

Using Technology to Connect with Victims of Mass Violence Incidents AND Help Victims Stay Connected with Others

The novel Coronavirus (COVID-19, also known as SARS-Co-V2) has transformed the way we socialize and interact with others, making the use of technology a powerful tool to combat social isolation and support important social connections. For those in victim services, connection through technology is critical to providing services and coordinating resources.

Social distancing refers to the intentional practice of creating physical distance between people to slow the spread of an infectious disease. However, this term is often thought of as misleading. Human beings are social and relational by nature. When we are socially isolated, such as when distancing protocols have been put in place, many people experience increased fear and anxiety, boredom and symptoms of depression, anger, frustration, and irritability. Populations at higher risk for catching COVID-19 or having more severe symptoms from COVID-19 are likely to struggle more and may also experience stigmatization. Additionally, those who are already vulnerable to social isolation (homeless, elderly, people with disabilities, rural community members, etc.) are at increased risk for being further socially isolated during stay at home orders. “Physical distancing” can be augmented with “social connectedness.”

Social media and technology can help us connect with our clients to let them know they are not alone, normalize their feelings and experience, and remind them that their needs are still a priority even during the current public health crisis.

Alternatives to Face-to-face Meetings

Don't discount the value in simply making phone calls. Understand that economic, generational, and technological barriers may exist for folks to use social media, like Facebook, Facebook Messenger, Instagram, and Facetime. While these are all great ways to meet with clients and stay in touch, be sure to encourage any form of communication that is accessible and healthy.

Below is a list of some additional apps available as alternative ways to connect with others:

Help Victims to Stay Connected with Others (Friends, Family, Fellow Victims)

The social media apps below are **free of charge**. The stars reflect public opinions and ratings provided on the app store. (Note. NMMVRC is not endorsing any of these social media apps, we are simply providing these as a resource)

- Houseparty ★★★★★
 - Caters to younger generations (Gen Z and Millennials)
 - Allows other users to know when you are in the “house” so they can jump on and join you.
- Google Hangouts ★★★★★☆☆
 - Free group calls up to 10 people
 - Messaging includes photos, stickers, and emoji’s
 - Real-time captions and speech-to-text available in *Hangouts Meet by Google*
- Discord ★★★★★
 - Semi-private and invite-only servers
 - Talk in real time while multi-tasking
 - Screen sharing
 - Watch friends stream their video games

The Social Media apps below may involve fees for use:

- Zoom ★★★★★
 - Great for formal meetings and conferencing
 - Classrooms, Family Chats, Work Meetings
 - Note. Some services are free but Zoom also offers the option to pay for more expansive services.
- Netflix Party ★★★★★☆☆
 - Chrome plug-in
 - Watch movies/shows on Netflix with friends at the same time aka “watch party”

Faith through Technology

- Communities of faith are providing virtual and teleconferencing platforms to engage their populations, maintain connections, and help congregants deal with the crisis.

When to Take a Break from Social Media

While social media offers a great way to stay connected, it is important to take some “breaks.” This is especially important to consider if news or posts become overwhelming or consistently cause distress and other negative emotions.

- If you need a break from just one page, group or person, Facebook allows a user to “snooze” them in their news feed for 30 days by clicking the three dots in the upper right corner of the post and selecting the snooze option.

Importance of Using Reliable Sources

- Filter unreliable news from social media by researching the institution behind the article or information. Sources that are local or that deals directly with the crisis, like the Centers for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov) or the World Health Organization (WHO; www.who.int), offer the most reliable information.

- Most states and counties have websites dedicated to COVID-19 that provide up-to-date and reliable local information about how to get tested (i.e., who is eligible, where to get testing), numbers of people who have tested negative and positive, AND the number of people who have recovered.
- Encourage this resource for those who may need a positive perspective through facts. There are more people testing negative than are testing positive, and people ARE recovering.
- Actively encourage folks to turn off media “commentators” and reading articles from people that are titled, “I’m a doctor and here’s what I know.” This is not helpful in managing crisis situations and instead can increase anxiety and misinformation.
- Use fact-checking sites such as SNOPE.com for accuracy of information.

Safety and Technology

- The IRS publishes the following on their website – this is a good example of how to explain these safety precautions to victims: *“The IRS urges taxpayers to be on the lookout for scam artists trying to use the economic impact payments as cover for schemes to steal personal information and money. Remember, the IRS will not call, text, email or contact you on social media asking for personal or bank account information – even related to the economic impact payments”* (IRS.gov).
- Advise clients to watch out for emails with attachments or links claiming to have special information about economic impact payments or refunds. DO NOT CLICK on any links!
- Other forms of fraud:
 - *Spoofer emails* are emails that usually contain a link or request for information. They appear to be from a contact but often contain a slight variation to that contact’s email address. If there is any uncertainty about the sender’s address, do not open the email.
 - Fraudulent surveys are illegitimate surveys that request private, personal information. Advise clients not to participate in any linked survey or provide personal information through the internet.

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