

Practical Privacy Tips

The RSP put together the following tips on protecting privacy when advocates are working from home or other atypical places. Please use these tips alongside your jurisdiction's laws on confidentiality and guidance from your coalition.

Talk with survivors, significant others, and other callers transparently about the ways COVID-19 is affecting services. As we all collectively change our behavior for the care of each other, that includes your work environment. Discuss their concerns around privacy: in general, but also specifically related to this call in this moment.

Remember that privacy and confidentiality are two different things, and that *both* belong to the survivor. The advocate's role is to reduce barriers for survivors while also honoring confidentiality obligations as suits each survivor. Nothing works perfectly during a pandemic, and our goal should be to provide the best service possible in these circumstances, centering survivors' choice and power.

Talk with your program's leadership and your state/territorial/tribal coalition about the specific regulations or laws that govern confidentiality in your jurisdiction, and what is most feasible for your program. You may also want to visit <https://nnedv.org/content/technology-safety/> and <https://www.victimrights.org/> for additional ideas, perspectives, and resources.

- Acknowledge that you are in a non-private space so survivors can assess and decide what's best for themselves
 - For example: "I am working from home and my kids are watching a movie in the next room. They know they shouldn't come in to talk to me right now, but kids don't always listen! Can we brainstorm some ideas about how to handle this? I want to provide the most private space for you that I can."
 - Come up with a way to abruptly end the conversation, if needed, on either side, or signal that you no longer have privacy.

- Find the most privacy you can, even in odd spots
 - For example: the car in the driveway, bathroom, garage, laundry room
 - Outside where possible (or send the kids/roommate/partner outside!)
 - If you live in a building complex with shared or close outdoor space (apartment balconies, for example) you'll want to factor that into decisions as well.
- Set up guidelines about things like using names: "I likely won't refer to you by name during this call, even when I normally would, in a concerted effort to minimize the personally identifying anyone on my side could potentially hear."
- Keep your end of the conversation minimal and careful.
 - If your roommate only hears you saying "uh huh" "yes" "I understand" and the like, they are not learning any private information.
- Use a headset or headphones to minimize the possibility of others overhearing the survivor's end of the conversation
- Get a white noise machine (perhaps you can borrow one from the office) or use a white noise app.
- Teach partners, kids, roommates the cues or a signal for your need for privacy. Ask that they go find something else to do when your work phone rings, for example.
- Set aside a few hours, wherever possible, for one on one time with survivors by negotiating household care schedules/nap schedules/favorite TV show time or other short-term scheduling.
- Consider using chat or text options to connect when there is no way to have a conversation. Even old school email may feel helpful to some survivors needing to connect. Let survivors know the limitations and privacy concerns of all chat, text, email options.
- Have a plan for protecting your computer and phone records, case files, and notes.
 - Phone access and records: if an advocate does have to use their personal phone for service provision, issues related to confidentiality and phone

records arise. It might be advantageous for a program to provide temporary cell phones to advocates, if they don't already provide phones.

- Temporary file storage: if advocates need to work remotely for some time, they will likely need to bring client files home. Best practice would be to get lockboxes for each advocate so they can store files confidentially. This might be something that the coalition wants to bring up with funders, as programs are unlikely to have budgeted for this. With electronic files, the program will want to set expectations and perhaps policy for advocates who will share a computer at home with partners, children, or others. The policy/supervision expectations should address signing in and out of databases, clearing history, etc., to protect confidentiality.

Regarding consent to services, confidentiality agreements, releases of information, and other paperwork:

- If you don't require a form to be signed before speaking with someone via phone or in-person, then you don't need anything signed before speaking with them by video, or communicating via chat or text.
- Some programs are finding ways to send documents to survivors for electronic signatures. This is great, but *do not* make this a requirement for services.
- An advocate can also read or explain the forms over the phone or chat, ask the survivor to give verbal consent, and note that in the case notes. Later, when you are able to serve them in person, you can have forms signed.

For more resources and assistance, visit www.resourcesharingproject.org. For assistance related to COVID-19 and sexual violence, visit <http://www.resourcesharingproject.org/covid19-emerging-response-resources>.

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