



*The Little Book of  
Tips and Tricks*



A Guide for South Asian Immigrant Women

( R E A )



CREA is a not-for-profit organization founded in the year 2000 that aims at empowering women to articulate, demand and access their human rights by enhancing women's leadership and building networks at the local, regional, and international levels through training, advocacy, and research. CREA works on issues of sexuality, sexual and reproductive rights, violence against women, human rights and social justice. CREA works on achieving its vision and mission through its offices in New Delhi, India and New York City, U.S.A. *The Little Book of Tips and Tricks* is part of CREA's Know Your Rights and Resources Campaign for South Asian immigrant women in the United States of America. *Know Your Rights: Domestic Violence in the United States*, an information booklet in English, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali and Gujarati, is also available as part of this campaign.

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## Contents

## Page

<i>The Courage to Fly</i>	3
<i>America ~ Land of Milk and Honey?</i>	4
<i>Getting Safely Settled</i>	9
<i>Immigration Issues</i>	12
<i>Staying Healthy</i>	15
<i>Learning and Growing</i>	17
<i>Your Children</i>	18
<i>Your Parents, In~Laws and Other Older Relatives</i>	22
<i>Finding Work</i>	23
<i>Money</i>	25
<i>Failing Marriages</i>	26
<i>Domestic Violence</i>	26
<i>General Safety</i>	32
<i>A Note on Using the Internet</i>	32
<i>Best of Luck</i>	33
<i>A List of Useful Resources</i>	34
<i>The Know Your Rights and Resources Campaign</i>	35
<i>Who Helped Make this Manual</i>	36

*Somewhere else.  
Somewhere else.  
How these little words ring.*

*Wisława Szymborska, The Railroad Station*

## *The Courage to Fly*

Shabaash! You have arrived, or are about to arrive, in a whole new world and a whole new life. Whether immigrating to the U.S.A. was your own idea or someone else's, whether you're here to be with your husband or to pursue an education or a career, we applaud your bravery. It takes a lot of strength and courage to leave your familiar people, roads, food, friends and surroundings, and start somewhere new.

No matter how brave you are, it is natural to feel intimidated and sometimes overwhelmed at the prospect of all the things you need to understand so that you can be comfortable and satisfied in a new country. The unknown is always a little frightening. Just remember, you're not alone.

# America ~ Land of Milk and Honey?



The U.S.A. isn't the land of milk and honey, as you probably already know. There are many things at home that you won't find here. However, there are also many, many things here that will amaze you when you find them. You can get answers to your questions, get help, find advice, free or very cheap in many ways. Here are just a few tips that should make your life easier. You can find more services listed in other sections of this booklet.

**911 Emergency Help:** Wherever you are, you can dial 911 for help in an emergency. This is a free call from your home, cell phone or a pay phone, and you will immediately be connected to a police officer. Anybody can use 911, regardless of your immigrant status or anything else. Even if you don't speak English, the person who answers will know where you are and try to send help to you.

**800 Free Phone Calls:** An 800 number is a number that you call without paying for the call. There are 800 numbers for lots of things, ranging from someone to talk to if you feel desperate and sad, to someone to ask for information about car insurance, and many other things. You can find these numbers at your local library, by calling the "800 Directory" on your phone, at **1-800-555-1212** or by asking around. Free services often advertise in newspapers, on billboards, and on advertisements in buses and trains. This brings us to one of the great treasures of the U.S.A., the library system.



**Public Libraries:** Most towns and cities have public libraries. You can walk in and use them, without having to join. Your library will have books, magazines and newspapers available for you to read. It will have computers where you can go on the Internet free, and look up any information you want. If you are not familiar with computers, someone in the library can not only help you find out what you need to know, he or she can also look for free classes for you to learn about computers. The library is a tremendous resource for finding legal help, classes you can take, things to do with your children, and any other questions you might have. Libraries are also good places to meet people, and volunteer.

**Laundromats:** If you don't have a washing machine where you live, you can usually find a local place where you can take your family's clothes to wash. Laundromats are convenient, and they are also good places to read and put up notices, and meet other people who live in your area.

**Phone Cards:** You can buy phone cards at South Asian grocery stores, chemists, and many other places. These allow you to phone anyone anywhere, including your family back home, from your home phone or a pay phone without a record of the call appearing on your phone bill. Phone cards are very convenient and the shopkeeper usually knows which kind is the best for you.

**Public Benefits:** You may qualify for welfare, food stamps or health benefits, depending on your economic situation and immigration status. Your librarian can tell you where to get information on these resources. You can also call your local city or state government. All these numbers are available in the blue pages of a telephone book.



**Community Resources:** Many communities have Food Banks where you can get free meals, health clinics for low-cost health care, and bill-paying organizations that can help you pay your bills if you are having financial difficulties. Local papers and searching on the Internet are good ways to find these.

**211** One of the best numbers to call for local resources is your local United Way, which you can call by dialing 211. This service is not available in all states, and you might need to look up your local United Way office, or go to [www.unitedway.org](http://www.unitedway.org). The people there can tell you about local services, from shelters to benefits to health care to schools to just about anything else you could want.

Keep in mind that often there are benefits for which your children qualify, even if you don't.

**Interpreters:** If you don't speak English, you might find free interpreters in many situations: in hospital and in court, for example. Be sure to ask for an interpreter if you need one. If possible, take someone who speaks fluent English with you for your first visit to any institution.



