


NATIONAL NETWORK
TO END DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE

For Advocates: Using Technology During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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National Network to End Domestic Violence

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OVC Disclaimer Language

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Safety Net Project

- Address **intersection** between technology and abuse.
- Provide **technical assistance and training** to advocates, law enforcement, legal services, social services providers, and survivors.
- **Advocate** with policymakers and technology companies.



SAFETY NET

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Digital Services

Using tech-based tools to provide services to survivors.

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Examples of Digital Services

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

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All Tools Have Risks

- Even older technologies have risks.
- Advocates should be able to talk about those risks with survivors.

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Safety & Privacy Risks

1. Interception
 - Personal Safety
 - Loss of Privacy
2. Impersonation
3. Program Confidentiality
4. Advocate Safety & Capacity

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The Bottom Line

- Offering additional communication options is crucial to survivor-centered services.
- AND, it must be done with caution.

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Staying True to Core Values



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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.

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Anecdotal Info from Hotlines

- Text & chat conversations tend to be longer in duration.
- Long pauses are normal with text and chat.
- Text & chat tend to have more numerous and graphic disclosures.
- The survivor may just stop communicating.

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Privacy & Safety Options

- 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.

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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.

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Digital Services Best Practices

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Best Practices – Safety Planning

- Talk to survivors about risks.
- Plan for safety and privacy.
- Make sure it's still safe to contact.
- If the survivor suspects monitoring, offer options, but if they still want to continue, respect that wish.

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Best Practices - Data & Devices

- Use agency owned devices & accounts.
- Collect the least amount of information needed to provide the service requested and keep that information for as short a period of time as possible.
- Do not collect more information than you would for a traditional hotline call or in-person conversation.

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Chat or Text Based Communication: An Overview

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Silent communication. • Helpful for people with specific accessibility needs. | <p>Concerns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details of the conversation are stored. • Potential impersonation or interception. • Default settings may not protect privacy. |
|--|--|

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Nuances of Communicating via Text & Online Chat

- Can be easily misunderstood.
- Challenging to assess emotion and tone.
- Stop and clarify if there is any confusion.
- Avoid Internet slang, acronyms, and emojis.
- If the conversation drops, consider closing the chat after a certain amount of time.

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Video & Audio Based Communication: An Overview

- Can make interaction feel more personal.
- May be helpful for people with specific accessibility needs.
- Decreased risk of impersonation.

Concerns:

- May be overheard by others.
- Default settings may not protect privacy.

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Chat-Based Services

- “Online chat” is browser-based.
- Chat started via link on the program’s website.
- Some platforms close the chat window on the survivor’s device automatically.

Concerns:

- Some platforms allow chat messages to be saved or copied – turn these features off!
- Know how the chat web address will look in the survivor’s web browser & strategize.

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Texting & Messaging

- Cell based texting & instant messaging apps.

Best Practice: Discuss safety issues related to texting and offer other options.

- Include a written record.
- Conversations saved by default on phones and accounts, numbers seen in phone bills.
- Risk of impersonation (develop code words / phrases).

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Texting & Messaging Strategies

- Delete message history.
- Don't save contacts.
- Remember cloud accounts.
 - iCloud, Google, etc.
- Offer more secure options.
- Check in regularly to make sure it is still a safe method of communication.
- If there are worries, discuss other options – phone, video.

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Video Calls

- Offers visual and audio cues.
- Talk with directors about how to add in a third party, including live interpreters for:
 - Survivors who are Deaf or hard of hearing, and
 - Survivors who speak a different language than the advocate.
- Communicate in private spaces & use sound machines.

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Phone Calls

- Communicate in private spaces & use sound machines.
- Talk with directors about interpreters and relay calls.

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Email

- Can be easily intercepted.
 - Abusive person may know account password.
 - Abusive person may have access to devices.
- Is saved by default in many places.
- Is often backed up on servers, and synced across devices through the Cloud.

