



Safely staying connected and informed about coronavirus

With the surplus of coronavirus-related (COVID-19) information available online, through cable news, and many other streams, it can be a challenge for anyone to sort through it all to determine the most important information for them. Through that process, Hubbard House encourages survivors of domestic violence and anyone supporting a survivor to take a few extra precautions.

There are many tactics an abuser can use right now relating specifically to coronavirus, including intentionally misinforming the survivor about the virus and isolating them from important resources and knowledge. Hubbard House has a [comprehensive look at those tactics on our website](#). For survivors, accurate information and communication with people outside of the home can be crucially important because of this, but that should be done carefully, in order to prevent a heightened risk of abuse.

In many abusive relationships, the abuser may have access to the survivor's text messages, internet history, phone logs, social media accounts, and more. A helpful message from a friend through those channels, therefore, can be intercepted by the abuser. If the communication appears to provide the survivor helpful support, information that contradicts what the abuser has said, or encouragement to leave, the abuser may see their control slipping away, and that can create an even more dangerous environment for the survivor.

While in-person communication is normally the safest option, it presents health risks right now, because of the spread of coronavirus. Instead, to provide support for survivors, Hubbard House encourages the use of "safe devices"- a phone or computer that the abuser has not had access to or does not know about. As an example, a survivor may be able to purchase a prepaid cellphone to use for emergency communications. If a survivor doesn't have one of these devices already and can't safely obtain one because of the self-quarantine measures currently in effect, then the survivor should always be aware that their phone records could be seen by the abuser. A code word could also be developed that the survivor can use to indicate during a call that the abuser is nearby, or that s/he is in need of help. Again, because of self-quarantines, it is likely the abuser will be close by when conversations are taking place, so if a codeword hasn't already been developed, allow the survivor to determine a safe time to have that conversation, like when the abuser goes on a walk or to get the mail.

It can be overwhelming to get accurate information and help, but Hubbard House wants survivors to know that you are not alone. If you have the ability to send a text message, you can reach trained Hubbard House advocates 24/7 by texting (904)210-3698. An advocate will respond via text and will help determine the safest way to continue

communicating. You can speak with advocates directly by calling the Hubbard House hotline at (904)354-3114.

It is best to commit both of these numbers to memory, however, if you need to save them in your phone, please do not save them as the “Hubbard House Text Line” or “Hubbard House Hotline”. Instead save them under a different name, so that if the abuser ever gains access to your phone, s/he doesn’t see that you have knowledge of and access to this life-saving resource.

If talking on the phone is not an option, and the communication must be in writing, remember that an abuser may have access to text, email, or social media accounts. When possible, you survivors are encouraged to delete written communication, including deleting text messages and clearing emails out of the inbox, sent, and trash folders.

If the abuser doesn’t have the password for the account, but can get to the survivor’s phone, that is another way they can get in to see the messages. Additionally, if a survivor is doing any research or communication online, the browser history should be cleared at the end of every session- if not even more frequently- to reduce the risk of an abuser seeing the websites the survivor is searching.

For survivors and supporters alike, taking these steps to guard your communication should not be a deterrent to communicating. It is important survivors have people and resources they can turn to if they feel it is safe to do so. Please use these considerations to guide your communication, but don’t let them turn you away from getting help.

The National Network to End Domestic Violence has an in-depth list of resources where you can learn more about [safety planning around technology](#) on their website. With these considerations, Hubbard House encourages all survivors to continually safety plan, and that’s most effectively done with the help of our trained advocates, by calling (904)354-3114 or texting (904)210-3698. If there is ever an immediate emergency that requires law enforcement, please call 911 without hesitation.