Using AI Safely in Survivor Advocacy

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Acknowledging Land and Digital Responsibility

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Tech Safety Canada

Women's Shelters Canada

- National network of shelters and transition houses
- Survivor-centred advocacy and systems change
- Research, policy, and frontline tools

About Us

Our mission is to work as a unified voice for systemic change to end violence against women, while providing leadership for collaboration and knowledge exchange among shelters and transition houses across the country. **Shelters support women and children fleeing violence. We support the shelters.**
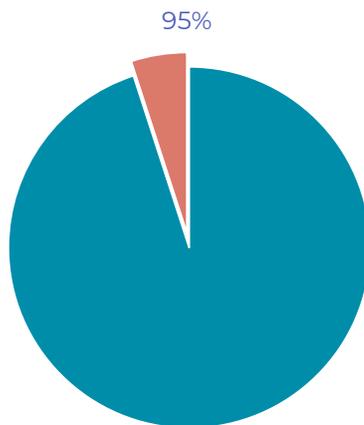
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Tech Safety Canada

What is Tech Safety Canada?

- National project of TFGBV
- Practical, harm-reduction guidance
- Training and tools for anti-violence workers

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Why This Work Is So Important

95%

- **95%** of Canadian shelter and transition house workers report supporting a survivor experiencing tech abuse.
- Survivors are being abused through technology.
- Digital literacy, proximity to tech support, and lack of money are a major barrier to safety, independence, and healing.

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Defining Tech Abuse

Any violent or abusive act carried out through tech devices, digital platforms, or apps by an abusive person targeting a current or former partner.
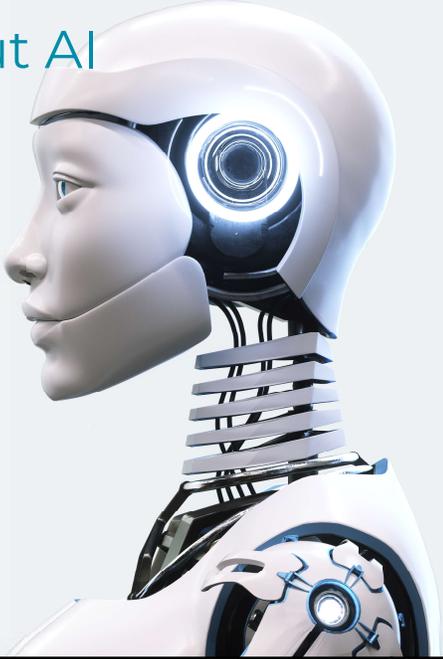

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What Tech Abuse Can Look via AI

- Creation of nude or semi-nude photos or videos

- Sextortion

- Impersonation

- Fabricating evidence

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Why We're Talking About AI Today

- AI is embedded in everyday tools
- Staff are already encountering it
- Survivor data creates unique risks

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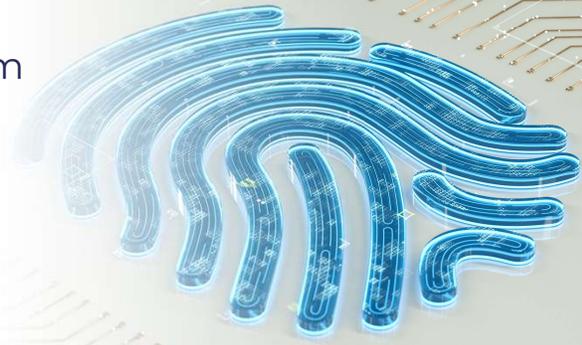
Principle 1: It's Not the Tech. It's the Abuse

- Tools don't cause harm
- Behaviour does

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Applying Principle #1 to AI: It's Not the Tool, It's the Risk

- Risk comes from data entry
- Loss of control causes harm

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Principle 2: Survivors Have a Right to Technology

- Technology can be a tool for safety, empowerment, and connection

- Support safer the use

- Cannot avoid tech; but we can increase privacy.