**Reaching out:** One of the things that 800 numbers, and free papers that you might find in the spice store or the library, provide, are counseling services of all types. You can talk on the phone, or in person, to someone about anything that is troubling you, such as concerns about your children or your marriage, sadness and frustration you might feel about your new life, or just advice on jobs or education.

In India, Pakistan and other countries of the subcontinent, "counseling" has a certain stigma. Many of us grew up believing that it is unthinkable to tell a stranger your problems, and only mentally ill or desperate people would go to a counselor. This is not true at all. In this country, all kinds of people go to counselors for many different reasons. Counselors are trained professionals whose job it is to support you and help you work things out.

Back home, you might have had all kinds of support and people to talk to: family, friends, neighbors. Here, especially at first, most of us don't have that supportive network. Think of a counselor as someone who takes the place of that network when you need it, someone who can help you make informed decisions about your life and your family.

It is understandable, and very common, for women to feel sad and depressed, lonely and sometimes even suicidal, when they come here and things are not easy. Talking to someone is often very helpful in dealing with these feelings. A hotline is a telephone number you can call, which is free and confidential, and talk to someone who is trained to listen, offer advice and counsel, and help you with references. Some of the useful national hotlines are:

**The Girls and Boys Town National Hotline, for suicide, depression, parenting issues and general referral: 1-800-448-3000**

**National Suicide Hotline: 1-800-784-2433**

**National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233**

**National Council for Child and Family Abuse: 1-800-422-4453**



If you don't speak English and you are in a crisis, hotlines may have access to interpreters, so it is a good idea to try. You should always familiarize yourself with local South Asian organizations as well.

In most cases, anything you say to a counselor is completely confidential. Not only will he or she not tell anyone, but the law requires him or her to keep the information private. This applies to doctors and lawyers as well, although sometimes South Asian doctors don't follow this rule.

However, there are some instances when the law says that counselors, doctors and teachers do need to tell someone about their conversations. This is so when they hear about a child in danger or an extremely violent situation. You can always clarify this with someone before you tell them anything. It is simple; all you have to do is ask, "Can I be sure that what I tell you will stay between us?"

# Getting Safely Settled

Once you have arrived in your new home, try to take some time to take care of some basics. The most important of these are paperwork, insurance, and getting connected in your new community.




**Paperwork:** Write down (and memorize) your address, phone number, your husband's work address and phone number, and other daily numbers. Start an "important phone numbers" list that includes the local emergency medical numbers, any numbers related to your children, numbers for *desi* groups.

Keep copies of:

- Your passport, and the passports of everyone in your family. Remember it is a crime for anyone to hold your passport against your will.
- All visa documents: green cards, work authorizations, any other immigration-related papers.
- Your and your husband's Social Security numbers, if you have them. If you don't have one, you can find out whether you can have one, and how to get it by visiting [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov) or calling 1-800-772-1213.



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- Your driving license, if you have one. If you would like to learn to drive, you can find classes in the library, the phone book, or by asking in your neighborhood. If you don't have a license, you can go to the Department of Motor Vehicles and get an ID, regardless of your immigration status. This is important.
  - Birth and death certificates.
  - All your financial and insurance documents.
  - Your marriage documents, and other proof such as photographs and videos.

It's important to have more than one copy, in more than one place, of any papers that are necessary for you or your family.

If possible, get your marriage registered in the U.S.A. as soon as you can. This makes all future paperwork a lot easier.

Pay attention to any papers you get. If you can't read something that has been handed or mailed to you, find someone you trust to read it. Never ignore anything. Divorces, subpoenas, eviction notices, and many other important documents come to you in the mail and you are responsible for acting on their contents.

**Insurance:** This is the land of insurance, and it is helpful to find out all about the different insurance you can choose to get. There is life insurance, disability insurance, home insurance, car insurance, and, most important of all, health insurance. You and/or your husband might get some of these through your jobs. To find out more about insurance, you can call brokers listed in the Yellow Pages

(phone directory), look up information online, ask at the library, look in the South Asian free papers in your local stores, or just ask people you meet. Don't sign anything until you're sure that you're ready to make a commitment, and you have checked it out with someone you trust.



**Getting Connected:** We're all social beings, and *desi* women are especially social. We need people so we can talk, feel safe, feel part of a community, reach out and have fun. In a new place, it is especially important to meet people.

Get acquainted with your new neighborhood, and find out where people meet. Are there playgrounds and parks? Is there a library or a tea place close by? What about the local South Asian stores?

Even if you cannot legally work yet, you can always look for a way to volunteer, at the library, or a soup kitchen, or many other places. This is a great way to meet people, and feel useful. You can also find out about free classes that you could take, and learn new things at the same time as you expand your social network. Call anyone whose number someone back home gave you, and you might find a friend. Look in the paper for events you can attend. Get familiar with local shops. You might find someone who needs a friend even more than you do.

# Immigration Issues



Immigration, the INS, Homeland Security, green cards, permits, U Visa, T Visa... it can all be a confusing maze when you first start the process of moving from one home to the other. Fortunately, there are ways to keep up with the latest laws. There are agencies set up to answer your questions. Here are a few very basic facts, and then a short list of resources to answer any questions you may have.

**Types of Visas:** If you or your spouse has a passport from the U.S.A., then the passport-holder is a citizen of this country and has all the rights and privileges of citizens, such as voting, traveling freely, working and eligibility for benefits. If you or your spouse has a green card, the green card holder is a legal resident, who cannot vote but has many other rights and privileges, including the ability to sponsor someone else for a visa.

