

Conversation Guide: Location Tracking



What is location tracking?

Location tracking refers to the use of technology—such as GPS, apps, device settings, or tracking devices—to monitor a person’s whereabouts in real time or over a period of time. While location tracking can be helpful for navigation and safety, it can also be misused by an abuser to monitor, control, or stalk a survivor. This can increase the survivor’s risk by limiting their ability to move freely, seek support, or leave an abusive situation without being detected. Understanding how location tracking works and how to disable or limit it can be an important safety measure for survivors.

Location tracking could look like someone:

- Hiding a Bluetooth tracker (e.g., Tile, AirTag) or GPS tracker in the survivor's (or their child's) belongings or vehicle.
- Misusing location sharing apps like Find My Friends, Life360, or Family Link.
- Monitoring the survivor's or their friends'/family's social media posts or using location-sharing services like Snap Map on Snapchat.
- Using location-sharing features on messaging platforms like WhatsApp.
- Downloading stalkerware apps onto the survivor's device.

Conversation Starters with Survivors:

Before getting started, remind yourself of the foundational principles of survivor centered tech safety support, see [The 4 Core Principles of Tech Safety Planning](#).



Step 1: Understand what is happening

Start by asking questions to learn how the abuser is tracking the survivor's location. This helps determine the level of risk and harm and helps you identify the most effective steps to address the issue. Questions you can ask the survivor:

- Do you suspect your location is being monitored or tracked?
- Does your current or former partner claim to know or show up where you are or say you were somewhere different from where you told them you'd be?
- Does your current or former partner always seem to know your location, or only when you're with certain people, driving, or in specific places?
 - Use this information to narrow down how the survivor's location is being tracked.
For example, if they only know where she is when she has driven somewhere,

the location tracking may be connected to her vehicle or GPS system. If the abuser knows where she is when she has her child with her, it may be something in the child's belongings or on the child's phone. If the abuser knows about her location most of the time, that could point to spyware or misuse of an app like Find My Friends.

- What apps do you use regularly? Do you know of any that may give away your location?
- Do you share your Apple ID or Google Account with others? Does anyone else have access to these accounts and passwords?



Step 2: Understand what the survivor wants to do

Each survivor's needs and goals will be different. Instead of assuming what should happen next, ask

- What would you like to see happen? What do you want?
- Do you have an order or peace bond that your current or former partner is breaching?
- Do you want law enforcement involved?
- Do you want to keep a record of what has happened?
- Do you want to prevent your current or former partner from accessing your location?



Step 3: Identify strategies that will match the survivor's goals

Once the survivor's goals are clear, help them develop a plan to secure their location and reduce further harm. Here, we are focused on technological strategies and responses. You should also take whatever other steps you would normally recommend if, for example, an abuser is breaching a peace bond or court order or if you have immediate or urgent concerns about the survivor's safety. Below are some suggested strategies:

If you suspect the survivor's location is being tracked by a physical tracker/device:

- Check for hidden GPS devices, Bluetooth trackers, or other location-tracking tools in belongings or vehicles.
 - When searching a vehicle, check the trunk, under the hood, inside the bumper, and under or between the seats. A trusted mechanic or law enforcement officer may be able to help locate a hidden device.
 - When searching belongings, look for unfamiliar items or places where a tracker could be hidden, such as inside the lining of a purse, under shoe insoles, or within a child's toy. Some devices are as small as a quarter, so examine gifts or everyday items for unexpected electronic components.
- Determine if the vehicle has built-in location-sharing capabilities. This can be found through an online search or vehicle user manual.
- Once you locate the tracking device, assess whether it is safe to remove the tracking device or disable location sharing (e.g. would disabling it escalate the risk of violence?).
- Develop a safety plan to decide when to keep the location tracker active and when to turn it off, especially if removing it could increase the risk of violence.

