



Family Violence and Technology

This resource is part of a series
about family violence risk and
safety produced by Women's
Refuge with support from
Contact Energy



WOMEN'S REFUGE

How can we best support victims?

Most family violence involves some form of digital technology. This resource sets out some step advocates can take to best support clients with digital abuse.

You don't need to be a tech expert to support victims of digital abuse



Support



Key facts about digital abuse

Refuge research found specific risks relating to phones and other digital technology. Perpetrators abuse victims through technology that most of us use everyday.

Digital abuse is often associated with intimate partner homicide.

Technology itself is not dangerous

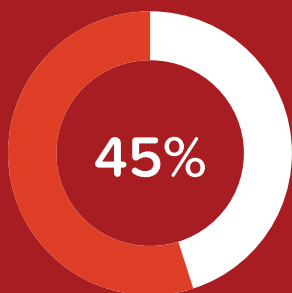
80%

Over 80% of Refuge clients have experienced digital abuse through their phones and other technology.

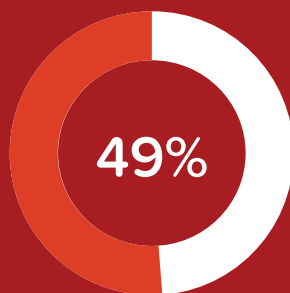


Refuge risk assessment data shows many victims experience constant:

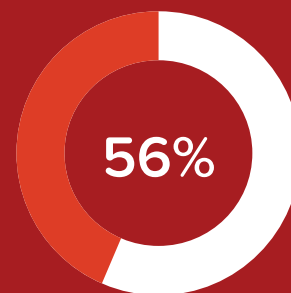
Checking of their private messages



Unwanted contact



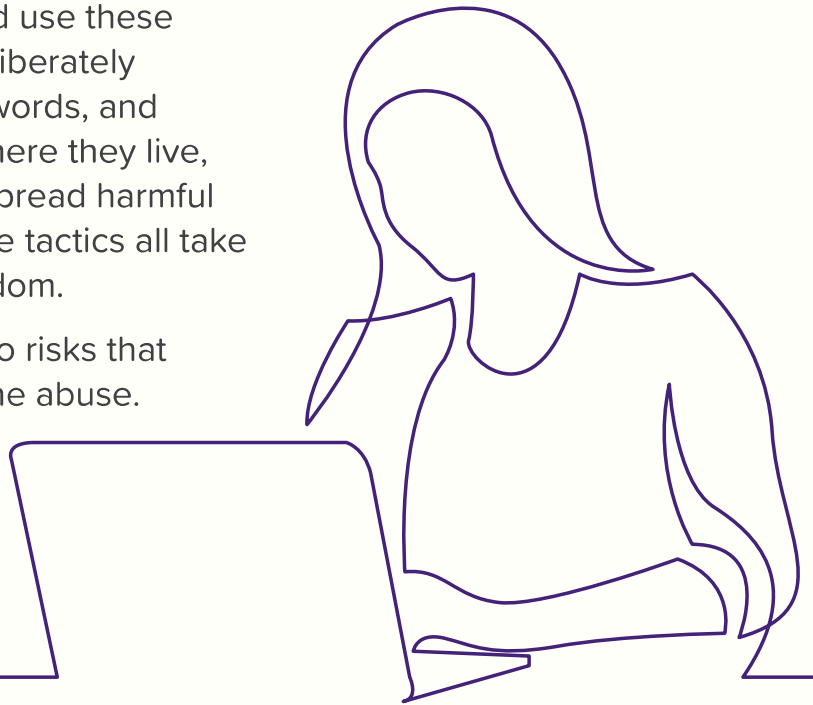
Tracking and monitoring of their whereabouts




Ask about digital abuse

Most victims have phones and use these to keep safe. Perpetrators deliberately access victims' phones, passwords, and online accounts to find out where they live, stalk them, contact them, or spread harmful information about them. These tactics all take away victims' day to day freedom.

Advocacy needs to respond to risks that relate to both online and offline abuse. This includes how we ask about, name, evidence and respond to digital abuse.



We can ask about digital abuse during...




Client intake into service



Wāhine & tamariki programmes



Safe house orientation



Any risk, safety or goal plan conversation



Ask clients

What form of contact is safest for you? (We don't want to assume it is safe to call, message, or send emails).

Have you kept any screenshots or saved anything they have sent you?
Can I help you start?

Have you spoken to the Police/Netsafe/other service? What have they said?

Do you have any court orders in place that says how your (ex) partner can contact you/and what for?

When you have to use your phone differently, how does it make life harder?

Does your (ex) partner have access to your phone, laptop, passwords, online accounts, or log-in details?
Whose choice was that?

Do they show up unannounced or always seem to know where you are?

Do they contact your children to get information about you?

How have you been dealing with their digital contact (including, monitoring and stalking)?

What happens when you limit or change how easy it is for them to contact you?
Does the abuse get worse?

What are you afraid might happen?