## Here are the most common visas in the US:

**H-1B** is a temporary worker visa. This visa is given for three years, and then can be extended for another three.

**H-4** is a dependent of an H visa holder. Many women come in on these visas, sponsored by their husbands who have H-1Bs.

**H-2B** is a skilled or unskilled worker visa, which is given for a specific amount of time for a specific job.


**J-1** is an exchange visitor or a student visa, given to people who have come specifically to study, with the approval of the United States Information Agency.

**J-2** is a dependent of a J-1 visa holder, which means the spouse or unmarried child younger than 21 of a J-1 student.

There are several other types of visas that apply specifically to victims of crime, refugees and other groups. You can read more about these later in this booklet, or look them up on the website listed below.

You can get a complete updated list of the types of visas at <http://uscis.gov> or by talking to a lawyer. The official US immigration customer service number is **1-800-375-5283**.





Depending on the type of visa you and/or your spouse have, you have different rights regarding work, residency, etc. The best way to answer specific questions is to talk to someone at your local Legal Aid Society or call 211 and ask for referrals to legal help.

Please keep in mind that the department of Homeland Security, which deals with immigration issues, is an independent department within the government. It is not connected with hospitals, lawyers, schools, or other institutions you might encounter. If you go to the police or a counselor for help, they should not report your immigration status to anyone.

It is crucial to keep copies of all your papers, and records of all your dealings with Immigration authorities. Write down times, dates and the names of people you speak with. Save copies of anything you send out and anything you get.

You, your husband, and your children could very well all have different visa situations. Do familiarize yourself with as much information as you can before consulting a lawyer, so you can spend your time with the lawyer as productively as possible.

If you have a non-US passport, make sure you keep it current. When it is six months from the expiry date, you can get it renewed at your country's consulate. You can do this in person or through the mail, depending on where you are.

Talking to an immigration attorney is your best bet if you have any questions.

# Staying Healthy

Your health, and your family's health, are your greatest assets. Make sure you take care of these. The most important thing you should know is that no matter how little money you have, what your legal status is, who you are and where you live, you can always find health care in an emergency.

**911** In any life-threatening situation, dial 911 and ask for help. Someone should be with you soon.

There is no municipal health care system in this country, and it can be confusing trying to work out your options. One good way to find a doctor is to ask people you know for suggestions, try out their recommendations, and then change if you're not happy with them. To see a specialist, often you will have to get a referral from a general doctor.

You can look under Physicians in the Yellow Pages to find doctors. If you are comfortable on the Internet, it is always a good idea to look up your doctor and make sure that he or she has a good reputation. You can also find referrals at local hospitals or health care systems, or through the United Way at 211.

You can go to a local hospital in an emergency and you will be treated, whether or not you have insurance, whether or not you can pay, and whether or not you are a legal immigrant. This is the law. There are also neighborhood health clinics that charge very little for visits.

Find out about insurance if you don't already have it through your husband's job, your job, or as part of a family. Some cities and states have very low cost insurance for pregnant women and children. You can ask at the library, do a Web search, ask your neighbors or call your local government office. Government numbers are usually in the blue pages of the telephone directory.

You are entitled to health care regardless of your immigration status, and you are also entitled to interpreters in most hospitals.



It's important for the whole family to have regular checkups. Women need to take care of their reproductive health by visiting a gynecologist once a year. You might never have done this before, and be nervous about it, but it's important and it can save your life. If you're more comfortable with a woman doctor, it's easy to find one, and you can always take someone along for support. The gynecologist can answer questions about infections, birth control, and any other things you might want to know, and she will also examine you and perform any necessary tests. If you are pregnant, she can monitor your progress and help you prepare for the birth. If you have any infections, she can treat these and advise you.

Your reproductive rights are protected by law in this country. Nobody can force you to either have or not have an abortion. It is against the law for anyone, including your husband, to force you to have sex. If you have a good doctor or gynecologist, you can talk to him or her freely about these things.

**211** If you or someone you know has problems with alcohol or drug abuse, you can call 211 to find out about local resources, support group meetings, rehabilitation programs, or just someone to talk to about the issue.

Your doctor can also help with this. Alcohol and drug abuse is common, and usually you need to take some active steps to deal with it.

City agencies can give you other information too, including everything you need to know about immunizations, and anything you want to know about public programs such as WIC (Women, Infants and Children), a program that helps provide nutrition to pregnant and nursing women, and young children.

## *Learning and Growing*

Even if you are not here on a student visa, you can find ways to take classes and learn new languages, skills and occupations.



The best way to find out about classes in your area, whether they are for learning English, driving, art, music, or anything else, is to look in local newspapers and ask at the library. Schools and colleges often offer adult education classes that you might want to take. Some are free and some cost money. Some offer reduced fees or financial aid. Hospitals have health-related classes.

If you want to improve your computer literacy, chances are you can find a class for that. In some cases, your husband's job, or yours, might provide tuition assistance.

If you want to join a full time course of study, or learn how to transfer your degree from home to this country, you can look in the local South Asian papers or magazines for numbers of people who can help you, whether it's a high school diploma or a medical degree.

There are many classes you can take regardless of your immigrant status. Going out and learning something, whether it is for the practical purpose of earning money or just for the joy of finding out things, is rewarding and fun, and a wonderful way to meet other people and become more confident.

## *Your Children*



Adjusting to a new country is challenging, and it can seem even more so if you have children who also need to adjust to a new home, new school, etc. The best thing to do if you have children is to make sure you reach out to them so that neither you nor they feel alone.

