Using Technology to Safely Communicate with Survivors

- Remember to assess the safety and risks of each platform
- Also, keep in mind accessibility
- Compare mobile phone default apps to computer-based texting apps
- Consider ways that the platform can be used for ongoing advocacy
- Understand that all tools will have risks, and talk with the survivors about those risks
  - Interception: Personal safety and loss of privacy
  - Impersonation
  - Program confidentiality
  - Advocate safety and capacity

Choosing a Vendor for These Services

- Data security & privacy
- Cost
  - Keep in mind that because it's more expensive doesn't necessarily mean it's better quality
- Features
  - Pictures, video, closed captioning/ability to use with an interpreter service, etc.
- Customer service
  - Is it easy to figure out solutions yourself or will you have to contact customer service?
  - How much will it cost if you reach out to customer service?
  - What do other customers say about the product?
- Downtime
  - There may be times that the service will be down for updates. You will want to account for that time.
  - When does the service take the platform offline?
  - Has there been an increase in outages due to increased capacity due to COVID-19?

Skills for Quality Service

- Be patient and ready to explain the technology to anyone not familiar.
- Be upfront at the beginning of each conversation about sharing information and the risks that may be involved.
- Allow the survivors to speak and ask questions.
- Keep in mind that digital communication is different than in-person communication. Text and chats can often be misunderstood, as you can't hear tone or emotion.
- Communicate clearly by asking clarifying questions, avoiding using Internet slang or acronyms.

Protecting the survivor's confidentiality and privacy is integral to keeping them safe. With the rise of online and virtual advocacy, we must closely monitor and track how we handle survivor's information in order to maintain their safety. Whether we are using our current technology or thinking about adding new technology, or features, there is a variety of factors we must consider.

Data stored on computers can be vulnerable to breaches in many ways including:

- Cyber-attacks
- On-site break-ins
- Off-site theft/loss of equipment
- Employees being tricked into giving access to data
- Intentional acts by an employee
- Mistakes by an employee

Minimizing the type and amount of data you collect can help lessen effects that may occur if a breach happens.

Consider Your Agency Policies

Your agency should have a clear and concise policy regarding collecting and retaining survivor information—both on devices and in paper form. Some recommendations are:

- The policy should consider and address what type of information you collect and for how long you keep it in your files.
- If possible, don't save names, texts, emails, etc., but if you have to you should delete them regularly after a certain period of time.
- You should not save a backup of survivor information. Your employees should know how to remotely remove information from devices. The policy should be reviewed every 6 months.
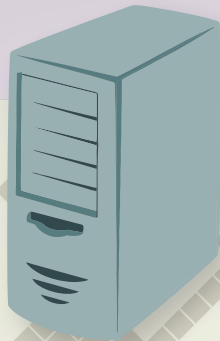
Consider How Your Agency Stores Data

- To do so, you can map the places and devices that store survivor data.
- Work with a professional IT consultant to help you determine if your agency is safely securing your data.
- Consider who has access to data and devices, and limit access if needed.
- To help secure data, make sure that advocates are only using agency-owned devices and technology.

When meeting with a survivor, you should ask permission before taking any photos or videos, and before sharing any photos or videos. Advocates should not collect evidence, but help the survivor collect the evidence or show them how to by example.

Technology is becoming more and more standard in our work with survivors. Here are some ways technology can help you as an advocate:

1. As it pertains to accessibility, we can use technology for relay services, alternative communication apps (such as text-to-speech apps), and remote interpreters.
2. Texting or online chat can help increase access for a survivor. Some survivors may feel that they can't find the time or the safe space to talk on the phone, but texting is easier and more comfortable for them.
3. Video chatting is another option that can be helpful. Survivors may want face-to-face interaction, but sometimes might not be able to get to an advocate. With the rise of COVID-19, video chatting programs are on the rise and most platforms are available on computers, tablets, and phones.
4. Online spaces for support groups can be beneficial during this time as well. If survivors were a part of support groups before the pandemic, maintaining these practices are valuable. Moving these groups to a secure online platform could be an idea that your agency is considering.
5. Phone communication could also be helpful, as people are trying to maintain social distance policies. Be sure to check with survivors when it is safe to call and whether it is safe to leave a message. It is possible to set up online numbers to allow more anonymity if needed.
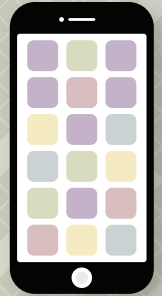
As always, with all of the technology that is available, you will want to be aware and vigilant. When using any of these services you will want to ensure that they are survivor-centric, reflect the needs of your community, and use them as ways to overcome barriers to your services. You should also note that using these new forms of communication, does not mean that people will not reach out in the same way they may have reached out in the past. Technology can just open your agency to a wider perspective of helping survivors.

Benefits to Adding These Services
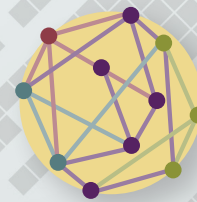
- Reach teens and younger adults
- Reach people from marginalized communities
- Reach survivors with disabilities
- Reach survivors with language barriers
- Reach survivors from rural communities or who don't have easy access to transportation
- Reach survivors who aren't available to meet during traditional hours due to work, school, etc.

Choosing Platforms for These Services

- First, consider all of the costs:
  - The actual software
  - Ongoing use
  - Upgrading equipment, if needed
  - Increasing bandwidth, if needed
  - Security
  - Training
  - Staff time in preparation
- Each type of service may utilize a different platform, you will want to research and determine which platform best fits the service you are trying to provide.