



Assistive Technology Considerations for Shelter Workers when Creating Safety Plans

When safety planning with survivors with disabilities, it is important to include questions about assistive technology. This encourages survivors and anti-violence workers to think through any potential privacy and safety risks that an abuser may pose through assistive tech.

A safety plan with survivors that includes the misuse of assistive technology may include:

- Helping survivors identify safer or more private devices for communication.
- If impersonation is a concern, anti-violence workers and survivors can agree on a safe code phrase(s) that only the survivor knows to ensure that it really is the survivor.
- Help survivors find replacements or repairs for technology damaged by an abusive person.
- Include assistive technology planning when survivors are seeking services or relocating. If a survivor is not able to bring their technology with them, strategize about finding replacements.¹

Information about funding options and resources for assistive technology can be found in our info sheet, [Funding Options and Assistive Technology Resources](#)

¹ National Network to End Domestic Violence. Providing Accessible Services: Assistive Technology. Retrieved November 2023.



Considerations for Anti-Violence Workers

Common Experiences of Survivors with Disabilities

The following are common experiences of survivors with disabilities. Remember:

- “Tech safety” items/recommendations/steps may not be straightforward or independently achieved for persons with disabilities.
- Many people with disabilities rely on caregiver support. Caregivers may have full access to a survivor’s technology, passwords, and accounts because an individual requires assistance. The caregiver should still be obtaining consent for any activity performed on the individual’s behalf.
- Caregivers may include family, friends, care aides, housing staff
 - Caregivers often have care plans they follow. These care plans are typically set by healthcare case managers like nurses or occupational therapists. Care plans typically include support for self-care/personal hygiene, medication management, light meal preparation, and light cleaning tasks.
 - Caregivers can be assigned by the funding source. Individuals may have limited ability to request specific caregivers or changes to caregivers.
 - Assisting with technology can often be up to the discretion of the caregiver.
 - In a supportive housing or group home environment, assistance with assistive technology and communication may not be available.



Examples of Safety Planning Questions for Survivors with Disabilities:

- Who is on your healthcare team or care team that you trust?
- How do you like to communicate? Are you independent with communication or do you require assistance?
- How do you ask for help or call for help?
- What devices or software do you use for phone calls, text messages, and emails?
- How comfortable are you with placing phone calls or sending text messages or emails?
- Can you communicate independently?
- Can you communicate privately?
- Is anyone placing phone calls or sending texts or emails on your behalf without your consent?
- How tech-savvy are you?
 - How comfortable a survivor is with technology is important when creating a safety plan. It cannot be assumed that someone with a disability is proficient at using assistive technology. Digital literacy can also vary greatly. Cognitive barriers may also impact their ability to carry out safety plans.
- What assistive technology do you use?
 - Having the survivor explain their setup may assist with guiding the conversation.
- Where do you access your technology? Do you have a private space?
 - If someone relies on voice recognition/speech dictation or a screen reader (i.e. computer access methods requiring sound), can they do so privately, or can other methods be explored?
- How do you access your assistive technology?



- Who set up your assistive technology (i.e. software, hardware)?
- Who has the licenses/access codes if assistive technology needs to be reinstalled or reprogrammed?
- Who else has access to your passwords to assist you in inputting them? Where are they saved?
 - Someone with a cognitive impairment or difficulty with memory may benefit from reminders (e.g. sticky notes on a computer, list in the Notes app)
 - Are there other, safer methods that could be used (e.g. password manager app, biometric [Face ID or fingerprint] login)?
 - Is there a trusted individual who can manage passwords?
 - Can multi-factor authentication (MFA) be set up to be accessed independently?
- If someone cannot physically complete a task, can assistance be added to the caregiver care plan/list of tasks?
 - Examples: Log off/shut down computer; Put cover on webcam; Put technology in a safe place
- Does anyone turn off your environmental control devices/smart speakers for you or Wi-Fi, without your consent?
 - Who has access to the environmental control units for physical access (e.g. doors, locks)?
- Does anyone refuse to help/deny assistance with charging devices you use for communication?
- Can documents be safely copied and stored electronically if they can't be accessed physically?
- Does anyone turn off/tamper with your assistive technology? Does anyone limit your use of or move your assistive technology?



- Examples: communication device, hearing aid, wheelchair, screen reader, dictation software, assistive devices for daily living (e.g. slider boards, reachers, bath benches, dressing sticks)?
- Does anyone push your mobility device to a location you have not consented to?
- How do you get around the community (e.g. regular public transit, adapted transport bus, modified vehicle, family member)? If using adapted transport, who has access to the booking system?

To learn more about safety planning tips for specific experiences of technology-facilitated gender-based violence see [Tech Safety Planning Checklist](#). [Tech Safety Planning Checklist](#). For more information about assistive technology, see our information sheet, Common Types of Assistive Technology.

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) is part of a continuum of violence that can be both online and in-person. If you or someone you know is experiencing TFGBV, you are not alone. You can use www.sheltersafe.ca to find a shelter/transition house near you to discuss options and create a safety plan. You don't need to stay in a shelter to access free, confidential services and support.

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For more information about using tech safety visit

www.techsafety.ca