If you are pregnant, there are many ways to get the care and support you need. The Health section of this booklet talks about pre-natal care. Friends and neighbors can be great sources of support, but you need to be under the care of a professional to make sure you and the baby are both healthy and well-nourished. Pregnancy is a perfect time to get out, get exercise, and make sure you eat well. You're doing it for two people, so you can feel especially good about it. After your baby is born, make sure you have a good pediatrician so that you can continue with regular checkups and have someone to answer your questions. Keep track of your children's immunizations.

If your children aren't covered by your or your husband's health insurance, there might be inexpensive government schemes that cover them. Look in the Health section for suggestions.




There are many public services for children - free classes, food programs, and of course public schools, which are free in this country. If you want to make sure they stay connected with your home culture, you can often find classes through your local South Asian cultural or religious organization.

Make sure you find out school age requirements. The local Board of Education will have a number in the directory, and most probably also a website you can visit to answer your questions.

Raising children is always complicated, and there are special issues that come up when you have children in a foreign culture. Sometimes we really yearn for our children to be like everybody else, and sometimes we long for them to be the way they would have been if we had never left home. This is a lot of pressure on our kids, and also on us. It is understandable to want to give your children the rich heritage that is their birthright, but it is also unreasonable to bring them to a new place and expect them not to adapt and change. Again, reaching out to other parents and even some experts (counselors at school, parent hotlines like the ones mentioned earlier and on the next page) can be very useful.

If your children have special needs, such as those related to physical or mental disabilities, there are many resources available for you. Some places to start looking for help include your local United Way and the Internet for public and private programs. The parenting hotlines also have extensive listings of organizations dealing with specific disabilities. If you call them, they can tell you exactly whom to call or where to go.



Keeping your children safe is an intimidating prospect in a place where you might not be sure of a lot of things yourself. If you have any doubts or concerns, talk to a school counselor, and if you don't find this helpful, talk to other South Asians or any other parents.

Mothers everywhere have concerns that range from incest to road safety. These things are the same in this country, but the ways to deal with them might be different. Information is your best friend – if you know things, you can teach them to your children: what is an inappropriate way for someone to touch them, which way they need to look before they cross the street.

Here are some useful numbers:

**The Girls and Boys Town National Hotline: 1-800-448-3000**

**The National Council on Child and Family Abuse: 1-800-422-4453**

**The Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network (RAINN): 1-800-656-4673**

Back home, and also here, some people think it is acceptable to hit your children to discipline them. Hitting and spanking is against the law in this country, and you can actually get into serious legal trouble for doing it. Keep this in mind, and, if you have questions or concerns about how you can discipline your children in other ways, parents' hotlines and counselors are often very useful for advice as well as just to air your frustrations and concerns.

Discipline is just one of the things that might concern you. You can also find out about nutrition, leaving children alone at home, schools, after-school programs, and other subjects.

Having a new baby can be overwhelming, and often women get increasingly isolated and depressed. If you find yourself sad or angry too often, do reach out for help, to a hotline, to a friend, to a clinic.

Children can also be social connectors: take your baby or young child to parks and playgrounds where you can meet other parents.

If you are in a failing marriage and working out child custody, remember to always keep originals or copies of all your child's papers (birth certificate, passport, school records, medical papers, etc.) with you. If you ever leave with the child, make sure that you are not open to charges of kidnapping. You can get more information on this in the "Failing Marriages" and "Domestic Violence" sections of this booklet. For information and advice on child abuse and the government's child protective services, you can call the hotlines mentioned earlier.







## *Your Parents, In~Laws and Other Older Relatives*

Often, parents come over from our home countries and stay on, to be with us, to help with the house and the children, or for some other reason. This can be very good for the whole family, but sometimes, as they get older and dependent, it can also be hard to look after them.

Depending on your parents' status, they may qualify for Medicaid or Medicare benefits. Even if they do not have legal status, there are places for them to get health care. Neighborhood health clinics and city or state programs exist in many places. Your parents may also qualify for senior discounts on purchases, or subsidized housing.

If your home is crowded and you are frustrated, you might be tempted to behave abusively toward either the old or young people around you. Your frustration is understandable and common, but verbal or physical abuse is both wrong and illegal. Again, supportive friends, looking for ways to defuse the tensions, and finding outside support through organizations or hotlines can be very helpful.

**The Eldercare Locator Number at 1-800-677-1116 is the number to call to report abuse, ask questions or look for referrals and information.**

# Finding Work




Your ability to find work depends on your visa status. For example, citizens and green card holders can work anywhere, H1 visas can work in designated jobs, H4s cannot legally work full time. Some visas allow you to get a work authorization. You can check any of the immigration information sources to find out your work status.

If you have a green card or a passport from the U.S.A., then you must get a Social Security number in order to be able to work. It is a good idea to have this number anyway. Contact your local Social Security office to start the process.

**Working Without a Permit:** Even if you cannot officially get a job, there are some employment options open to you. For one thing, you are allowed to make a certain amount of money without having to declare it. There are also other kinds of work, such as child care, sewing or cooking from home, and volunteering jobs with stipends, that you might be able to do. Check in your local community for opportunities. This might be a good time to explore your entrepreneurial side.

**Trafficking:** It is against the law for anyone to force you to work if you don't want to, threaten you for money, force you into sex work, or take away your identification papers. If any of these things are happening to you, you might be a victim of trafficking.



You can call for help, and, regardless of your status, there are ways for you to stay in the U.S.A. if you want to, while your case is investigated. These include the T visa for some trafficking victims, a U visa for some crime victims, an S visa for some people who help in investigations, and an asylum visa for certain people who face persecution in their home country.