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Why This Matters within Tech Safety

- Survivors may choose AI
- Staff must not introduce risk

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Principle 3: Accountability Should Fall on the Abuser

- Criminal Harassment (section 264)
- Uttering Threats (section 264.1)
- Interception (section 184)
- Identity Fraud (section 403)
- Publication of an Intimate Image without Consent (section 162.1)
- Child Luring and Sexual Exploitation (section 150.1/3,172.1,152)

- Voyeurism (section 162)
- Copyright (civil)
- Defamatory Libel (section 298)
- Extortion (section 346)
- Unauthorized use of a computer (section 342.1)
- Indecent Communication (section 372.2)
- Intimidation (section 423)

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Why this matters in anti-violence work

Survivors trust us with highly sensitive information

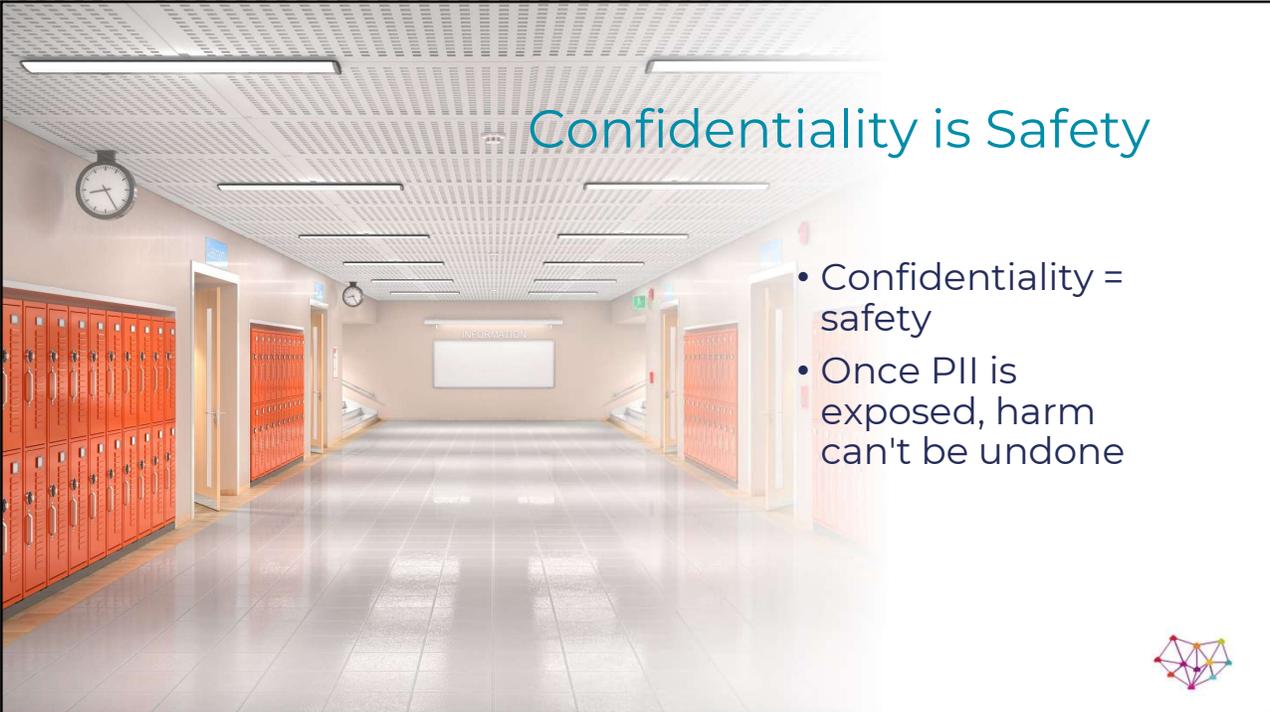Confidentiality is a legal and ethical obligation

A data breach or disclosure can put lives at risk

AI tools involve third parties outside our control

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Confidentiality is Safety

- Confidentiality = safety
- Once PII is exposed, harm can't be undone

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What do we mean by "AI tools"?