If you suspect the survivor is being tracked through an app or social media, consider disabling the abusive person's access to the survivor's location through these strategies:

- Check which apps on the survivor's phone, tablet, or computer have access to their location. This can be done through the device's privacy and security settings. Survivors can choose to disable location access or limit when apps can track their location.
- Camera and photo apps often store location data, which may be included when sharing a photo. Location tracking can usually be disabled in the camera and photo app settings. Keep in mind that location details can also be revealed by what's visible in photos, such as landmarks.
- Friends may unintentionally share the survivor's location by tagging them in social media posts or checking them into specific locations. If the survivor uses social media, they may

be able to adjust privacy settings to prevent others from tagging them or sharing their location. Some platforms also offer notifications when someone shares their location.

- Some apps, such as shopping, ride-share, or food delivery services, request location access. If someone else has access to these accounts, they may be able to see the survivor's location. Go through your apps and choose when it is ok to share your location.
- Spyware (also called [stalkerware](#)) installed on a phone, tablet, or laptop can track a survivor's location without their knowledge. These apps may not be visible on the device. [Learn more](#) about mobile spyware and how to detect it.
- Depending on how the survivor is being tracked, they can contact the company providing the tracking service to request the removal of the abuser's access to their location or to learn how to better control location-sharing settings.

If the survivor wants to pursue legal action:

Survivors might not be sure if they want to go to the police or they may know they don't want to involve law enforcement right now. However, if the evidence isn't preserved when the abuse happens, they may not be able to access it later if they change their mind about involving law enforcement. Encourage them to preserve evidence before removing a location tracker or disabling the abusive person's access to their location through an app so they have proof if they ever need it . Here are some suggestions:

- Consider notifying law enforcement if it feels safe to do so. Let the survivor know that reporting to the police could lead to an investigation to see if the abuser broke any laws.
- Plan for safety, especially if they go to the police station, as the abuser may realize that they are reporting if a location tracker is still on the survivor's belongings or vehicle.
- Seek legal support. Survivors can reach out to a civil attorney or legal aid organization. The survivor may also consider applying for a civil protection order independently or with the support of an advocate or attorney.

- [Keep a record](#) of the location sharing incidences. Write down the time, date, who did it, and any other important details. See Women's Shelters Canada's (WSC) Sample [Technology-Facilitated Violence Log](#) here
- Take a photo of the location tracker and where it was found before it's removal. Take [screenshots](#) or [video screen record](#) the abuser's access to the survivor's location if they are being stalked through an app or social media.
- Include the person's profile and any details that show who they are in evidence.
- Store the evidence in a safe place. Back it up somewhere else, too, just in case.

Ensuring survivors have control over their location and privacy is an essential part of their safety and autonomy. By understanding how location tracking works and exploring strategies to limit or disable it, anti-violence workers can help survivors regain a sense of security. Whether a survivor chooses to remove a tracker, adjust app settings, or seek legal action, their safety and choices should remain at the center of any plan. Providing trauma-informed, survivor-led support ensures they can make informed decisions about their next steps while minimizing risks.

Suggested Resources

- [What is Tech-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence?](#)
- [Is Tech Abuse Happening to You \(Poster\)](#)
- [Tech Safety Planning Conversation Starters](#)
- [Tech Safety Planning Conversation Starters for Anti-Violence Workers Supporting Indigenous Survivors](#)
- [Your Safety, Your Voice: Protection Your Location Privacy](#) – Video for Survivors
- [Specific App Guides](#) is a helpful section found within the Tech Safety and Privacy Toolkit.
- [A Survivor's Guide to Location Tracking](#)
- [Mobile Spyware: Identification, Removal and Prevention](#)
- [Safety Planning Check List](#)

- [Preserving Digital Evidence Toolkit](#)
- [Video: Securing Your Location Settings](#)

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) is part of a larger pattern of violence that can happen both online and in person. As a support worker, it's important to let survivors know they are not alone. For guidance on addressing TFGBV, you can refer to our comprehensive techsafety.ca website.

This project was supported by a grant from CIRA's Net Good Program