

Telehealth, COVID-19, and Intimate Partner Violence: Increasing Safety for People Surviving Abuse

The coronavirus pandemic and subsequent social distancing measures are increasing risks for survivors of IPV and their children, reducing families' financial security, making it harder to stay connected to support networks, and is a source of stress. The move to telehealth offers opportunities to connect with people who may be experiencing abuse. Consider the following guidance to address IPV via telehealth visits.

Before the visit:

- Prepare a “script” for integrating information about IPV and available survivor support resources for people to give to their family and friends into the visit.
- Understand that telehealth visits may not be a safe time for asking IPV screening questions – others may be in the room or listening in.
- Connect with local survivor support agencies and hotlines to understand what services they provide.

During the visit:

Offer normalizing information about relationships, health and stress during the coronavirus pandemic. One method for this is the “CUES” intervention for IPV, which can be used for telehealth visits:

C: Prioritizing **Confidentiality** by ensuring it is safe for the patient to speak over the phone/video and letting them know that their health information will be kept safe (disclosing any reporting requirements).

“Your medical information is confidential, that doesn’t change just because you’re not in a clinic setting. I will not share anything we talk about here outside of with the care team [or if you tell me refer to your state law]. Are you somewhere where you can speak freely?”



UE: Offering **Universal Education** to all patients about how stress can affect relationships and relationships can affect health, and that there are support resources available.

“Before we get started, I want to say that I know COVID19 has made things harder for everyone. Because people are stressed, we are sharing ideas about helping yourself and people you care about. For example, we may experience more stress now in our relationships including increased fighting or harm, and that can affect our health. There is free, confidential help available if you know someone who is being hurt in their relationship. Would it be okay if I sent you some resources for you to share? I will also send information on support around parenting, access to food and stress. How are things going right now for you?”

S: Providing **Support** if patients disclose experiences of violence or other needs, offer validating messages and a warm referral to an IPV survivor support agency, crisis text line and health promotion information.

“Thank you for sharing this with me. I am so sorry this is happening. What you are telling me makes me worry about your safety and health. A lot of my patients experience things like this and there are people who can help. I can connect you today if that interests you – even right now if you like—stay on the line with you - whatever you like.”

You may also be able to brainstorm with patients who are experiencing violence about ways to stay connected when someone is controlling their access to health care and support networks.

“I’d like to think about your health too and hear if your partner is interfering in any way with your plans to stay healthy like messing with your medicines, taking away hand sanitizer, preventing you from seeking help, or keeping you from connecting with friends and family.”

Visit <https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/get-updates-information-covid-19/> for more information.

Clinical Pathway for Addressing IPV During Telehealth Visit

*"Your medical information is confidential, that doesn't change just because you're not in a clinic setting. I will not share anything we talk about here outside of with the care team [or if you tell me refer to your state law].
Are you somewhere where you can speak privately?"*

No

Yes

Work with patient to support their safety and privacy during telehealth visits.

- *"Are you able to move to a place where you feel more comfortable to talk freely?"*
- *"Can others in the room hear what I am saying?"*
- *"Would you prefer to find another time to talk or move our conversation to messaging through the health portal?"*

Offer Universal Education about IPV and health.

- *"Because this is a stressful time we are sharing ideas about where you or a friend or family member can get help.*
- *For example, we may experience more stress, fighting or harm in our relationships and that can affect our health.*
- *Would it be okay if I sent some resources for you to share? I will also send information on support around parenting, access to food and stress.*
- *How are things going right now for you?"*

Share resources, if patient agrees, through text, health portal message, or phone – even if there is no disclosure of violence/relationship troubles.

If patient discloses violence or indicates that things with their relationship are difficult or stressful offer validating statements and support.

- *"Thank you for sharing this with me– this sounds really hard."*
- *"This makes me worry about your safety and health."*
- *"Unfortunately, a lot of my patients experience things like this but the good news is there are people who can help."*
- *"I can connect you today to someone who works with people who are going through hard or scary times in their relationships,"*
- *"If that interests you I can connect you– even right now if you like— and I can stay on the line with you – or send you a number."*

Connect this conversation to the reason for the health visit by brainstorming with the patients about ways to stay connected when someone is controlling their access to health care and support networks.

"I'd like to think about your health too and hear if your partner is interfering in any way with your plans to stay healthy like messing with your medicines, taking away hand sanitizer, preventing you from seeking help, or keeping you from connecting with friends and family."

Document referrals and care plans in a private part of the medical record and schedule a follow up visit.



Even if patient is not currently experiencing abuse, they may still be feeling triggered or in crisis because of COVID-19 situation.

- Validate these feelings,
- Offer strategies for reducing stress,
- Answer questions about COVID-19 and staying healthy during the pandemic,
- Connect to support services for mental health, food access, and other.

For more information visit:

ipvhealth.org

futureswithoutviolence.org/protecting-your-health/