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Online Groups - Considerations

- Should be limited to survivors and the group facilitator.
- By limiting participation to only survivors already working with the program, you can:
 - Ensure members are well-suited for the group.
 - Minimize the risk of impersonation.

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Support Informed Choices

- Share information at the beginning of each text or chat conversation.
- “Canned” messages: keep the language short, meaningful, and in plain language.
- Give survivors a chance to ask questions.

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Considerations from a Legal Perspective



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The Law & Written Communication

- Introduction to WomensLaw.org.
- The importance of considering language in written communication.
- Specific “do’s and don’ts.”

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WomensLaw.org

WomensLaw.org is not just for women. We serve and support all survivors, no matter their sex or gender.

Important note: Although courts may be closed or accepting limited cases due to COVID-19, there should still be a way to file for a protection order and other emergency relief. See our [Frequently Asked Questions Involving Courts and COVID-19](#), or call your local courthouse for more details.

WomensLaw.org
Because knowledge is power.

About Us Legal Information About Abuse Places that Help Donate Search

Legal Information

Home » Legal Information

Click on your state (in the map or in the drop-down menu) to read "plain language" explanations of that state's laws.

Choose the Law - By State
Preparing for Court - By Yourself
Immigration
Federal Gun Laws
Domestic Violence in the Military
Videos

State vs. Federal Law
Restraining Orders
Child Support
Parental Kidnapping
Divorce
Housing Laws
Workplace Protections
Confidentiality
Criminal
State Gun Laws
Suing an Abuser
Selected State Statutes

Useful Legal Information
Preparing for Court
Immigration, court documents, your case, and more
Immigration
U-visa, VAWA, T-visa, and more
Other Federal Laws
Domestic Violence in the Military

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WomensLaw.org (part 2)

Am I Being Abused?

- Danger Assessment
- Signs of Abuse

Forms of Abuse

- Abuse Using Technology
- Domestic Violence
- Emotional Abuse
- Financial Abuse
- Sexual Abuse and Exploitation
- Stalking/Cyberstalking

Abuse in Specific Communities

- Abuse Among People Living with HIV/AIDS
- Abuse in Immigrant Communities
- Abuse in Tribal Communities
- Information for Teens and Young Adults
- LGBTQIA Victims
- Male Victims
- Abuse in the Jewish Community

Safety Tips

- For Domestic Violence Victims
- For Stalking Victims
- Safety Planning with Children
- Safety in a Confidential Address
- Safety in Court
- Safety in Rural Areas
- Safety While Using the Internet

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WomensLaw.org (part 3)

Places that Help

- Advocates and Shelters
- Finding a Lawyer
- Courthouse Locations
- Sheriff Departments
- National Organizations
- Chats and Message Boards

Find Help for Yourself and for Others

Click on your state (in the map or in the drop-down menu) to find contact information for 1) advocates in local domestic violence programs and shelters; 2) legal assistance organizations; 3) courthouse locations where you can file for a protection order; and 4) sheriff departments, if you need to talk to someone about an abusive relationship, you can call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233.

Other Helpful Information

- National Organizations
- Hotlines and other resources by subject matter
- Chats & Message Boards
- Online support for survivors of abuse and sexual assault
- Helping Others

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WomensLaw Email Hotline

WomensLaw Email Hotline

The purpose of this Email Hotline is for WomensLaw to provide basic legal information, referrals, and emotional support related to domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking. All emails that involve legal content are answered by an attorney or answered by a law student volunteer and then reviewed by an attorney. However, we cannot provide legal advice or apply the law to your specific situation.

STOP! Before you continue, please think about whether someone else might be monitoring your device.

First time here?
Ask a question.

Been here before?
Read WomensLaw's response or ask another question.

After 90 days, your account and all information associated with it are deleted from our systems. Read our privacy policy.

