



Building Your Case: How to Document Abuse

May 12, 2014 / 22 Comments / in Get Help Today

If you are in an abusive relationship and are in the process of taking (or deciding to take) legal action against your abusive partner, documentation of your partner's abusive behaviors can be an important component of your case.

It's worth noting that each state has different laws about what evidence and documentation can be used in court. Speaking with a legal advocate in your state might better prepare you for your unique situation (our advocates at the Hotline can help locate a legal advocate near you). According to [WomensLaw](#), in most states evidence can include (but is not limited to) the following:

- Verbal testimony from you or your witnesses
- Medical reports of injuries from the abuse
- Pictures (dated) of any injuries
- Police reports of when you or a witness called the police
- Household objects torn or broken by the abuser
- Pictures of your household in disarray after a violent episode
- Pictures of weapons used by the abuser against you
- A personal diary or calendar in which you documented the abuse as it happened

Below are a few actions you can take to create documentation, if you are able to or feel safe doing so:

Visit the doctor. More and more, doctors and gynecologists are trained to recognize signs of abuse. Your health care provider could also be a safe resource for disclosing the abuse. If you're visiting a doctor for an injury, ask them about safe ways they can make notes about the abuse — ex. Some can write “cause of an injury” without it having to go to the police.

Consider outside documentation. Do you have a trusted friend, coworker or family member who knows what's going on and would be willing to help? There are many ways they can help document the abuse — whether that's a coworker making note of times your partner calls you at the office, or a friend holding your journal at her house.

Create a stalking log. If your partner is stalking you, creating a stalking log can be very helpful to your case. The National Center for Victims of Crime's [Stalking Resource Center](#) has examples of stalking logs (in PDF and Word formats) as well as additional information on stalking.

Learn more about police reports. Always ask questions. Call your local police department's non-emergency number and find out about the protocols and procedures of filing a police report — ex. Like filing about a lost bike. Ask, “Hypothetically, if there was something that was happening that I would want to report...” This can help you prepare for filing a police report if you need to, which creates a paper trail of the abuse.

Take pictures. A digital camera or your phone camera may not always be safe. Consider getting a disposable camera. Another option is for someone else to take the pictures and keep them for you.

Let a call go to voicemail. Is your partner calling over and over? Let it go to voicemail once and save the voicemail.

Save digital evidence. Do you have a smartphone? Most have the “take a screenshot” option. Thirty missed calls from your abusive partner? Take a screenshot of that. Threatening texts? Instead of responding to them, take a screenshot of them. These screen shots get saved in your images folder, so remember to send them on to a friend and delete them. If your partner sends threatening emails, don't respond to them, but consider saving them in a folder in your inbox.

If you're not sure if making documentation of your abuse would be safe, always go with your gut. It's very important to keep in mind that *you* are the expert on your situation, and what works for one person may not be a safe idea for another person.

We are not legal advocates at the Hotline, but we are able to offer support and refer you to the local or state resources that might be helpful to you. Give us a call anytime at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233).