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### **TIPS FOR SURVIVORS OF CYBER ABUSE IN THE AGE OF COVID-19**

Quarantine and social distancing have been challenging for most of us these past months. We have placated ourselves with Zoom meetings with our families, Google Meetings with coworkers, FaceTiming with grandparents, as well as conventional social media. Those methods of connection provide comfort and peace for many, but can be a vehicle for retraumatization for others. Survivors of cyber abuse face tremendous emotional barriers when it comes to the use of technology.

This article aims to aid those who are struggling with the conflict of choosing between isolation from friends and family or connecting with them on devices that have caused significant emotional harm. First, understand that you are not alone. The sensations of trauma that you are experiencing (perhaps nightmares, flashbacks, anxiety, among others) are not unexpected. If you have been stalked, extorted with your image, harassed, or otherwise victimized online, these and other responses to trauma are widely reported. There is no “right” way to respond to abuse. Give yourself some mercy. Here are some suggestions. They likely won’t all provide you with relief, but one of them might.

- **Use discretion with your alerts.** You want to know when your boss or school is trying to reach you, but you probably don’t need to catch all of the BREAKING NEWS. Set up tones that please you and don’t constantly remind you of the tones that terrorized you in the past.
- When you are hyper-aroused by technology, **do something to ground your body.** Stand up and stretch, run in place, or scream into a pillow. Check in with all five senses. Now is a great time to pull out those essential oils, eat something (healthy?) and delicious. Play with the cat. Whenever you can, let yourself get reregulated before you dive into the next task. Taking a break will bring you back more calm and focused. Work better, not longer.
- Keep your central nervous system protected while you sleep. **Leave your phone and computer in another room.** Invest in an alarm clock—you don’t need a phone to intrude into your slumber.
- Find comfort. **Allow yourself to laugh.** There is so much fear-generating information coming at us from all sources. We need to counteract it with humor. Read funny books or articles, listen to a comedy station or podcast, watch a movie, or, if it serves you, visit your favorite sites or channels online. Between the fear of the pandemic outside and your fear of the devices inside, you need to be intentional about taking care of you. Avoid excess of those things that numb your emotions, but allow yourself indulgences. It’s okay to read trashy novels instead of challenging yourself with the classics right now. Do what feels right and balanced.
- **Find kindred spirits.** Most of the people in your life may not understand what it is like to be terrorized by your device. A therapist or victims’ advocacy group could connect you with those who have shared the experience. It would be comforting not to have to explain why FaceTiming makes your heart pound, or why you worry that someone could take control of your computer.
- **Get image consent.** As we pound the drum of consent messaging, consent for images should be part of the conversation. Set the example by allowing others to turn off their cameras for meetings (absent necessity), and ask before posting ANY images of others. Ask your coworkers to do the same, or better yet, make it a policy. This will normalize the conversation for all. Regardless of our experiences, it is fair to desire that our images be protected.

Adapted from a Blog by the C.A. Goldberg Victims Rights Law Firm. <https://www.cagoldberglaw.com/>