



REMOTE ADVOCACY

During a time when most Rape Crisis Center services are being considered an essential resource, yet most hospitals and other healthcare settings are limiting or altogether prohibiting visitors in their facilities, many programs have moved to providing some or all of their services in a remote format. This means that, for the first time ever, many advocates and administrators are working predominantly from home. Although many states, including Ohio, have begun the process of “reopening,” many programs have elected to continue to offer remote-only services until there is more certainty about the safety of bringing staff back into the office environment.

We at OAESV know that the shift to working from home has probably not been seamless, and comes with a lot of barriers and considerations, which are absent when working in an office setting. This is why we have put together this resource packet, which provides tips and tricks to hopefully make working from home a little less stressful. We are also providing within this packet suggestions for supervisors on how you can still practice trauma-informed supervision while managing your RCC from a distance.

As your statewide anti-sexual violence coalition, we are also navigating this time of immense change and uncertainty, and we do not pretend to have all the answers. However, it is our hope that this resource will provide you with some new ideas for how to best serve your clients from home, which includes taking care of yourselves.



SAFETY &
CONFIDENTIALITY

Perhaps the biggest considerations in practicing ethical advocacy are survivor safety and confidentiality. These two tenants comprise the foundation of effective rapport building and ongoing communication with survivors. If your clients do not feel safe and assured that their information will be kept private when accessing your services, they will likely not be interested in engaging with you as an advocate. When utilizing technology to provide advocacy, such as video-conferencing software, telephone, text, and e-mail, maintaining these two tenants of advocacy can be tricky. Not every platform or service is created the same, and it is important to know exactly how secure your communication methods are when having remote discussions with and about survivors. Below is a list of things to consider when choosing how to safely utilize communication technology in your work:

1. **Avoid using personal devices to communicate for work purposes.** Although it may save your agency some money and can be more convenient to only carry around one communication device, having client information stored on a personal device is extremely problematic. Client contact information could be listed in your personal cellphone bill, for example. Additionally, if other household members have access to your personal communication devices, this could violate your organization's policy of not sharing survivor information with a third party. If you have no choice but to use your personal device for work purposes, try installing an app which provides a different phone number for client communication. This way, you can at least keep your clients' information in a separate space on your device, and the app may have an option to keep this information password-protected, which could prevent others from having access to it.
2. **Do not share agency-issued devices with household members.** While it may be tempting to allow your child to play a game on your work tablet, or to let your partner use your work cellphone to make a quick call, this could lead to a violation of client confidentiality. As a rule, only you should have access to any device which contains information about survivors or other private agency business, such as supervision records and employee files.
3. **Allow for supervisor access.** Make sure to keep your accounts separate. You should have e-mail and file sharing accounts which only contain work-related information and are not used for personal business. Also, make sure that at least one supervisor or administrator has access to your account, including your password. This will ensure that, if you become unexpectedly unavailable or have to suddenly pass a task off to someone else, your supervisor can access any records or information necessary to ensure that services can still be provided in your absence. Also, keep in mind that any activity you engage in on your work devices and accounts are subject to monitoring by your

supervisor. So, do not engage in personal communications or business on these devices if it is prohibited by your agency, or if you don't want your employer to find out about it.