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Línea Informativa de WomensLaw

WomensLaw Línea Informativa

English

El propósito de esta Línea Informativa por Email es que WomensLaw provea información legal básica, referidos y apoyo emocional. Todos los correos electrónicos que incluyen contenido legal, son contestados por un/a abogado/a o por un/a estudiante de derecho voluntario/a y revisados por un/a abogado/a. Sin embargo, no podemos dar un consejo legal o aplicar la ley a su situación específica.

¡ALTO! Antes de continuar, por favor piense por favor piense si alguien más puede estar monitoreando su equipo.

¿Primera vez aquí?

Haga una pregunta.

¿Ha estado aquí antes?

Lea la respuesta de WomensLaw o haga otra pregunta.

Después de 90 días, su cuenta y toda la información asociada con ella serán borradas de nuestro sistema. Lea nuestra política de privacidad.

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The Importance of Considering Language in Written Communication

In written communications, you want to be more aware of your language so that you don't open yourself up to liability.



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The Benefits of Delivering Services in Writing vs. Phone or In-Person

- When you are writing to clients, you can allow yourself more time to review what you wrote and make any necessary changes.
- By laying out options and safety planning with your clients in writing, this better serves clients who are in the midst of trauma. They can refer to it later once the trauma subsides when they are more capable of taking it all in.

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What Does the term “Unauthorized Practice of Law” Mean?

- Unauthorized = unpermitted, not allowed.
- Practice of law = doing tasks/actions that a lawyer would do:
 - a) Advising client on best course of action to take.
 - b) Representing client in court/speaking for client.
 - c) Giving legal advice (as opposed to legal information).
 - d) Application of the law to the specific facts of your client's case.
 - e) Drafting legal papers, motions, petitions, affidavits, etc.

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Key Phrases Non-Lawyer Advocates Should Try Not to Use

Stay away from writing:

“You should...”

Example: “You should keep your child home from the court-ordered visit because of the risk of spreading coronavirus to your elderly mother.”

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Key Phrases Non-Lawyer Advocates Should Try Not to Use (part 2)

Stay away from writing:

“The best thing for you to do is...”

Example: “You weren’t properly served with custody papers that your child’s father filed, and so the best thing for you to do is not appear in court.”

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Key Phrases Non-Lawyer Advocates Should Try Not to Use (part 3)

Stay away from writing:

“The law won’t apply to your situation because...”

Example: “It’s OK to go into hiding with your kids. The parental kidnapping law won’t apply to your situation because you are not taking them out of state.”

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How to Best Frame Options and Information for Your Client

- You don’t need to change how you provide emotional support and referrals.
- Make clear in your written response: “I can’t tell you what to do or what is best for you. I will help you think through possible options, and help brainstorm potential pros and cons for each option, but the ultimate decision is yours.”

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How to Best Frame Options and Information for Your Client (part 2)

- If you want to include legal information:
 - Link them to self-help guides on your state courts website.
 - Link them to online brochures or materials from your local legal services website.
 - If neither of those exist, call your local legal services or your state coalition attorney to say “I am getting lots of emails and chats about X. Can you help us put together an FAQ that I can send to my clients?”
 - Link them to WomensLaw.org for detailed state-specific info.

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Reminder: It's Important to Set Boundaries with Remote Work


Ideas to separate home and work:

If you have a designated home office, close the office door, turn off the lights, and pull down the shades when your shift is over.

If you don't have an office, turn off your laptop and phone; put them in the closet, under the couch, or out of sight.

Only get calls forwarded to your personal cell phone during your work hours. Turn off call forwarding when the "workday" is over.

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QUESTIONS?

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RESOURCES

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TechSafetyApp.org







Tech Safety
 Welcome to the Tech Safety App. This app contains information that can help someone identify technology-facilitated harassment, stalking, or abuse and includes tips on what can be done.
 Available in English and Spanish.
 Enter Website



Contact Information

Safety Net Project
safetynet@nnedv.org
 202-543-5566



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