Tele-Advocacy During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Toby Shulruff
Safety Net Project
National Network to End Domestic Violence

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Digital Services

Using tech-based tools to provide services to survivors
Examples of Digital Services

- Adding text or web chat to your hotline
- Video calls with survivors
- Video or web chat for support groups
- Email or text (caution)
Support & Access

• Meet survivors where they are – chat, video, text, etc.
• Offer tools to meet accessibility needs.
• Offer tools with low tech barriers to access
• Provide information so survivors can choose
Privacy & Safety Options

• Options for anonymous use
• No traces on survivor’s device or accounts
• Company can’t see info about survivors or content of conversations
• “HIPAA Compliant” is not enough
Stay True to Core Values

• Just because the tech makes something possible, doesn’t mean we should do it.

• Tech that is OK for our families or workplace is not necessarily OK for survivors.

• Use any new digital service temporarily – reassess once the pandemic has passed.
Chat

• Survivors connect via a browser window.

• Advocates use computer-based chat system to respond.

• Your webpage can include service hours, other hotlines to contact, and resources.
Texting

• Texting is not high-tech

• All mobile phones have a default texting app – no separate download required

• Convenience of texting whenever there is time, pausing if needed
How Programs Text

- Basic approach: Use a cell phone
  - Requires juggling multiple conversations on a single device
- Better: Computer-based messaging
  - Allows multiple staff members to triage, assign, and respond to messages that come in
  - Can more easily protect confidentiality
Quick Notes on Email

• Email can be easily intercepted.
  – Abusive person may know account password.
  – Abusive person may have access to devices.

• Email is saved by default in many places.

• Email is often backed up on servers, and sync’d across devices through the Cloud.
Video Calls

• Video offers visual and audio cues.

• It is easier to add in a third party, including live interpreters to increase accessibility.

• Many people don’t have the bandwidth or data plans to support video.

• Not safe or private if someone else is in the location.
Phone Calls

• Make program-owned devices and accounts available to advocates.
• Plan for forwarding calls after shifts.
• Make sure phone interpreter account information is available.
Safety & Privacy Risks

1. Interception
   - Personal Safety
   - Loss of Privacy

2. Impersonation

3. Program Confidentiality

4. Advocate Safety & Capacity

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Start with What You Know

• Begin with the same safety and privacy protocols that you use on phone hotlines – then update for digital services.

• The technology is different, but survivors’ informed choices, safety, and privacy are all still the goals.
Strategies with Survivors

• Talk to survivors about risks, each time.
• Plan for safety and privacy.
• Offer options based on each survivor’s risks and access.
• Use codewords or phrases.
• Remember sync’d cloud accounts.
Strategies in Your Program

• Delete message history.
• Don’t save survivors’ info in contacts.
• Provide program-owned devices.
• Choose tools that don’t require survivors to download or sign-up.
• Choose tools designed with privacy in mind.
Vendors To Look Into

• ResourceConnect
• Cyph
• Gruveo
• Zoom
The Bottom Line

• Offering additional communication options is crucial to survivor-centered services.

• AND, it must be done with caution.
Digital Services Toolkit
Contact Information

Safety Net Project

safetynet@nnedv.org

202-543-5566