

### **Empower Yourself with a “Distress Code” System**

A distress code is a spoken word or phrase that is not commonly used but can be worked into any phone or in-person conversation for cases where you feel that you are in danger. Use this code if the person you are with can overhear the conversation, but you don’t want to alarm them.

Here are the steps to setting up and using a distress code:

1. Choose a distress code word or phrase and share it with your colleagues, friends and family—anyone you might call in an emergency situation. Your distress code should be something simple, something that makes sense to you and is easy to remember, and something that will not alert your “distressor.” Examples of distress codes: “Hi, this is Jane. I’m at [address]. Could you look up something in the RED FILE for me?” It may make the most sense for everyone in your office to share a single distress code; this will be easiest to remember for everyone.
2. Share and practice your distress code with your office, your colleagues and your family and friends. You may have a designated person you plan to call, but circumstances may change that; it’s best to have several people prepped and ready to receive a call with your distress code.
3. The colleague who receives your call with the distress code will then be alerted that you may be in danger. At your pre-arranged signal, they will know to call 9-1-1 on your behalf, or, after asking a few careful questions, can arrange to meet you so that you are not alone, or call you back and ask you to return to the office to respond to an “emergency situation.”

When should you use the distress code? In situations where you are uneasy, but do not feel you are in danger. If you are in immediate danger, leave the area. Also, don’t hesitate to call 9-1-1 in an emergency.

(Source: Washington Real Estate Safety Council)

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