Name digital stalking risks

Digital stalking is associated with the risk of women and children being killed by current or ex-partners. This can look like

Contacting victims children and their devices to monitor their Mums



Using information from digital stalking to show up and carry out threats in person

Accessing victims phones and accounts to see everything they do and where they are



Tracking victims' locations through their maps, apps, online accounts, and devices

Constantly calling, messaging, or checking up on victims



Stalking, monitoring and tracking checklist

Does the perpetrator have access to any of the following? Place a tick next to what your client's (ex) partner might have access to.

For anything ticked, record as digital abuse in the client's file and respond to these risks in advocacy and safety planning.

Phone

- Phone account (linked accounts)
- Email
- Google maps
- Find my phone
- Cloud and image storage accounts

Social media

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Snapchat (Snapmaps)
- TikTok
- LinkedIn
- Family YouTube account

Apps

- Photos (with location activated)
- Transport apps (Snapper, Uber)
- Games
- Dating Platforms

Online logins/accounts

- Internet banking
- MyMSD
- MyIR
- RealMe
- Manage My Health
- Countdown/New World
- Online gaming/streaming
- Fitness apps (smart watches)

Texts from other services

- Account verification
- GPs
- Sexual health
- Chemist
- Appointment confirmations
- Online payments

Evidence digital abuse

Blocking the perpetrator might not be in the victim's best interest as it can stop them collecting evidence.

Safely evidence digital abuse by:

Asking clients first

Ask if collecting examples of the abuse might be helpful for:

- Reporting the abuse,
- Applying for legal orders,
- Providing information to Police,
- Removing intimate recordings from the internet,
- Reporting a protection order breach,
- Evidencing a court charge,
- Applying for services or resource support, and
- Having a personal record of the violence.

Collecting safely

Check:

- What evidence can be captured without the perpetrator knowing? (e.g. screenshotting on Snapchat notifies sender),
- Is there a safer option to capture those examples? (e.g. taking a photo on another phone), and
- Does it need to be captured straight away? (e.g. social media posts require quick recording before the content is deleted).

Including 'who, when and where'

Take screenshots or recordings of:

- **Who** the abuse is from - the digital identity of the abuser (e.g. username, profile page, phone number),
- **When** the messages were sent or posted (e.g. date/time stamps), and
- **Where** it is (e.g. screenshots of the messages in their original location; or website URL).

Storing evidence safely

Ask:

- Could your (ex) partner access where the evidence is stored?,
- Would you feel safer if we stored examples on another device/email?, and

The Bright Sky NZ app can be a safer option for storing examples.

Providing specialist support

- Use your knowledge of how the perpetrator might find out and retaliate to identify safe ways to gather and store evidence, and
- Reduce victim workload by doing what you can to log examples (e.g. storing screenshots on Record Base, writing case notes that detail the violence).

Evidence of abuse tactics perpetrated through phones and technology include screenshots, photos of messages or posts, and audio recordings of voicemail.

Showing the full story

To show the context of the abuse, take screenshots of the whole content not just the abusive parts, including all messages victims have sent. Write down any extra information victims have.



Support clients safely by

Understanding digital abuse:

- Digital technology is part of all of our everyday lives and is essential for how we participate in daily life. Groups who are more vulnerable are even more reliant on digital technology,
- Anything that can be used can also be misused by perpetrators - so phones and online accounts are frequently part of perpetrators' violence,
- Digital abuse tactics can go hand-in-hand with in-person violence, and can be initiated more easily and quickly from anywhere and at any time,
- Safe responses focus on safely limiting perpetrators' opportunities to use violence, and
- When talking about all kinds of family violence, including digital abuse – be clear about who did what to whom.

Responding to digital abuse:

- Be a point of contact for victims experiencing digital abuse,
- Use clients' stories to identify when and how digital tactics are used against them, and incorporate what they tell us into safety planning,
- Keep good records and use these to strengthen how other organisations (police, justice, medical) respond to these risks,
- Make more options available to clients, so they can still participate fully in digital life (e.g. giving client a new/alternative phone),
- Help with the workload around collecting evidence,
- Advocate on their behalf so others (e.g. family court and lawyers) understand the context of violence, including in parenting situations,
- Spend time talking to clients about how phones are used by perpetrators and how it can be coercive, controlling, or abusive,
- Learn (and help our clients to learn) how to screenshot, record, and manage social media settings, or to find resources that guide us on how to do it, and
- Include details of digital abuse tactics as well as in-person tactics when helping clients with court applications or affidavits.



Extra support



Call 111 in an emergency and contact Police to report digital breaches of protection orders or bail conditions.



Contact Netsafe to report digital abuse and get help to remove online content. take screenshots, and change phone settings.



Consider using the Bright Sky NZ app to help clients safely document the abuse and store evidence of it.



Inform clients about how Shielded Site can be a safe option for making contact with Refuge.



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Made with the generous support of Contact Energy.

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National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges
Ngā Whare Whakaruruhau o Aotearoa
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