

Recording Instances of Abuse: A Comprehensive Worksheet

Introduction

Documenting instances of abuse is a critical step if you're seeking legal assistance, safety planning, or simply need to validate and remember your experiences. This 4-page worksheet provides a structured, safe way to record details of abusive incidents—physical, verbal, emotional, financial, or otherwise—while prioritizing your confidentiality and well-being. Keep this record in a secure, confidential location where your abuser cannot access it (e.g., with a trusted friend, in a safe deposit box, or in a password-protected digital file). Update your records regularly as new incidents occur, and use this tool in conjunction with a safety plan or support from a therapist or advocate. If you're in immediate danger, call 911 or a crisis hotline before proceeding (see resources at the end). Recording abuse can be distressing, so practice self-care and seek support afterward—your safety and healing are the priorities.

Section 1: Understanding the Importance of Documentation

Why Record Instances of Abuse?

Documenting abuse serves several purposes:

- **Legal Support:** Detailed records can provide evidence for restraining orders, custody battles, or criminal charges, supporting your case with dates, descriptions, and witnesses.
- **Validation:** Writing down incidents helps you validate your experiences, counter gaslighting, and remind yourself of the reality of the abuse.
- **Safety Planning:** Tracking patterns can identify triggers, risks, and opportunities to leave safely, informing your safety plan (see “Creating Your Safety Plan” worksheet).
- **Healing:** Reflecting on and documenting abuse, with support, can aid in processing trauma and building resilience.
- **Challenges:** Recording can be triggering or risky if your abuser discovers it. Prioritize safety—do not document if it puts you in danger. Work with a domestic violence advocate or therapist to navigate this process securely.

Tool: Use a documentation safety plan to decide when, where, and how you'll record incidents (e.g., “Write notes at a friend's house after an incident, using a secure app”). Review with a professional to ensure confidentiality and effectiveness.

Section 2: Recording Abuse Incidents

This section provides a detailed template to document abusive incidents, ensuring specificity and safety. Record events as soon after they happen as is safe, using the categories below. Customize as needed for your situation (e.g., adding financial or technological abuse).

Abuse Incident Log

Use this template to record each incident. Repeat for each event, ensuring accuracy and detail. If safe, include photographic evidence, but prioritize safety over gathering proof if it risks harm.

Date	Time	Description of Incident	Any Injuries and How Treated	Witnesses
(e.g., MM/DD/YYYY)	(e.g., HH:MM AM/PM)	(What happened? Include physical, verbal, threats, or control tactics—be specific)	(Describe injuries, medical treatment, or self-care)	(Names, roles, contact info if safe)

Examples for Completing the Log

- **Date:**03/04/2025
 - **Time:** 8:30 PM
 - **Description of Incident:** My partner screamed at me for being 10 minutes late, calling me “useless” and “irresponsible.” They grabbed my arm tightly, leaving a bruise, and threatened, “If you leave, I’ll make sure you regret it.” They also checked my phone without permission, accusing me of hiding messages.
 - **Any Injuries and How Treated:** Red marks and a bruise on my left arm from the grab. I applied ice and later saw a nurse at a shelter, who documented the injury and advised monitoring for swelling.
 - **Witnesses:** None present, but I later told my friend Maria (555-123-4567), who can corroborate my emotional state.
- **Date:**03/05/2025
 - **Time:** 3:15 PM
 - **Description of Incident:** My partner criticized my appearance, saying, “You look disgusting today,” and refused to let me leave the house, locking the door and saying, “You’re not going anywhere until I say so.” They withheld my wallet, a form of financial control, to prevent me from buying groceries.
 - **Any Injuries and How Treated:** No physical injuries, but emotional distress—called a hotline afterward, and they recommended journaling and therapy.
 - **Witnesses:** Neighbor Lisa (555-987-6543) heard yelling and offered support, though she didn’t see the incident directly.

Tool: Use a secure app (e.g., Day One) or password-protected document (e.g., Google Docs with two-factor authentication) to store logs digitally. Avoid shared devices or paper copies your abuser might find. Print or save backups in a safe location (e.g., with a friend, shelter, or safe deposit box).

Fill out the log for at least 2-3 recent incidents, being as specific as possible (e.g., exact words, actions, context). Reflect on how documenting these events feels and whether you need additional support to continue safely.

