# Social Networking & Privacy Tips for Domestic & Sexual Violence Programs

Domestic violence and sexual assault programs are increasingly using social networks, such as *Facebook*, *MySpace* or *Bebo*. There are many benefits to joining a social network: networking with peers, reaching out to potential funders and allies, and raising awareness. However, there are legitimate concerns about safety risks and confidentiality.

## What to Post

Remember that nothing online is completely private and even social network pages that are set to "private" may still be accessible by others. So think about what you share online, how it represents your organization, and who can potentially see it. Be careful about posting information about your colleagues; whether it's a link, a video, or a picture, get their consent before you post it. Never share personal information about survivors without a written release.

## What Others Post on Your Page

Your program should have a policy on whether others can post to your page. Depending on the social network you use, you can filter posts, making it necessary for you to approve the post first. If you choose to allow friends to post without approval, determine how you will respond to posts from survivors, abusers or perpetrators and to posts with sensitive information or inappropriate content. Organizations should decide which topics are appropriate to address via the social network and which topics are not. Also decide on what cannot be posted on your social network site, such as personally identifying information or content that is malicious in nature. Most networking sites have a content policy, so make sure your content doesn't violate it. Social networks can be a good place to have in-depth discussions about certain topics. However, although a conversation on a social network page may seem like a dialogue between just two people, anyone can read that thread. In addition, anyone can take a screen shot of that conversation and post it on other sites.

## Friends' Pages

Members or friends in your network may share information on their own pages that is sensitive or you don't agree with. You can't control what your friends post on their pages. However, if you see something that could be harmful or sensitive in nature, talk to them and ask if they'll delete their post, video, or picture. You may even have a policy on whether to "unfriend" someone if they post harmful or malicious content.

## Friendship Acceptance Policy

Your organization should have a policy on who to accept as a friend within your network. Think about the information that you share through your social network page and whether it's appropriate to share that with the person who wants to join your network. Don't forget that your agency's social network page is a professional tool and should reflect your agency's goals or communications strategies. If your program uses your site to raise awareness and therefore want to accept all friend requests, it is important that you're constantly reviewing the information on your site to ensure that it's appropriate for a broad audience.

## Survivors

Survivors may wish to share information about themselves or others on your social networking site. Depending on the details and information shared, sharing personal stories on a social network page may open the survivor and owner of the site to legal action. Survivors should be informed of the safety and legal risks associated with sharing personal information online. Follow the policy guidelines you have in place on what others can post on your page.

Your policies should be clear and new members or friends should be notified of them immediately. You may wish to develop a privacy policy, which informs users of what you do with the information shared or collected on your page. For information on how to create a privacy policy, visit: http://www.privacyrights.org/fs/fs28-nonprofits.htm#4 and http://www.idealist.org/if/idealist/en/FAQ/QuestionViewer/default?section=19&item=37.

We strongly suggest that programs do not solicit information about abuse or conduct counseling or advocacy using social networks. However, because social networks can be an access point for survivors to reach out, programs should include hotline numbers, contact information, and website links in their social network profile.