For questions or help about trafficking, contact a local agency, a lawyer, or call **1-888-428-7581** to talk to someone at the US Department of Justice. You do not have to give your name when you call.

**Job Safety and Workers' Rights:** Wherever you work, whatever your position, you are entitled to certain basic safety measures. If you feel you are vulnerable at work, to harassment, pollution, physical danger or anything else, talk to someone you trust. For work safety issues, you can look in the blue pages of your phone book for the appropriate government agency.

Documented and undocumented workers all have legal protection to ensure that they retain their rights to safety, fair wages and dignity.

**Looking for Work:** Just as it is back home, networking and talking to people is the best way to find out about work. Tell everyone you know that you are looking for work. Look in the classified sections of all the papers and magazines you can find. The Internet has vast listings of jobs. Libraries, supermarkets, community centers - all these places have bulletin boards. If there is somewhere you would like to work, you can just walk in and ask to speak to the person in charge. If you have a professional background and need help preparing materials to send out, you can find it at the library, or perhaps your local college.

# Money



Even if you're not earning money on your own, it's important to understand how money works. Get familiar with the new currency so that you're comfortable with dollars, quarters, dimes, nickels and pennies.

In the U.S.A., many things run on credit. If you have a credit card, learn how it works, and make sure you understand that anything you buy with it is not free - you've just delayed paying for it. Try to establish a credit rating of your own. This will help you if you ever want to rent a car, buy a house, and many other things.

Try and familiarize yourself with the banking routine of your household. If your husband manages the finances, you can tell him that it's important for you to understand everything he does, so you can manage if he's ever ill or in any other emergency. Know the bank account numbers, and whose names are on all the accounts.

Anyone who legally works here pays taxes, and you must keep copies of all your tax records in case you need them.

You can protect yourself from fraud by never giving out your personal financial information to anyone, never signing documents you don't understand, and never trusting anyone who is not from a reputable company.

Banks and other financial institutions, libraries and schools and colleges often hold useful classes on financial planning and managing money.

## *Failing Marriages*

Sometimes, despite all our hopes and efforts, marriages simply don't work. If your marriage is in trouble, and you and your husband both agree that you want to work things out, then do talk to trusted friends or get some counseling to help you through your rough patch. If both of you are willing to seek help, that is a very good sign that you will be able to work things out.

If you feel that the marriage cannot, or should not, be saved, and you want to part ways, then you can find out how to do this in the most painless way. If there are no children, and you both agree, then some states even allow you to get a divorce without a lawyer. For legal information on this and other marriage-related issues, you can call your local Legal Aid Society, a women's center, look in the Yellow Pages for a lawyer, or look on the Internet at sites such as [www.Nolo.com](http://www.Nolo.com). This site offers free legal information, forms, and software.

## *Domestic Violence*




Please remember that domestic violence is NEVER the victim's fault. It doesn't matter what you might have done: nobody has a right to abuse you, and if there is violence, the person who commits the violence is always responsible.

If you have children, things are contentious, or there is abuse, then you can get support in many different ways. The first step is to recognize domestic abuse, in your own life or in someone else's. Here are some questions to ask:

Does the situation involve:

- Threats (like deportation, taking away your children, hurting your family back home)?
- Intimidation ("Who do you think you are? I am stronger than you.")?
- Harassment (Criticizing your cooking, your appearance, your activities)?
- Pushing, shoving, kicking, choking or slapping?
- Not allowing you freedom to work?
- Frightening you or your children?
- Sex whether you want to or not?
- Isolation (limiting when you go out, monitoring your friends, phone use, computer access)?
- Withholding care and support?
- Withholding money or control of money?
- Humiliation (putting you down in public, belittling you)?
- Breaking things at home?
- Jealousy?
- Encouraging other people to hurt you or treat you badly?
- Blaming other people or you for the abuse, or denying responsibility?



Abusers can be husbands, boyfriends or girlfriends, same-sex partners if you are gay, in-laws, co-workers, acquaintances or friends.

Abuse is unacceptable and you can take steps to stop it. No one deserves to be abused, and objecting does not mean you are a bad wife or mother or daughter or friend. You are also not alone. Every 15 seconds, a woman is battered in America, according to the United Nations' Study on the Status of Women in 2000. Unfortunately, more than one-third of all women experience some form of violence sometime in their lives.

Many women put up with abuse because they feel that they owe it to their children: "They love their father. How can I deprive them of a stable home life?" Please remember that a home life in which either they or their mother is being abused is NOT a stable home life, no matter how it looks from the outside. Children are deeply affected when they see that their mother is unhappy and powerless. Also, some studies have shown that boys who grow up in abusive houses are much more likely to grow into abusers themselves, and girls who do so have a higher chance of being abused when they are older.

What's best for you is often best for your children.

**Whatever you do, do not leave your children behind if you can possibly help it.**

### What You Can Do:

- Call the police, if you or your children are in immediate danger. You can dial 911 from any phone, and the police will respond. The police can talk to you and the abuser, help you find a safe place if you need one, and help you file a restraining order if you want to. A restraining order is a court order that may require someone to stay away from you, your house and/or your children. Find a safe place, whether it is a neighbor, a friend, a relative or a shelter. You can find a shelter by calling the **National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)**.
- Report your injuries to a doctor or hospital as soon as you can. You need to look after yourself, and also collect documentation in case you need it later.
- Get legal information. The domestic violence hotline can help with this, and so can shelters.