Section 3: Customizing Your Documentation

Abuse can take many forms—physical, verbal, emotional, financial, technological, or sexual. Tailor your log to fit the types of abuse most common in your relationship, ensuring it captures all relevant details.

Customization Prompts

- **What types of abuse do you experience most often?**
 - **Example:** “I experience emotional abuse (e.g., insults, gaslighting) and financial control (e.g., withholding money) more than physical abuse.”
- **Are there additional categories you need to add to the log (e.g., financial control, technological tracking)?**
 - **Example:** “I’ll add a column for ‘Financial Impact’ (e.g., money withheld, bills unpaid) and ‘Technological Abuse’ (e.g., phone monitoring, spyware).”
- **How can you make your documentation safer or more effective for your situation?**
 - **Example:** “I’ll store logs on a prepaid phone I keep at a friend’s house and use a code word (e.g., ‘sunflower’) in notes to disguise sensitive details if discovered.”

Tool: Use a customization checklist to add or adjust categories (e.g., “Emotional Abuse: Insults, Gaslighting, Guilt-Trips”; “Financial Abuse: Withholding Funds, Controlling Spending”). Test your updated log with one incident to ensure it’s comprehensive and safe.

Write down your customized categories, including at least one example for each. Reflect on how these adjustments improve your documentation’s accuracy and safety. Update as your situation evolves.

Section 4: Photographic Evidence and Safety Considerations

If safe, photographic evidence can strengthen your documentation, but prioritize safety over gathering proof if it risks harm. This section guides you on using photos responsibly and managing triggers.

Photographic Evidence

- **Prompt:** If safe, describe how you’ll take and store photos of injuries, property damage, or other evidence of abuse. Include safety measures to protect yourself.

- **Examples:**
 - **Photo Type:** Bruises on my arm from being grabbed.
 - **How Taken:** Use my spare phone (prepaid, stored at Maria’s house) in a private bathroom, ensuring no identifiable background.
 - **Storage:** Save encrypted on the phone, backed up on a password-protected USB with my advocate, and delete from the device if discovered.
 - **Photo Type:** Damage to my car from an angry outburst.
 - **How Taken:** Take a discreet photo at night in a public parking lot, using a basic camera app with no GPS data.
 - **Storage:** Email to myself (encrypted) or store on a shelter’s secure server, accessible only by my advocate.
- **Tool:** Use a photo safety guide (e.g., from a domestic violence hotline) to ensure privacy (e.g., disable location services, blur faces). Practice taking and storing photos in a safe, controlled setting to build confidence.

Write down your plan for photographic evidence, including safety measures and storage locations. Reflect on any risks (e.g., discovery by abuser) and how you’ll mitigate them (e.g., “Only take photos when they’re away, using a friend’s device”).

Trigger Warning and Self-Care

- **Note:** Revisiting abusive incidents can be distressing and trigger trauma responses (e.g., anxiety, flashbacks). Practice self-care afterward to manage these feelings and protect your well-being.
- **Self-Care Strategies:**
 - Use grounding techniques from the “Rebuilding Strength” worksheet (e.g., 5 Senses Exercise, deep breathing) after documenting.
 - Engage in a joy-and-comfort activity (e.g., listening to music, cuddling a pet) to restore calm.
 - Reach out to a support (e.g., hotline, friend) for validation and emotional relief.
 - Journal about your feelings, focusing on your strength and progress, not just the abuse.

Tool: Create a self-care toolkit with grounding scripts, affirmations, and contact numbers, keeping it accessible after documenting. Set a goal to practice one self-care activity immediately after each log entry.

Write down 2-3 self-care strategies you’ll use after recording incidents, including how they’ll help. Reflect on how this practice supports your healing and safety.

Section 5: Storing Records Safely and Seeking Support

Ensuring your records are secure and seeking support are critical for safety and recovery. This section guides you on confidentiality and resources.

Storing Records Safely

- **Prompt:** Describe where and how you'll store your abuse logs and evidence, ensuring your abuser cannot access them. Include backup plans if needed.
 - **Examples:**
 - **Storage:** Password-protected Google Doc on my spare phone, backed up on a USB with my advocate at the shelter.
 - **Backup Plan:** Print a copy and store it in a safe deposit box, accessible only with Maria's (555-123-4567) help if the phone is lost.
 - **Safety Measures:** Use a code word (e.g., "sunflower") in notes, encrypt files, and avoid shared devices or locations.
 - **Tool:** Use a storage security checklist (e.g., "Is it encrypted? Is it off-site? Can the abuser access it?") to verify safety. Consult a domestic violence advocate for additional tips.