4. **Use Passwords/Passcodes.** Be sure that any account or device which contains private work-related information is password/passcode protected. In the event that your device is lost or stolen, this will hopefully help to ensure that survivor or employee information cannot be accessed by anyone else. It is also helpful, as it is likely that you have others living with you in your home and it is not always possible to keep work devices in a place that is inaccessible to others. For this reason, it is also recommended that you choose a password which you do not use for personal accounts, especially if those accounts/passwords are shared with others in your home.
5. **Install security software/apps.** If your agency device(s) does not come with pre-loaded security software or apps, make sure to ask your supervisor about the policies and protocols regarding installing something yourself. Oftentimes, there are security apps or software available for free online, though paid subscriptions often offer more protection. Be sure to seek approval from your supervisor before installing anything on agency-owned devices. Also, make sure to run updates on your devices as recommended, as these updates often include security features.
6. **Use a private, password-protected Wi-Fi account.** Whenever possible, make sure that you are using your own private Wi-Fi account when working from home, as opposed to a public account provided by an area business or neighbor. Also, make sure your Wi-Fi account is password-protected, so others outside of your home cannot access your Wi-Fi, and do not provide the password to guests or neighbors. During this time when many people are home and wanting to utilize the internet, it can feel good to be charitable and let your neighbors use your Wi-Fi, but this could compromise client confidentiality when you are using the same account for advocacy.
7. **Be careful about downloading apps.** For devices you conduct advocacy on, be sure to only download the apps that are necessary for doing your work. Most apps ask for access to your pictures, contacts, and other applications. If you have survivor information stored in your contacts, email, or other places on the device, you could be putting this information at risk by allowing this access. Also, when you do download apps, make sure you download them directly from the pre-installed app store on your device (Apple Store or Google Play Store). Downloading apps from external sources can put your device at risk for security breaches.
8. **Be ready and willing to make accommodations.** Survivors' ability to connect on a digital platform will vary, depending on their particular circumstances. Be sure that you are approaching remote advocacy from a social justice platform by being prepared to accommodate survivors in as many ways as possible. This includes ensuring that all advocates have access to a language interpretation service, to assist survivors with Limited English Proficiency. Also, consider survivors who are deaf or hard of hearing. Is there a TTI or text-communication option available, or is there a way to access a sign language interpretation service remotely? Also think about survivors who may not have internet access. Is there an option for them to receive services over the phone? For folks who are only available to access in-person services, are limited office hours being made available, or is there a community partner agency you can work with who can meet with the survivor in-person and assist them with accessing phone or web-based advocacy?

- 9. Consider options for remote hospital advocacy.** Several hospitals and clinics in the state have prohibited guests on their premises, including advocates, in an effort to mitigate contamination risk. Given that advocates usually make first contact with survivors at the hospital, this could be a large contributing factor to a decrease in requests for sexual violence advocacy services. If your agency is not currently able to send advocates to the hospital to provide crisis intervention, there are still options for reaching survivors during this time. We at OAESV have created an introduction-to-advocacy video, which has been distributed widely to hospitals throughout Ohio. This video is to be shown to survivors when they arrive at the hospital for a sexual assault examination, and explains the services available at the local RCC. Further, you can be sure to provide the SANE office with packets or pamphlets of information to be given to survivors, so they can access your services at a later date. Ideally, the SANE can contact the advocate by dialing your agency's 24/7 hotline number and allowing the advocate to speak to the survivor while they are in the hospital. This way, the hotline advocate can do a phone intake and secure contact information which can be given to a fulltime advocate or case manager, who can reach out to the survivor at another time and offer ongoing services.
- 10. Consider options for remote hotline advocacy.** Many 24/7 RCC hotlines operate by having a hotline advocate available in-person to answer a telephone at the RCC facility. This is especially true for dual-service DV/SV agencies located within an emergency shelter facility. However, if it is possible for the advocate to not come into an office to answer the phone, it might be safer during this time to consider options for them to answer the hotline from home. One option that many RCCs across the state utilize is the employment of an answering service. The answering service can patch the calls through to the advocate's personal phone, which would prohibit the caller from having access to the advocate's personal phone number. Another option would be to forward calls made to the hotline number directly to the on-call advocate. If you are interested in this option, talk to an agency administrator about reaching out to the agency's phone company to inquire as to this possibility. Also, some agencies utilize an on-call cell-phone for hotline advocacy, which is usually kept within the office. It may be possible for this cell-phone to be safely exchanged between hotline advocates, so they can answer the phone from their homes, as opposed to coming into the office.

Sources: <https://www.techsafety.org/resources-agencyuse/mobilecomputing-bestpractices>
<https://www.oaesv.org/what-we-do/resources-for-providers/covid19-emerging-response-resources/healthcare-resources/>



SELF CARE & SCREEN FATIGUE

As you have been providing remote advocacy services for several weeks now, you may have noticed that you are feeling more exhausted than usual. This may be confusing for you, as you might have expected that working from home would be less tiring than working in the office. After all, you no longer have a commute, and you can possibly even work in your pajamas! However, research has shown that blending the work and home environments, especially unexpectedly, can come with some unanticipated stressors, which are known to cause a lot of mental—and physical exhaustion.

