

I need help: *coping with communal living*

If you have made the difficult decision to enter a shelter as part of your plan to stay safe, you may be trying to adjust to and cope with communal living. While it can be comforting to know that you are not alone, shelter life is not easy. All of the other shelter residents—grown-ups and children—are struggling to put their lives together too. Remember that staying in a shelter may be necessary right now, but it is temporary, and soon you will have a place of your own.

WHAT TO EXPECT IF YOU GO TO A SHELTER

Every shelter and safe housing program is different, but generally you can expect the following:

- *Safe, private location.* Shelters and safe housing programs make everyone's safety their first priority. You may be asked to keep the location a secret.
- *No fees.* Shelters and safe housing programs are free.
- *Transportation.* Most programs will provide transportation to a shelter or safe housing program. Many also offer residents bus tickets and/or transportation to appointments.
- *Children's safety.* As advocates, we understand that children are also impacted by domestic violence. Advocates will be able to work with both you and your children by offering support, information and advocacy.

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- *Self-provided childcare.* Your children will be under your watch and care at all times. Childcare may be provided during groups and other activities.
- *Help finding a safe place for your pet.* Shelters will work with you to find a place for your pets to be cared for elsewhere. Most shelters do not allow pets, but some do.
- *Confidentiality.* Your information will be private and will not be shared with other agencies unless you give your written permission. You will be asked to honor the privacy of other program participants by not discussing their names or situations with anyone else.
- *Food, clothing, and toiletries.* Shelters and safe housing programs will provide basic necessities for you and your family at no cost.
- *Sleeping arrangements.* You may share common areas and might be asked to share a bedroom. In most shelters you will share the kitchen, common living areas, and bathrooms with other residents.
- *Laundry facilities.* Shelters and safe housing programs usually have laundry facilities and provide guests with linens (sheets, towels and blankets).
- *Visitors.* Visitors are generally not allowed in the shelter or safe housing program, but you can meet with your friends and family elsewhere.