Write down your storage plan, including at least one backup location and safety measures. Reflect on any risks (e.g., digital hacking, physical discovery) and how you'll mitigate them.

Seeking Support

- **Prompt:** List 3-5 supports you can turn to for help with documentation, safety planning, or emotional relief. Include their roles, contact information, and why they're helpful.
 - **Examples:**
 - **Support:** National Domestic Violence Hotline
 - **Role:** Crisis support and safety planning
 - **Contact:** 1-800-799-7233, <https://www.thehotline.org/>
 - **Why Helpful:** Offers 24/7 confidential guidance on documenting abuse and planning exits.
 - **Support:** Maria Lopez (Friend)
 - **Role:** Emotional support and safe storage partner
 - **Contact:** 555-123-4567
 - **Why Helpful:** She's nonjudgmental, keeps my records secure, and listens when I'm upset.
 - **Support:** Local Domestic Violence Shelter
 - **Role:** Advocacy and legal assistance
 - **Contact:** 1-800-555-1234, Anytown Shelter
 - **Why Helpful:** Provides resources for documenting abuse, safety planning, and legal support.

Tool: Use a support network tracker (e.g., spreadsheet or app like Circle of Friends) to log interactions, noting frequency and how they help. Set a goal to contact one support monthly or after each log entry.

Write down your supports, including at least one reason each is valuable. Reflect on how often you use these supports and whether you need to expand or adjust them.

Additional Considerations

- **Customization:** Adjust the log categories to fit the types of abuse most common in your relationship (e.g., add “Financial Control: Withholding Money, Monitoring Spending”; “Technological Abuse: Tracking Devices, Hacking Accounts”). Tailor to your needs for accuracy and safety.
- **Trigger Warning:** Revisiting these events can be distressing and trigger trauma responses (e.g., anxiety, flashbacks). Practice self-care (e.g., grounding, joy activities) and seek support afterward to manage these feelings.
- **Confidentiality:** Protect your records at all costs—avoid storing on shared devices, use encryption, and keep physical copies in a secure, off-site location. Work with an advocate to ensure safety.
- **Legal Use:** If seeking legal assistance, consult a domestic violence advocate or lawyer to ensure your documentation meets legal standards (e.g., timestamps, witness statements, photos). Do not confront your abuser with this evidence—it could escalate risk.

Further Resources

- **National Hotlines:**
 - U.S.: National Domestic Violence Hotline – 1-800-799-7233, <https://www.thehotline.org/>
 - Canada: Canadian Women’s Foundation – 1-866-863-0511, <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/stop-family-violence/services.html>
- **Local Support:** Contact your local domestic violence shelter or crisis center (e.g., ShelterSafe.ca for Canada) for region-specific help, including documentation guidance.
- **Books:**
 - *The Gift of Fear* by Gavin de Becker – Strategies for documenting and responding to abuse safely.
 - *Safety Planning with Battered Women* by Jill Davies – Practical tips for documenting abuse and planning exits.
- **Online:**
 - National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) – <https://ncadv.org/> – U.S.-based resources adaptable for Canada, including documentation tips.
 - Ending Violence Association of Canada – <https://endingviolencecanada.org/> – Canadian resources for documenting and addressing abuse.
- **Apps:**
 - *Bright Sky* – A safety app for domestic abuse survivors, including tools for documenting incidents and storing evidence securely.
 - *SafeJourney* – Tools for mapping safe routes, storing emergency contacts, and documenting abuse discreetly.

Final Thoughts

Recording instances of abuse is a courageous and empowering step toward safety, validation, and healing. This worksheet provides a structured, safe way to document your experiences, ensuring accuracy, confidentiality, and support. You deserve to feel safe, believed, and

respected—start by completing one log entry, seeking support, or updating your safety plan. If you're in danger, prioritize safety by reaching out to a hotline or professional immediately—your well-being is the priority. Keep practicing self-care and trust in your strength to navigate this journey.