If you are afraid that telling someone will put you in danger, tell anyway - you are not safe if someone who is threatening you is responsible for you. Tell someone whom you feel safe with, at a safe time. Shelters and police can work with you on ways of making you safe.



When you have a little time to think, consider all the options for you and your children. These might include:

- Getting family counseling.
- A restraining order, which may legally oblige the abuser to keep away from you.
- Legal separation.
- Divorce. Remember, it is better to get divorced in the U.S.A., as this makes it easier to enforce child support, among other things. Keep in mind also that a religious divorce is not necessarily the same as a legal one.
- Visitation. You can work out ways for your children to see their father in safe ways, while they are in your custody. Shelters and lawyers can help with this.
- Leaving the country, if you want to. You must make sure first that it is all right to take your children. Both you and your spouse are open to kidnapping charges if you move the children without legal support.

Always have a plan if you can. If you have been abused, even if you don't expect it to happen again, it is sensible to have a plan, just in case. Make sure you keep your important papers, numbers, jewelry, etc. handy so you can quickly take them. Never assume that you can go back to get anything. Decide in advance how you will communicate to your family back home, and talk to them, if possible, before your husband does. If you can, tell someone you trust what's happened so far and work out a way you can let him or her know if you're in trouble. Stay informed about shelters, where you can go with your children, where they could stay if you need to find them another place, whether you can count on anyone at your child's school to support you.

A Selection of South Asian Anti-Domestic Violence Organizations in the U.S.A.  
from [www.sakhi.org](http://www.sakhi.org)

### California

Maitri  
San Jose  
1.888.8.MAITRI  
408.436.8393  
[www.maitri.org](http://www.maitri.org)  
[maitri@maitri.org](mailto:maitri@maitri.org)

Narika  
Northern California  
1.800.215.7308  
510.540.0754  
[www.narika.org](http://www.narika.org)  
[narika@narika.org](mailto:narika@narika.org)

South Asian Network  
Los Angeles  
562.403.0488  
[www.southasiannetwork.org](http://www.southasiannetwork.org)  
[kripa@southasiannetwork.org](mailto:kripa@southasiannetwork.org)

### Connecticut

Sneha  
1.800.58.SNEHA  
860.658.4615  
[www.sneha.org](http://www.sneha.org)  
[sneha@sneha.org](mailto:sneha@sneha.org)

### Georgia

Raksha  
Atlanta  
1.866.725.7423  
404.842.0725  
[www.raksha.org](http://www.raksha.org)  
[raksha@mindspring.com](mailto:raksha@mindspring.com)

### Illinois

Apna Ghar  
Chicago  
1.800.717.0757  
773.334.4663  
[www.apnaghar.org](http://www.apnaghar.org)  
[info@apnaghar.org](mailto:info@apnaghar.org)

### Michigan

New Visions: Alliance to End  
Violence in Asian/Asian-  
American Communities  
734.615.2106  
[www.ssw.umich.edu/newVisions/  
newvisions@umich.edu](http://www.ssw.umich.edu/newVisions/newvisions@umich.edu)

### New Jersey

Manavi  
732.435.1414  
[www.manavi.org](http://www.manavi.org)  
[manavi@worldnet.att.net](mailto:manavi@worldnet.att.net)

### New York

Sakhi for South Asian Women  
New York City  
212.868.6741  
212.714.9153  
[www.sakhi.org](http://www.sakhi.org)  
[contactus@sakhi.org](mailto:contactus@sakhi.org)

### North Carolina

Kiran  
1.866.KIRAN.INC  
(1.866.547.2646)  
[www.kiraninc.org](http://www.kiraninc.org)  
[kiraninc@hotmail.com](mailto:kiraninc@hotmail.com)

### Oregon

Sawera  
Portland  
503.778.7386  
503.641.2425  
[www.sawera.org](http://www.sawera.org)  
[sawera@sawera.org](mailto:sawera@sawera.org)

### Texas

Daya  
Houston, Dallas and San Antonio  
713.914.1333  
[www.dayahouston.org](http://www.dayahouston.org)  
[info@dayahouston.org](mailto:info@dayahouston.org)

Saheli  
Austin  
512.703.8745  
[www.saheli-austin.org](http://www.saheli-austin.org)  
[saheli@saheli-austin.org](mailto:saheli@saheli-austin.org)

### Washington, D.C. Area

ASHA - Asian Women's Self  
Help Association  
Washington, D.C., Virginia,  
and Baltimore, Maryland  
1.888.417.2742  
202.207.1248  
[www.ashaforwomen.org](http://www.ashaforwomen.org)  
[coordinator@ashaforwomen.org](mailto:coordinator@ashaforwomen.org)

### Washington (State)

Chaya  
Seattle  
1.877.92.CHAYA (24292)  
206.325.0325  
[www.chayaseattle.org](http://www.chayaseattle.org)  
[chaya@chayaseattle.org](mailto:chaya@chayaseattle.org)

## General Safety



Always keep your emergency numbers, such as police, fire and poison control, handy. Know the fire escape routes for your home, and make sure you have secure locks for your doors and windows. Find out the safe times and streets to travel in your neighborhood. The most important thing you can do is to try not to isolate yourself, so someone will notice if you are ever in trouble. You can take safety courses such as CPR with your local Red Cross.

