



Indiana Coalition to End Sexual Assault & Human Trafficking

Engage. Educate. Empower.

Guidance for Rape Crisis Centers and Sexual Assault Service Providing Organizations

In response to the current COVID-19 pandemic, the Indiana Coalition to End Sexual Assault and Human Trafficking has established the following guidance for Rape Crisis Centers and sexual assault service providing organizations. The guidance is based on CDC guidelines, the Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) and guidance publicly shared by the Governor of the State of Indiana.

It is recommended that the following in-person direct services be suspended until further notice from the CDC:

- 24/hour Medical Response to the Hospital
- Criminal Justice/Legal Advocacy (i.e. interviews and court accompaniment)
- Support Groups
- Community Outreach/Awareness
- Counseling/Therapy

With the recommended suspension of these services, it is critical that survivors of sexual violence feel connected, engaged, and continue to have access to the invaluable services that your agencies provide. Agencies should make the necessary accommodations to begin shifting to remote advocacy and begin modifying service provisions. Consider providing “virtual” services such as teletherapy, virtual groups and meetings. **Agencies that offer a 24/hour crisis helpline must continue to offer this service without interruption during this time.**

It is very important that your programs have a remote work and administrative leave policy as well as an emergency preparedness policy that addresses unexpected and extraordinary circumstances. These policies will be helpful when seeking reimbursement for services from state and federal funders. If you have not yet created or updated these policies, we encourage you to do so. Here are some [Here are some examples](#) of such policies for your reference.

The Indiana Criminal Justice Institute (ICJI) released [a COVID-19-letter to constituents -grant-interruptions](#) on March 17, 2020 that provides guidance on *Conference, Events, and Other Gatherings, and Salaries/Personnel/ Performance of Grant Work* for both Office of Justice Programs and Health and Human Services grant funded programs. We will continue to work with ICJI and provide you with updated information as it is released.

As you modify services and move to working remotely, we would encourage you to take the following into consideration:

- **Confidential workspace:** each program will need to work with advocates to assess their remote workspaces and if confidential services can be provided. If, for example, an advocate's partner is also temporarily working from home, the advocate will need to ensure that there is a separate room and soundproof room for the advocate to respond to victim phone calls.
- **Temporary file storage:** if advocates need to work remotely for some time, they will likely need to bring client files home. Best practice states that files should be kept in a lockbox. Discuss with staff how files will remain confidential. With electronic files, you will want to set expectations and perhaps policy for advocates who will share a computer at home with partners, children, or others. The policy/supervision expectations should address signing in and out of databases, clearing history, etc., to protect confidentiality.
- **Phone Access:** if you do not already provide cell phones to staff, issues of confidentiality may arise. It might be advantageous for your programs to provide temporary cell phones to advocates. Discuss with your grant manager as this may likely not be in your current budget. VAWA and VOCA regulations clarify that grantees must not disclose, reveal, or release any personally identifying information regardless of whether the information has been encoded, encrypted, hashed, or otherwise protected. Additionally, VAWA regulations require grantees to make reasonable efforts to prevent the inadvertent disclosure of identifying and individual information, especially when making use of any third-party database, or internal database managed by an outside company. When using cell phones, and when the occasion arises when an advocate has to use their personal cell phone consider the following:
 - Don't save survivor contact information in a mobile phone.
 - All incoming and outgoing calls and texts should be purged regularly.
 - If the phone has both internal memory and a memory card, save to only one and regularly delete from that. Saving to a memory card offers greater protection since a memory card can be removed and destroyed.
 - Before getting rid of a phone or updating the phone to give to a new advocate, reset the phone to factory settings to clear any data that is on the phone.
 - Advocates can use a virtual phone service and voicemail to contact a survivor, allowing the advocate to keep private their phone number.
 - Alternatively, an advocate can prevent their number from showing in the receiver's Caller ID by either dialing *67 before dialing the number or turn off "Show My Caller ID" in the smartphone settings.
 - Call logs and text message logs related to communication with survivors should be deleted immediately from the advocate's phone.

For additional information on [Using Technology to communicate with survivors during a public health crisis](#), [Best practices for mobile advocacy](#), and [How to operate as a remote workplace during a public health crisis](#).

Information on COVID-19 is changing rapidly and information is being updated daily. It is also essential for Rape Crisis Centers and other sexual assault service providing organizations to **monitor and follow the guidance of the [Indiana State Department of Health](#) and the [Centers for Disease Control](#)**. Their guidance may evolve quickly, and they have the best information about local conditions.

We are in uncharted times; however, as sexual assault service providers, greater challenges have been overcome.

Thank you for all that you do each and every day!