**Technology Safety in Domestic Violence Programs**

Technology provides many ways for all of us to communicate and stay in contact with our family, friends, and others in our social network and has become part of our everyday lives. The Action Alliance recommends that each Sexual and Domestic Violence Agency establish guidelines to assist staff in integrating discussions about technology into their safety planning with residents of the shelter, as well as with survivors receiving non-residential services.

Over the past decade there have been amazing advancements in technology that impact how we provide services and how people who have experienced sexual and domestic violence access our services and other supports systems. The impact of technology on our work has its benefits and challenges. Some key benefits are that it creates new ways for people who have experienced sexual and/or domestic violence to reach out to support networks, family, and friends. Some key challenges are how it impacts safety, privacy, and confidentiality, including how it is used by perpetrators to maintain power and control. However, perpetrators have always been adept at finding ways to track victims and monitor victims’ behaviors, interactions, and communications.

Policies that strictly limit access to or use of personal devices are not recommended or best practice and may even have the effect of increasing rather than decreasing risks in some circumstances. Such policies fail to address the security and privacy issues as a whole for the individual survivor and do not acknowledge or value the importance of survivors maintaining contact with their established social networks. Shelter, in particular, is isolating enough without asking residents to surrender their phones and other electronic devices or to stop emailing or engaging in social media. An effective process will include survivors to identify safety concerns regarding cell phones and other electronic devices that they may have with them or to which they have access and working with them to develop individualized safety plans. It is important to balance the privacy and self-determination of persons who have experienced sexual and domestic violence and to work with each individual to develop a safety plan that addresses not only their own safety but the safety of those in their immediate environment.

**Procedures Checklist:**

* Develop policies and protocols that help survivors think critically about how their technology use or disruption in use fits into their safety plan. For example, if a survivor is known to be active on Facebook, it may be more risky and raise alarm for her/him to abruptly stop using Facebook.
* Develop policies and protocols that assume that perpetrators can find the shelter--and that they are adept at tracking victims with or without GPS technology.
* Ensure that all staff and residents are prepared at all times for the possibility that a perpetrator may arrive on site and that staff and residents know exactly what to do when this occurs.
* Establish procedures that permit cell phones, and work with each resident to identify safety concerns with regard to their cell phone and technology use Integrate technology safety into your intake and safety planning discussions with survivors
  + Did the survivor bring any electronic devices with them? If not, does the perpetrator have access to those types of devices and the information on them (appointments, emails, Facebook account, etc.)?
  + Do any of the devices have GPS technology? Discuss safety concerns regarding GPS and work with the survivor to see if their phone has an option to turn the GPS to "911 only" or "off".
  + Does the survivor’s vehicle have an internal GPS system to which the perpetrator might have access?
  + Does the survivor have any concerns or suspicions about being tracked by the perpetrator through technology? In opening this discussion, you can learn more about the risks involved, as well as educate the survivor about technology risks.
  + Is the cell phone in the survivor's name or abuser's name?
  + Does the abuser have access to the phone and its information? Are the billing records shared? If so, the abuser may be able to see all incoming and outgoing calls.
  + Does the survivor have a Facebook or email account? Does the perpetrator have access to these accounts or monitor the Facebook page? Does the survivor intend to use these accounts while in shelter? If so, discuss safety planning around use.
* Develop a plan to have alternative phone options available for survivors if their personal cell phones are deemed risky. Many phones can be put in "airplane mode" in order to get phone numbers without connecting the phone to a network.
* Develop a plan to work with phone carriers to provide offline only billing.

To summarize, the Action Alliance recommends that SDVA staff be trained to have discussions with all survivors (including those not in shelter) regarding the risks and benefits of technology and electronic devices. Survivors will have different levels of tech awareness/savvy, as will perpetrators, and no single policy will assure safety. The goal is to assess the technology safety risks of each survivor and to work with each survivor to develop a relevant safety plan.