



## How to Talk with Survivors About Safe Methods of Contact

Before asking a survivor to fill out any form that asks about safe methods of communication, you should have a conversation. The ways that a survivor wants to communicate with your program should match their needs. A program should never contact a survivor in a way that the survivor has not specifically indicated is safe and private. When you talk with a survivor about how the program can communicate with them, the focus should be on helping the survivor:

- identify their goals
- consider if/how having the program contact the survivor meets those goals
- consider current or future risks that may arise if the program contacts the survivor in particular ways
- consider alternative ways for the program to contact the survivor (for example, the survivor could contact the program again when they are ready, and in a safe and private location)

If the survivor does want the program to contact them, then write down those preferences on an intake form or other place where an advocate working with the survivor can easily find that information. NOTE: What is safe or private for a survivor can change, so be sure to check back in regularly, or even each time, to make sure that contact methods are up to date and match the survivor's wishes.

### **Step 1: Ask Questions & Provide Information**

- 1) Lead this discussion with the reasons why the program would follow up with the survivor (for example, with additional resources or information). Then help the survivor decide if they want to be contacted by the program, or if the survivor wants to be the one to follow up. **It should be clear to the survivor that they can choose whether and how to follow up.****

- 2) If the survivor prefers to follow up with the program, the program can share a reasonable timeframe when the information or resource will be available. Let the survivor know how to reach someone with the program safely and quickly. If the survivor chooses to have the program contact them, ask about the preferred ways to communicate. This might include phone, voicemail, text, email, postal mail, or other means. Offer the methods that your program has the capacity to provide in a way that increases survivor safety and privacy, and meets your confidentiality obligations. Read more about [best practices in our Digital Services Toolkit](#).
- 3) Assess for potential safety or privacy risks. Ask: Do you have any concerns that anyone might be monitoring your phone or computer? Does anyone else regularly use your phone or computer who you wouldn't want to see a message or call from us?

### **Step 2: Discuss each of the following:**

- 1) If the survivor is worried about someone else having access to their phone, computer, or accounts, talk about common risks associated with different technologies. See more about information to share in the next section.
- 2) What information can be safely and privately shared in messages like voicemail, text, or email.
- 3) If there are any other conditions that would make communication safer or more private, for example, only during certain hours.
- 4) The survivor's right to change the way they want to be contacted, or even to be contacted at all, at any time.

### **Step 3: Make Notes**

- 1) Fill in the How to Contact Me form or make notes based on your discussions with **this particular survivor** (not based on standardized practice or habit).

- 2) Check back in regularly to ask about any changes to the ways a survivor wants to be contacted.

### **Talking Points for Common Risks**

- An abusive person can monitor your phone or computer use by looking at it when you're not there, by accessing your accounts through another device, or by attaching hardware or installing software or an app that records everything you do on your phone or computer.
- If you're worried that someone is monitoring your phone or computer, we can talk about next steps, including changing passwords, security settings, or setting up new accounts.
- Some steps may result in the loss of evidence of the abuse, or the abusive person might escalate their behavior. We can make a plan before you take action to decrease or address those risks, and you might decide not to take any action.
- Other people (friends, family, coworkers) who share your phone or computer, even just once, might accidentally see messages, or information about calls or messages. We want to consider how we would contact you and what we would share when contacting you to try to increase your privacy as much as possible.
- We can talk about other ways you can communicate safely and privately, including using someone else's phone, or a computer at a library, school, or community center.

You may also want to use this guide to [Assessing For Technology Abuse](#) with the survivor, to help determine how technology may be being misused.

## Suggested Resources for Survivors

- [Phone & Location Safety Strategies](#)
- [Spyware & Safety](#)
- [Online Privacy & Safety Tips](#)

They may also want to browse through our [Survivor's Toolkit](#) for more information.

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