



Your Guide to Protection Orders

1. Keep in mind that a Protection Order is just one piece of a safety plan. Think about other ways that you can keep yourself safe before you file for a Protection Order, after the respondent is served, and after the Protection Order is granted. Your Advocate at DVSAS can help safety plan with you and brainstorm ways of staying safe and accessing support.
2. Keep in mind that the legal definition of domestic violence (found on the Protection Order statement form) and DVSAS' definition of domestic violence differ. At DVSAS we know that domestic violence includes emotional and verbal abuse, but it is important for the information provided in your Protection Order statement to fit as closely as possible to the legal definition of domestic violence.
3. Protection Orders can be used to give a parent temporary care and custody of minors when there is a safety concern, **but they should not be used as a replacement for a Parenting Plan**. If custody or visitation issues are involved, you should also pursue a Parenting Plan. A DVSAS Advocate can make a referral to the LAW Advocates Parenting Plan clinic for assistance.
4. Common children should be included on the Protection Order, even when there is no safety concern. Use the **Other** field to propose the temporary visitation plan for common children.
5. **If the Temporary Protection Order is not approved, you will need to make arrangements to have the order served yourself.** Any adult 18 years or older who is not a party in the case can serve the respondent, or you can hire a process server. For a referral for a process server, contact your DVSAS Advocate.
6. Contact your DVSAS Advocate if you would like help reviewing your statement before filing. Advocates can also attend court with you for support.

Writing Protection Order Statements

1. **If possible, type the statement on a computer.** This will make editing easier. Computers are available for client use at DVSAS. You can access the forms online at <http://www.courts.wa.gov/forms/>. **Use Arial 12pt font, 1.5 spacing with no underlines.** You can **bold** any parts of the statement that are particularly concerning, like specific incidents of violence.
2. **Always use specific dates and quotes whenever possible.** For example, *“On August 14th John told me in a voicemail message, ‘If I can’t have you, no one will,’ and ‘you’re going to be sorry.’ He was screaming, calling me degrading names and said he’d ‘make [my current boyfriend] pay.’”*

If you can’t remember an exact date or time an incident of abuse occurred, give your best estimate. For example, *“In late summer of 2014,”* or, *“Sometime during the second week of August...”*

3. **Note the frequency of incidents.** Instead of saying, *“He is always calling me and always yelling,”* say, *“He calls me at least 20 times a day and I have received over 150 text messages from him since April 9th. When we were together he yelled at me daily, calling me degrading names (“whore”, “stupid bitch”) in a threatening and aggressive tone.”*
4. **Describe exactly what the acts of violence were.** Instead of saying, *“He is abusive,”* say, *“At least once a week throughout our five year relationship, John becomes enraged and his yelling escalates into physical violence. On May 22nd he hit me across my face and caused my nose to bleed. He then grabbed me by my shoulders and shoved me into a wall, bruising my arms in the process. He was yelling at me, calling me a “cheating whore” and other names. I was terrified that he was going to kill me.”* When there are too many incidents of abuse to describe in the petition, it is okay to write something like *“This is just one of a number of incidents”* after a detailed

explanation. It may also be helpful for to write *“This happens at least once a week,”* or something similar to show the judge how frequently abuse occurs.

5. **It is important to be as specific and clear as possible** in order to show the Commissioner what the situation is and why protection is necessary. Show that there has been a pattern of abuse and that the survivor is experiencing fear.
6. **Try to avoid unnecessary back story that does not contribute to the overall understanding of the pattern of abuse.** It is not as important to describe why the abuse occurred (what started the argument, for example, or other unpleasant behaviors from the abuser), than the actual acts of violence.
7. Schedule an appointment to meet with DVSAS Advocate if you would like help reviewing your statement before filing. Advocates can also attend court with you for support.