

## 6 Questions To Consider When Providing Advocacy Services via Technology

Programs are increasingly considering the use of technology to provide services to survivors. These services include offering group support via teleconferences or online forums; individual advocacy over email; counseling through video chat; or support and advocacy through texting (either through a native texting app, a computer, or a messaging application/feature). Using technology to communicate can be more convenient for both advocate and survivor than a face-to-face meeting.

However, when using technology, both the advocate and survivor need to consider safety, privacy, and security. Social media and other technologies are not always private or secure. Others, including the abuser, could have or obtain access to these conversations in a variety of ways and could compromise safety and privacy.

### 1. Will It Solve Your Problem?

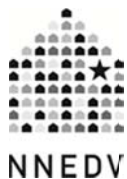
Oftentimes, programs want to use certain technology to offer services because barriers for the agency or survivors are preventing participation or access to services and resources. For example, the program offers long-distance counseling via video conferencing because a survivor lives 50 miles from the program. Other times, it is because programs assume that using a particular technology would be more convenient or preferable by survivors, such offering texting services because the program wants to serve a younger population and have assumed that younger survivors would prefer to text. Assess if the technology you choose will truly meet the need or solve a particular problem. For example, it could be that the program isn't serving young survivors not because the program doesn't offer texting as an option but because young survivors don't know that services are available.

### 2. Why This Particular Technology or Platform?

When choosing a particularly technology, be sure that is the best technology to meet your goal. For example, if you are contemplating using an online chat system to stay in touch with clients, is that the best tool? Would simpler methods of communication, such as calling or emailing, be a simpler solution? Sometimes, a simpler, less advanced technology solution may be the safest and best solution. Generally, the more advanced a technology, the more considerations and risks there are for safety and privacy.

### 3. Is this Platform Secure?

All technology is vulnerable to being hacked. It is important to thoroughly understand the security of the technology that you're using or considering. For example, if you are considering using a forum to create an online support group for survivors, is the host website secure? How easy would it be for someone to gain access to the forum to see the conversations? If you are using a private site where users must log into to be part of the conversation, are there security protocols in case the user forgets to log off and



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someone else (not the user) has access to the private site? While security cannot be 100% foolproof, you can take measures to ensure that the site or system you are using is as secure as it can be.

### 4. Can Other People Access or See the Data?

Services that are offered through a third party could allow others outside of your agency access to the information shared on or through the service. Even if you're using a conference call service for a support group, it could be possible that an operator or someone who works for the conference call service has the capability to enter the call, even if it's just for maintenance or quality purposes. If the technology you are using is hosted and offered through a third party, know how and what their staff has access to.

Some third party services may not allow access to the information shared or communicated through the technology but they may use aggregate data (number of callers, phone numbers, IP addresses, etc.) and share it with their other clients, advertisers, or partners to promote their services. When selecting a service, know exactly what information they will collect and for what purpose.

### 5. Does the Technology Keep a Record?

Some services may store a record of all conversations unless it's deleted by the users. Because of this, if you are offering counseling or a survivor is sharing intimate details with you, that information may be stored on the service for as long as their data retention policy dictates. Some video conferencing or phone conferences services may allow for either party to record the conversation. Be sure you know if the service you have selected allows record keeping of any kind.

Also keep in mind that since you are using a third party, if these records are kept and stored by the service provider, they may release them to law enforcement or to an attorney through a court order or subpoena. Be sure you know how this company will respond to legal requests for information, and whether it is safe for you and the survivor to share certain information through these services.

### 6. What Type of Safety Plan or Strategies Should You Discuss?

Beyond the technical security and privacy of the technology itself, survivors' own technologies may pose a risk to safety and privacy. If the survivor is using a computer to access the video chat or online support forum, talk to the survivor about computer safety. Safety tips could include: log out of the program when done, use a private browser so the browsing history isn't stored on the computer, or use a safer computer if the survivor suspects that the abuser is monitoring the computer. If the survivor is using a cell phone, offer phone safety tips so she/he can access help in the safest method possible.