If you have been the victim of any kind of violent crime, such as robbery or rape, do report it as soon as you can. There is sometimes government compensation available for you. To find out more about this, call:

**The National Organization for Victim Assistance: 1-800-879-6682.**

## A Note on Using the Internet



Computers, and the Internet, have transformed our lives. Now we have information, email, contacts, at our fingertips in ways that our parents couldn't even imagine. Do use the Internet to answer your questions, to look up resources, to expand your horizons. But keep in mind that anyone can make a website. Don't believe everything you read. Groups with their own agendas can put anything they want on a website.

For instance, there used to be a website called [www.whitehistory.org](http://www.whitehistory.org) that claimed that there were no schools in South Asia before the British Raj. This is completely false, but that is what the website said. So, for instance, if you are looking for the dosage of a particular medicine to give your child, only trust the website of a reputable hospital or the medicine's manufacturer; don't get your information from unqualified people in a chat group. For example, if you have immigration questions, go to the government's website.

## *Best of Luck!*

You've crossed oceans and continents and come a long way, and you have a long and exciting journey ahead. We applaud your courage and spirit, and we wish you much satisfaction and joy along the way.



# *A List of Useful Resources*

Emergency:	911
Phone numbers and referrals:	The telephone book, with white (residence), yellow (business) and blue (government) pages
Toll-free (800) directory:	1-800-555-1212
Legal information and forms:	<a href="http://www.nolo.com">www.nolo.com</a>
United Way:	211 or <a href="http://www.unitedway.org">www.unitedway.org</a>
Social Security:	1-800-772-1213
South Asian Women's Network (SAWNET): This is a comprehensive forum and resource service for South Asian women	<a href="http://www.sawnet.org">www.sawnet.org</a>
US Immigration:	1-800-375-5283 or <a href="http://uscis.gov">http://uscis.gov</a>
The Girls and Boys Town National Hotline:	1-800-448-3000
The National Council on Child and Family Abuse:	1-800-422-4453
The Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network (RAINN):	1-800-656-4673
The Eldercare Locator Number:	1-800-677-1116
Trafficking issues:	1-888-428-7581
National Domestic Violence Hotline:	1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
The National organization for Victims Assistance:	1-800-879-6682

## *The Know Your Rights and Resources Campaign*

CREA's *Know Your Rights and Resources Campaign* was launched in 2004 to inform South Asian immigrant women of their rights and resources in the United States of America. CREA, in collaboration with Narika and Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach and with support from the Family Violence Prevention Fund, first developed a booklet called *Know Your Rights*, containing information for immigrant women facing domestic violence. It was printed in six languages - English, Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali, Punjabi and Urdu. The booklet explains the concept of domestic violence in simple terms, and informs readers about: how to recognise abuse; actions that can be taken if they or someone they know are being abused; and legal aid, shelter and counselling services in the United States of America. In particular, *Know Your Rights* contains information on the landmark 1994 Violence Against Women Act that allows battered immigrant women to apply for their own legal immigration status without the aid of their abusive spouse. These booklets are available through CREA and have been distributed to organizations working with South Asian populations in the U.S.A. and in India.

*The Little Book of Tips and Tricks*, also part of the campaign, is a general manual offering an overview of women's rights and resources in the U.S.A. Immigrant women could use this manual to learn about their rights as women and as immigrants, about the resources and services available to them, and to find contact information for South Asian women's and domestic violence groups in their local areas. This manual will be distributed to both women living in the U.S.A. and women about to depart from South Asia, and will be translated into several South Asian languages.

We feel that this campaign and the resource materials that have been created can be used as a model to create specific tools for other immigrant groups. The *Know Your Rights and Resources Campaign* is just beginning. After *The Little Book of Tips and Tricks*, we plan to produce regional manuals with information on laws and resources specific to the regions, and we are thinking of creating an interactive website that would provide frequently updated information for South Asian immigrant women.

## Who Helped Make this Manual



CREA is a not-for-profit organization founded in the year 2000 that aims at empowering women to articulate, demand and access their human rights by enhancing women's leadership and building networks at the local, regional, and international levels through training, advocacy, and research. CREA works on issues of sexuality, sexual and reproductive rights, violence against women, human rights and social justice. CREA, 116 East 16th Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10003  
Phone: 212-599-1071; Fax: 212-599-1075  
Email: mailcrea@verizon.net; Website: www.creaworld.org

*In collaboration with:*



Apna Ghar, based in Chicago, provides comprehensive multi-lingual, multi-cultural social services including emergency shelter and advocacy to South Asian women and children victims of domestic violence. Our staff and volunteers speak many languages of the Asian sub-continent. All services at Apna Ghar are free and confidential.

Apna Ghar, Inc. (our Home) 4753 N Broadway Ste 632, Chicago, IL 60640  
Phone: 773-334-0173; Fax: 773-334-0963  
24 hour crisis hotline: 773-334-HOME (773-334-4663)  
24 hour toll-free hotline only within Illinois: 800-717-0757  
Email: info@apnaghar.org; Website: www.apnaghar.org



Daya, Inc., a Houston-based voluntary non-profit, serves South Asian victims of family violence and sexual assault. Daya's confidential and free services include language specific counseling, translation and interpretation, information and referrals and legal advocacy. Daya also provides limited financial assistance towards rent, food, utilities, childcare, legal fees and education and job training to enable clients to break the cycle of abuse.

DAYA, Inc. P.O.Box 571774, Houston, TX 77257  
Helpline: 713-914-1333; Office: 713-981-7645  
Email: info@dayahouston.org; Website: www.dayahouston.org



Narika  
1-800-215-7308

Narika, based in Berkeley, is a domestic violence helpline for South Asian women. We provide confidential free services for women and youth, which include a helpline, referrals, and translation and interpretation help. Our Speakers Bureau offers community education, and our Youth Outreach Project provides support and workshops on topics ranging from parental pressure to arranged marriage.

