Dear Advocates,

COVID-19 has presented challenges in the way we do our work. It has also provided us the opportunity to re-imagine how we do our work and take care of ourselves.

This guide will provide you some tips for working from home while still providing quality advocacy to survivors. Should you need more support, feel free to reach out to us. We are here to support you!

Love,

The ACESDV Team
Keeping Confidentiality

Maintaining confidentiality should still be a priority when providing services. While working from home, advocates should be conscious of the personal information in their possession and who may have access to it. Here are some things to keep in mind as you transition to working from home!

File, organize, and dispose of documents properly

From quick scribbles and emails, to court files, advocates have a responsibility to keep these documents secure. If you use a computer, make it part of your personal routine to fully close out and shut down your computer when you step away.

- Consider keeping a single notebook so you stay organized and only have one thing to keep track of.
- To secure documents you are keeping, consider investing in a document safe.
- For disposing of documents, consider investing in a shredder.
- Have a conversation with your organization about providing these tools to those working from home and/or contracting a secure third-party vendor for your document destruction needs.
Get verbal and virtual confirmation

Getting consent from survivors is always important. During this time, we have to adapt to other ways beyond signing forms to obtain consent from survivors. Strategize at your agency a way to collect signatures electronically, or even consider moving to verbal confirmations during this time. For more information about digital services and getting virtual consent, go to the NNEDV Safety Net Project and check out their Digital Services Toolkit.

Ensure meetings and phone calls are taken in a private place

Get creative in making a private space. This can be a separate room, your car, or even your large walk-in closet, if you have one! Any place you can be alone and have a door that shuts is ideal.

Tip!

Be transparent about your work environment. Let survivors know about some interruptions that may take place during your calls. For example, if you have kids or pets, let the survivor know that you are doing your best to minimize background noise as you currently have children or pets in the home due to COVID-19.
Build Your Own Mobile Toolkit

Advocates are never sure when they will receive a call from a survivor in crisis. Having your own “mobile toolkit” prepped and ready may be helpful when you have a less permanent working space while at home.

Some of these materials may be:
- Different color writing utensils
- Highlighter
- Notepad or your advocate notebook
- Something to drink
- Snack
- Fidget items

Think about what helps you stay grounded and engaged when doing your work.

What helps you stay focused and remember information when speaking with survivors?

A fidget is an object that keeps your hands busy while your mind is occupied.
Providing Services Remotely

During this time, advocates should be flexible in the many different ways to provide advocacy. This will most likely require a more creative use of electronic and virtual resources.

Offer one-on-one advocacy sessions virtually or telephonically

Advocates are still able to provide active listening and emotional support even when the person is not sitting in front of them. Check out this resource for how to choose a platform.

Consider moving support groups/group meetings to an online platform

Web-based meeting platforms are useful because you can hold a meeting with multiple people. Many of them also have a ‘raise your hand’ and a ‘chat function’ to help make these meetings more dynamic.

When using web-based platforms for services, it's important to consider function, as well as privacy. NNEDV has this comparison chart for several online platforms. You can also add additional protections to your meetings. Check out this article, How I can prevent Zoombombing.
Remote Accompaniment

Develop procedures to provide remote accompaniment, such as calling-in during a court hearing or forensic exam. There should be separate policies developed for how these processes will work internally at your agency, and for collaboration with others such as the courts, medical facilities, and other members of your local SART/CCRT. For more information on remote medical accompaniment during COVID-19, go to the Research Sharing Project’s Hospital Advocacy and Sexual Assault Forensic Exams section.

Suggestion
If you're not able to do accompaniment, think about leaving several of your agency’s materials with these partners as well as a letter to survivors as to why you can’t be there in person. This way, survivors can contact your agency later at their discretion.
Boundaries

Creating a work and home life balance might be difficult when your primary work space changes from your agency to your kitchen table. Advocates might need to create new boundaries when it comes to managing your availability and self-expectations.

Set clear work hours
As best you can, inform your supervisor, coworkers, and survivors you’re working with about your availability and do your best to stick to those times. When you’re not working, do your best to distance yourself, whether physically or mentally, from your work.

Debrief with your co-workers
Debriefing with those who understand your work can help with collective burnout and work fatigue. For more tips on how to stay connected with others, check out our ACESDV Self-Care during COVID-19 interactive workbook!

Practice saying no
For helpers, saying no can sometimes be difficult. Setting boundaries allows us to re-energize and take care of our own needs, so we can continue to assist others long-term. Practice saying, “no thanks”, and “I’m going to pass”, more frequently in your vocabulary.
Have a Designated Workspace

Finding a designated workspace while at home can help you focus and begin the day. This workspace can be stationary or rotating, but it needs to be a place that you can think freely and privately. Ideally, this would be an area separate from the space in your home where you relax.

For some people, this is a location with plenty of sunshine, fresh air, and things to look at—maybe on your porch or backyard!

For others, it might be their home office that has nice lighting, minimal noise, and a calming scent. Find the balance that is right for you!

We wanna see your workspace!

Send us a picture of your workspace to christa@acesdv.org, or tag us in the picture on social media!
Develop a Routine
Physically commuting to your agency provides some of that natural structure that we are missing while working from home. Intentionally building that structure back in your day can help signal to your brain that it's time to work and complete your day’s tasks. Here are some of our favorite work from home routine ideas.

Consider "commuting"
Try doing the same thing every morning so you’re in the headspace for work. This could be stretching, checking your schedule, reading the news, or dressing-up for work. At the end of the day, consider closing your computer, putting away all your work materials or even driving around your block so you have time to switch from work to relaxation mode.

Don’t forget to take breaks!
You can go for a jog, unload your dishwasher, have a snack, water your plants and more! If it helps, you can schedule regular breaks throughout your workday so you remember to take them. You can also try to schedule a Skype lunch with your co-workers a couple of times a week! Check out these stretches you can do while working from home.
Beyond Providing Advocacy

When you’re not providing advocacy to survivors, there are still other ways to be productive. Now might be the best time to take care of some administrative functions and focus on professional development.

Have regular meetings on your calendar

Think about scheduling regular check-ins with your fellow advocates, supervisor, and people you work with. We can all use some additional support during times of uncertainty.

These might be things like

- Working on a longstanding project
- Completing your unfinished paperwork and data entry

These might be things like

- Watching webinars and other activities that will enhance your professional development
- Preparing yourself for the following day
Let's get working!

Want some background music while you work? Check out NNEDV's Empowerment playlist on Spotify!

Connect with us!

Helpline (Monday through Friday, 8:30am - 5:00pm)
(602) 279-2900 or 1 (800) 782-6400

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