Examples include:
- Tools like ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot
- AI writing or editing assistants
- Translation tools
- Meeting transcription or note-taking tools
- AI features built into Word, email, or case systems

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Privacy vs. confidentiality

Privacy

- A survivor's right to control their own information

Confidentiality

- Our legal and ethical duty to protect information shared with us

Both are essential

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Most commercial AI tools:

- Store data on third-party servers
- Log conversations for review or training
- Lack clear deletion controls
- Are not transparent about access

How AI Handles Data

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A major recent development

As of May 13:

- ChatGPT conversations are preserved by court order
- Includes deleted and "temporary" chats

Key takeaway: AI chats are not confidential

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Canadian Legal Obligations

How can anti-violence orgs use AI and follow their legal obligations around PII and consent?

Organizations must follow:
- Federal privacy law (ex. PIPEDA) or
- Provincial or Territorial Privacy Law (ex. BC PIPA)

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## What some privacy laws require: Consent and Control

Organizations must:
- Collect the minimum information necessary
- Use information only for stated purposes
- Obtain meaningful consent
- Protect data with safeguards
- Control third-party disclosures
- Survivors have the ability to withdraw consent at anytime.
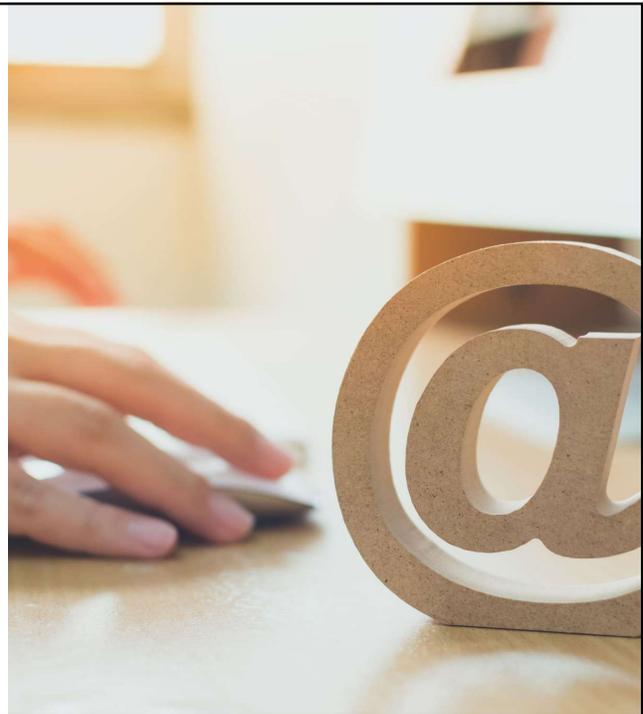
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AI = Third-Party Disclosure

- Using AI may mean:
- Data leaving your organization
- Data crossing borders
- Unknown retention timelines
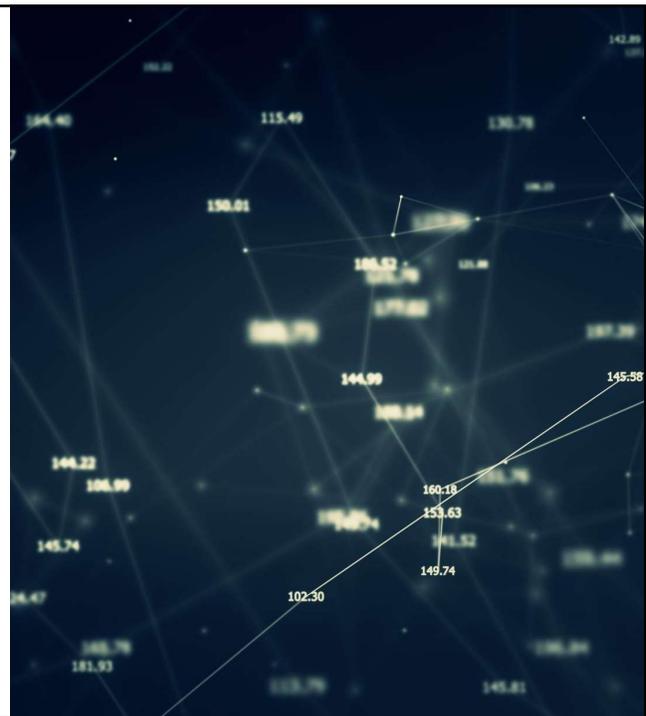
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Why this is especially dangerous for survivors

