



Positively Safe:

THE INTERSECTION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & HIV/AIDS

WHAT HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE INTERSECTION OF HIV, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, CONFIDENTIALITY & TECH

POSITIVE USE OF TECH

The HIV and Domestic Violence (DV) fields are two separate disciplines that are aligned and intersect in several ways. As a result, it is important that advocates and providers working in both fields understand the many layers and challenges that survivors may experience. As technology continues to emerge and intertwine with our social lives we must also understand how we may be putting survivors at risk within our programs.

The rise of awareness around both of these issues has given survivors courage to speak out and connect to the supports that they need in order to live a life that is free from violence. Survivors now have the opportunity to join online groups where they can connect with others who are impacted by the same issues, contact programs in their community for support, or share a status to build awareness amongst friends and followers.

As advocates and service providers it is vital that we talk to survivors about positive health and wellness and center our work around privacy and confidentiality best practices. We must educate survivors so they are confident in receiving the support we are providing them and understand how to navigate the various other systems that they may come in contact with. Essentially, we want to encourage survivors to request the support and services that they need so they can live healthy lives free from abuse.



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While we are providing survivors with the support they need, we must also understand the positive ways that they are using technology. Survivors use technology in the same ways that we do to communicate via text, email and social media. They also use technology to locate resources, support groups, date, attend school, and search for employment. With all of this in mind, we should be encouraging survivors to stay connected in these positive ways while educating them on privacy and safety related to their use of technology.

HOW ABUSERS MAY MISUSE TECHNOLOGY AGAINST SURVIVORS WHO ARE LIVING WITH HIV

While all of these connections may be positive, there are various ways that technology can be misused and cause harm to survivors. There are several ways an abuser can cause harm to a survivor by stalking, harassing, and monitoring them through technology. Abusers are aware of the harm they may cause and want to maintain power and control; one way is through physically going through a survivor's device searching for information about their medical history / HIV status. This information can be used to threaten and humiliate the survivor by sharing it with family, friends, and online communities that the survivor is a part of. Financial abuse is also a tactic that can be used to maintain power and control. Abusers can go through the survivors' device to monitor banking activities or housing benefits, force them to engage in sexual acts via web cam video or sell sex online via apps. As a way to keep the survivor engaged in these acts, abusers may also save emails and text messages from the past in order to incriminate the survivors about their HIV status.

IMPORTANCE OF PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Disclosing someone's HIV status can lead to major consequences. They can face risks of being homeless, physical harm, loss of their support system and income, and receive further stigmatization from community and service providers. Survivors that receive support services from a program that is funded through the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA), or the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) must follow strict confidentiality obligations and guidelines. Safety should always be the cornerstone of service provision. If a survivor does not feel safe, they will not trust the program and the services that are being offered. Survivors do not need to disclose their HIV status in order to receive services at a DV program. Survivors who are receiving services within a medical setting are protected by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, also known as HIPAA. When a survivor is requesting support from our program, they are usually seeking a specific



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service and have a need. In order to meet that need there are specific questions that we may need to ask them to fulfill a requirement from a funder or for stats within our organization.

Many of these questions are sensitive in nature and should not be a part of our intake process. Questions about a survivor's medical status are not needed for domestic violence programs to fulfill the services a survivor is seeking. Before we collect any sensitive information from a survivor we should ask ourselves, why are we collecting this information? How will this information help us provide support to the survivor? For more on Intakes, take a look at our [Model Intake Form](#). Requesting information about a survivor's health and HIV status in order to provide them with services is invasive, problematic and against the law.