Narika, P.O. Box 14014, Berkeley, CA 94712

Helpline: 800-215-7308; Email: [narika@narika.org](mailto:narika@narika.org); Website: [www.narika.org](http://www.narika.org)



Sakhi for South Asian Women is a non-profit community-based anti-domestic violence organization serving the New York metropolitan area. Sakhi works to provide emotional, linguistic, legal, and health-related support to individual women affected by domestic violence as well as engages our community to end violence against women. Sakhi offers classes on topics including computer literacy, job readiness, and stress management, and works for policy reform.

Helpline: 212-868-6741; Office: 212-714-9153; Email: [contactus@sakhi.org](mailto:contactus@sakhi.org); Website: [www.sakhi.org](http://www.sakhi.org)



**raksha** inc.

Raksha, Inc., based in Atlanta, is a non-profit organization that promotes a stronger and healthier South Asian community through confidential support services, education, and advocacy. We are guided by values of consensus, diversity and the worth of every individual.

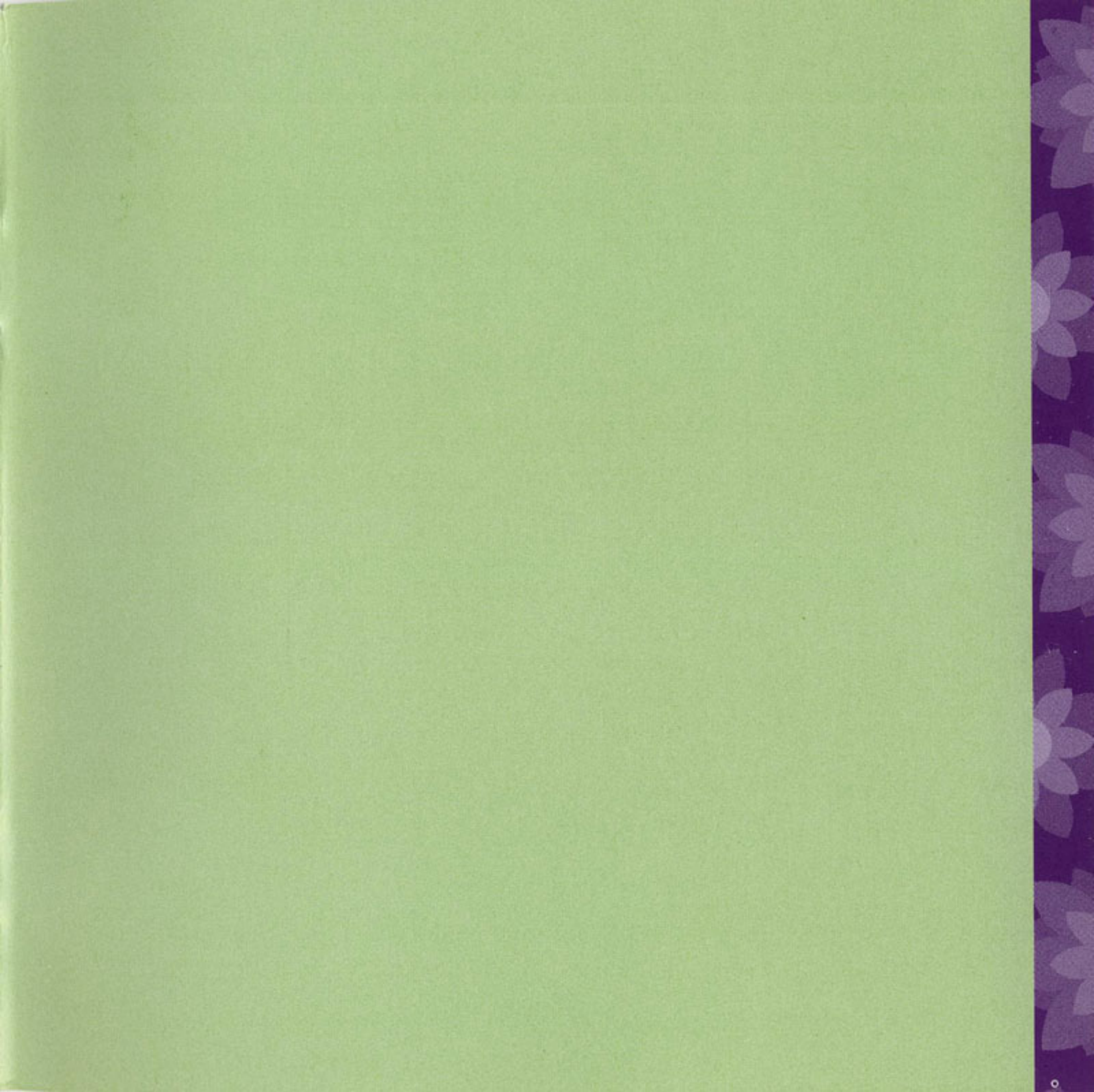
Raksha, Inc P.O. Box 12337 Atlanta, GA 30355

Phone 866-725-7423 (toll free); 404-876-0670; Fax 404-876-4525

Email: [raksha@mindspring.com](mailto:raksha@mindspring.com); Website: [www.raksha.org](http://www.raksha.org)



# Notes



# CREA

In Collaboration With