According to Steven Hickman, Psy.D., executive director of the Center for Mindful Self-Compassion, there is a new phenomenon being known as “Zoom Fatigue,” which many are now experiencing due to the worldwide shift to remote work across almost all industries and disciplines. Though we may expect that sitting at a computer desk all day would not be very taxing, Hickman suggests that online engagement can actually require a lot of attention and effort. In his article entitled “Zoom Fatigue is Real. Here are Six Ways to Find Balance and Stay Connected,” Hickman states that, when engaging with someone on a digital platform, you are required to gather a lot of information from far fewer visual and body language cues than you would have if you were engaging in person. When engaging with several people in one online space, such as in a Zoom meeting, or conference call, he says you are trying to process and analyze limited cues from several folks at once, which can be exhausting in itself.

Another aspect to “Zoom Fatigue” is the fact that, when engaging on remote platforms, we tend to be multitasking more than we would be in an in-person setting. For example, you may be listening to a webinar, but also checking your e-mail and responding to text messages from clients at the same time. If you were in a room at a conference, listening to a presenter, you would likely only be focused on the presentation, as opposed to having to divide your focus amongst many tasks at once. To avoid over-exerting yourself in these situations, Hickman suggests being hyper-aware of your own actions and not engaging in more than one activity at a time.

Additionally, many of you are probably working from home with children or elders to care for, or maybe you have a second job you are also trying to do from home. It can be difficult to ignore household responsibilities, when they are literally staring you in the face. It can be incredibly exhausting to be bouncing between childcare duties, homeschooling, cleaning the kitchen, working, and any other responsibilities which may arise when working from home. If you get to the end of the day and wonder why you are so tired from “just sitting at the computer all day,” try to remember all the additional

tasks you probably completed on your “break time,” which you wouldn’t have been doing if you were in the office.

Fortunately, in light of the pandemic, several resources have emerged regarding self-care, especially given the shift to remote work during this unprecedented time. However, we do understand that self-care can sometimes be as taxing as work, parenting, or household responsibilities, when you consider the uniquely stressful position that everyone is in. Practicing self-care does not have to be a well-thought-out activity, nor does it have to be time consuming. Simply think of something that brings you joy, even something simple. For example, there might be a television show that you enjoy watching. Try to carve out 30-60 minutes a day to watch the show. If you don’t have that much time, maybe your self-care can consist of taking a five-minute break during your work day to do a few stretches or to just close your eyes and take a few deep breaths.

An easy way to engage in self-care without putting too much effort into it, and to prevent yourself from sinking into depression or experiencing burnout during this time is to make sure you still engage in regular physical grooming and health habits. Working from home, it can be easy to jump out of bed and get straight to work. However, it is important for both the mind and body that you hold onto some of the same habits and routines that you had when you worked outside of the home.

When you transition from sleep to work, make sure to change your clothes. Even if you change into another pair of pajamas, the act of changing outfits for the day signals to the brain that it is time to shift your focus. Also, make sure you are eating regularly. It can be easy to get out of a meal schedule and just eat whenever you feel like it, since you are at home, after all. However, having a meal schedule can help regulate your digestive system, which helps to give you enough physical energy to get through the day. Keeping regular hygiene and grooming habits is also very important during this time. You may be happy to not have to do your makeup every morning now, which is great! However, still make sure you brush your teeth and hair, wash your face, and shower as regularly as you would if you were working outside the home. Again, these are all activities that signal to your brain you are preparing for the day ahead, even though now that day may look very different from before.

Sources: <https://www.mindful.org/zoom-exhaustion-is-real-here-are-six-ways-to-find-balance-and-stay-connected/>; <http://www.resource-sharing-project.org/working-remotely>



MAINTAINING TRAUMA
INFORMED SUPERVISION
PRACTICES

Supervising advocates from a distance is probably a very new experience for any Rape Crisis Center Director or Program Manager. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that most RCC programs are grant funded, and funders expect certain deliverables to be met. As a supervisor, you may be feeling added pressure to justify how your staff is spending their time when they are not in the office or seeing clients in person. As a non-profit manager, the threat of losing funding is always looming over your head, and during this time of great uncertainty, it can be easy to fall into a pattern of micro-managing from a distance; demanding increased documentation of time worked, or possibly even reducing staff hours and laying people off.