- AI chats may be:
- Retained without the user's knowledge
- Accessible through legal discovery
- Stored in ways survivors cannot control

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Banning AI in your work doesn't work

- AI is built into everyday software
- Staff may use it quietly without guidance
- Bans create confusion and inconsistency

Instead:
- Harm-reduction
- Clear boundaries
- Privacy-first decision making

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Instead of Banning:

Do not enter:
- Survivor names or identifying details
- Information about children
- Details about abusive partners
- Case histories or narratives

Includes:
- Case notes
- Referral letters
- Safety plans
- Survivor communications

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Example: Unsafe vs. Safer use

Unsafe:
"Write 2-3 sentences summarizing today's meeting with Hazel. Joe is harassing her again and using their daughter to spy on her. Hazel seems depressed"

Safer:
 "Help me write a note saying the survivor came in for a meeting today and discussed plans for safety."

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When AI may be acceptable

AI may be used for:

Grammar or spell-check

Editing non-personal documents

Grant writing without survivor info

Translating non-identifying text

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When AI Should Never Replace Humans

Survivor support or counselling

Crisis response

Risk assessment or prioritization

Decisions about services

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Supporting Survivors Who Use AI

Advocates should:

Explain privacy risks clearly

Encourage generic prompts only

Discourage sharing personal details

Reinforce that AI is not confidential support

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Introducing the AI PIA Checklist

Before using AI, ask:
- Is it necessary?
- Is personal information involved?
- Is it legally permitted?
- Is it safe for survivors?

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PIA Red Flags

Stop if:

- Personal information is involved
- Data may be reused or trained on
- Storage location is unclear
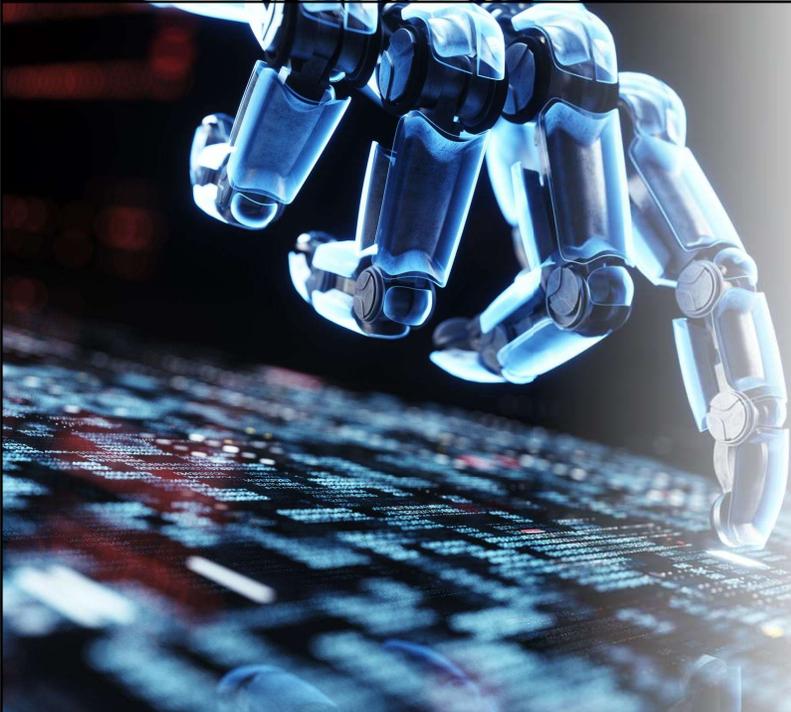- Consent cannot be meaningful

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Policy and Practice Recommendations

01

Require a PIA before AI use

02

Define acceptable vs unacceptable uses

03

Train staff regularly

04

Review policies as technology changes

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Final Message

- AI can be helpful, but convenience is never worth survivor safety.
- When technology and safety are in tension:
- **Safety always wins.**

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Tech Safety Canada

www.techsafety.ca   www.securitetech.ca

You have the right to be safe online.

What is Tech-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence?

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Thank You!
Q & A

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www.sheltersafe.ca

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