be places where you’ll feel safe, so you may not want to pick obvious choices like close family members or friends. Think outside the box: a friend or family member who your abuser is either unaware of or thinks you’re estranged from; hospital emergency rooms; police stations; shelters that have emergency services; and so on. Be sure you have addresses, phone numbers, etc. Do NOT keep this information either where your abuser may find it or in a format he/she can access. Again, think outside the box: a flash drive you can carry, ask a neighbor to keep, or put in an emergency bag.
- Pack an emergency bag for you and your children. (Don’t forget pets, if applicable to your situation. Although most shelters and such do not allow pets, some offer “pets in crisis” services. Ask. This only means that, until you’re able to get a grip on the situation, a volunteer care provider will take your pet into their home and tend to them. You then retrieve them once you’re able.) For a list of items to be sure to include, refer to Chapter 2.

- Whenever an incident occurs, be sure to notify the police and file a report – even if it’s just a miscellaneous report. The documentation and “paper trail” may prove to be instrumental if not vital in the future. If you need help understanding your rights, refer to Chapter 3.

If you’ve decide to stay with your abuser at this time, there’s little more on this action plan for you to execute. You know who and what you’re dealing with – and, if you don’t or are unsure, read the book. You’ll then know for sure and be more equipped to make the best decision for yourself. Honestly, though, until you’re ready to leave and take back control of your life, there’s little anybody will be able to do or help you with. Keep this action plan until then, so you’ll know what to do when or if the time comes that you either decide to leave or feel you no longer have a choice, if you’re going to protect yourself and your children.

If you’ve decided to leave, there are more action steps for you.

- Contact those places or people on your list of places to go. Make arrangements to do so. This may take some careful planning, depending on the severity of control your abuser exercises over you. If you’re working with a shelter or organization, they’ll help you devise a plan, figure out what to tell your abuser so you can get out of the house without him/her, and assist you with getting you where you need to go in the event of an emergency.
- As soon as you’ve left and is feasible, go to your local County Courthouse and file for a PFA (Protection From Abuse) or PFS (Protection From Stalking) Order. This is typically done in some area of the Family Law Department; just ask at the information desk where you should go to do this. Some shelters and organizations have staff advocates who can assist you with this process, although you can do it on your own. (Chapter 3 explains how and what the general process is.)

Although this is a good and legal step to do, please remember: It’s only a piece of paper. It does afford you certain rights and protections, but only to the extent that (a) your abuser honors them, (b) the police are present to enforce them, and/or (c) the court will exercise its power to make your abuser honor them. To not have had this and need the coverage or “paper trail” later would be a big mistake, however.

- Whether with the help of a shelter advocate, that of a friend, or on your own, sit down and make a list of the most immediate things you need to focus on tending to. These things are not “busy work” or “fluff ‘n puff”; they are non-negotiable, bare minimum, must-be-done items. In reality, there shouldn’t be many – but they may seem big and daunting. Don’t be afraid. Others have done it, and so can you!

If you filed your PFA/PFS paperwork, you’ll most definitely have at least one upcoming court hearing to put on your list at which time you’ll be asking the judge to make the temporary order permanent. Some other things that may appear on your list could be: acquiring employment if you currently have none; figuring out or acquiring transportation to/from employment, appointments, hearings, etc.; acquiring housing of your own for you and your children; and getting children enrolled in school or transferred from one school to another. Be sure to put deadlines on these items. List is your own personal mini-list with in this list. Only you can do this because I have no way of knowing what you do, don’t, will, or won’t need. Focus on them, and get them done as quickly as possible. The faster you can set a foundation for yourself, the better you’ll feel personally and the more normalcy and control will enter your life.

- If needing to obtain employment, create or update your resume. Shelter advocates will often help with this. If that’s not an option for you, there are usually templates on most PCs, free community workshops, etc. Be resourceful.

- Define for yourself the employment parameters you need for your life. For instance, I'd made a commitment to only accept employment that would still allow me to drop off/pick up my son from school, be home with him when he was out of school, etc. Knowing your priorities and what, exactly, you need will help you immensely; don't overlook this step.
  - Check newspapers, careerbuilders.com, and ask every person you meet for referrals. (I got my first job after moving with the help of a person from the Chamber of Commerce – with NO references!)
  - Apply for everything you may be remotely qualified for, even if it's a bit of a stretch. Just don't lie; it'll ruin your credibility and reputation. Accept what fits and upgrade as your life settles down and you can focus on this more clearly and intently.
- If needing housing, understand that you may not get exactly what you want right off the bat. It doesn't mean it won't come – just keep upgrading.
    - Again, make a list of what, exactly, you need. "Need" being the operative word. Unless you're better off than most survivors, "wants" will come later – unless you just happen to fall into the perfect place and situation. For instance, if you have children of opposite genders, you need to have separate bedrooms for them.
    - Know your budget, but don't be afraid to stretch a little bit. As long as you're willing to sacrifice in the "want" department (i.e., eating out and such), you'll likely be able to afford more "house" for your money. Drive the area you want to live in. Check newspapers, Chamber of Commerces to see if they have landlord lists or resources to help you, check landlord organizations, and ask for referrals from every person you meet.
    - Don't forget to consider schools (if applicable) while you're pursuing housing. You must acknowledge district attendance lines and such. If you're unsure, a phone call or visit to the district administrative offices will give you all the information you ever wanted to know.
    - Once you've found housing, be sure it's secure. (Review Chapter 5)
  - If your children are changing schools, drive the area and decide where you want them to attend. Then find out the requirements, such as attendance lines, new student enrollment process, etc.
  - Empower yourself to feel more confident in your own personal safety. There are many options: self-defense classes, martial arts, conceal and carry classes/license, gated communities, etc. Pursue whatever legal means fits you best.
- Take a breath. The first and most hectic leg of your journey is complete. You've now navigated through the most chaotic and stressful of situations you're likely to encounter – not that there won't be any more, but they'll likely be various renditions of one of these that you've already done. I caution you, though, to not become too complacent or comfortable. Continue to better your life, grow in your self-esteem, connect with other survivors, acquire counseling for your children if they need it (If you lack health insurance, apply for your state's medical assistance. You may not qualify, but your children likely will. Mental services are often covered under these circumstances.), continue to document any incidents and pursue your right to live a life free from fear.

***CONGRATULATIONS!***

**You're well on your way!**

Join our Facebook group at [www.facebook.com/groups/ShouttheSecret](http://www.facebook.com/groups/ShouttheSecret)

You'll receive support, insight, answers to questions that may arise, encouragement, and have the opportunity to share accomplishments and praise items as you pass milestones in your new life.