However, it is important to remember what your agency stands for. You work for a crisis center; your very work is supporting people through unexpected traumatic circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic is an unexpected traumatic experience that is affecting every human across the world, including your staff. How can you expect them to continue to work their hardest to support survivors during this time, if they do not feel supported by the leadership at their agency?

According to an article published by the Oregon Institute of Occupational Health Sciences, entitled “4 key strategies to help supervisors support employee well-being during COVID-19,” there is an increased risk of burnout, stress, and negative health outcomes for employees who are suddenly balancing remote work with family responsibilities. In the article, authors Leslie Hammer, PhD and Lindsey Alley, MS state that “management must set the tone and serve as a resource for workers,” during this pandemic. Below is a list of four ways that agency leadership can support their employees’ mental and physical wellbeing while supervising from a distance, based off of Hammer and Alley’s suggestions.

- 1. Provide emotional support.** Simply asking employees how they are feeling and letting them know that you are here to listen to their personal and professional concerns can make a huge difference. It is highly likely that, at some point, every advocate will be feeling overwhelmed with the shift to remote work. One way that you can provide emotional support without a lot of added effort is to allow time at weekly team meetings or check-ins for each employee to share any life updates and discuss any personal or professional barriers they are facing, if they feel comfortable doing so. This allows space for advocates to provide each other with peer support as well.

2. **Be a role model.** Demonstrate with your own actions and words how important it is to have a healthy work-life balance during this time. If your staff sees that you are not taking time for yourself or your family, and are consistently working, they may feel as if that same response is expected of them, even if you are saying the opposite. Be sure to set personal boundaries, keep a regular work schedule as much as possible, and respect your own personal time. Put down the work phone, do not send or respond to work related e-mails when you are not working, and do not contact advocates outside of their working hours, except for emergencies. This sends the message that you care about them and respect their personal time.
3. **Be flexible.** Wherever possible, allow for employees to change their schedule based on personal needs and commitments. Staff who are working from home while also homeschooling children, for example, may not be able to work the same hours they would if they were in the office. Allow for them to work on evenings and weekends, if this is feasible. Also, ask for staff input when scheduling virtual team meetings and supervision calls. Simply scheduling something and expecting staff to be available during that time sends the message that you do not care about their personal schedule and circumstances. Additionally, expect that advocates may have to make unexpected changes to their availability due to personal commitments which come up out of the blue. Try to be understanding and supportive when this happens, as opposed to angry and frustrated.
4. **Do not require additional documentation.** It can be tempting to ask staff to heavily document their time worked, client interactions, and other projects completed in order to ensure the same level of productivity as before. However, when you start asking advocates to provide you with documentation or proof of time worked beyond what you required before, this sends the message that you don't trust them to continue to do their job effectively from home. Remember that your staff are experts in adapting to crisis; it is literally what they do for a living. If they do not have as many requests for services from survivors, for example, it is likely they will find another project to keep themselves busy. Remember, our work is never done in the anti-violence field. Trust your advocates to know what needs to be done and to do it, even if you can't be there to witness it.

Source: <https://blogs.ohsu.edu/occupational-health-sciences/2020/03/25/4-key-strategies-to-help-supervisors-support-employee-well-being-during-covid-19/>



CONCLUSION

There is no perfect answer as to how to adapt to a sudden shift in the way we do our work, due to a worldwide crisis. As we often tell survivors, any reaction is a “normal reaction to an abnormal circumstance.” Now, more than ever, we need to practice self-care, give ourselves and our coworkers grace, and understand that while we are all weathering the same storm, we are wading in different boats. Everyone’s personal circumstances are different, which means their ability to adapt to remote work will vary, even amongst advocates who work at the same agency. Remember that, while remote work can feel very isolating, you are not alone. We at OAESV are here to support you and your entire agency; to provide suggestions and tips, and to listen to your needs and concerns. Please feel free to reach out to us via e-mail at info@oaesv.org and to keep an eye on our COVID Support Webpage at www.oaesv.org/COVIDSUPPORT, where we will provide up-to-date information which may be helpful to advocates during this time. Take deep breaths, remember that the work you are doing is crucial, know that you are significant, and know that you are loved.