**Tools for Remote Communication**

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With the unprecedented crisis of COVID-19, more and more we are looking for ways to communicate remotely with clients, colleagues, family and friends. Below is a list of free video conferencing options. We are also sharing information for you and your clients about telephone service, expanded internet service and no or low-cost smartphones and other devices for low-income persons. Finally, we provide instructions for how to email encrypted attachments.

**FREE VIDEOCONFERENCING AND VIDEO MESSAGING**

*There are many great free video-conferencing applications, but none of them work with each other. This means that both you and the person you are video-conferencing need to be using the same application. Most, however, work on any platform, Windows, Mac, iPhone or Android.*

*“Browser” means any supported web browser on a PC or Mac*

**1. Zoom –** A professional, full-featured product that allows unlimited 1-on-1 meetings. Meetings with more than 2 people carry a 40-minute time limit. Mobile Screen sharing is also available for Android and IOS. Also available on phone and tablet.

Key functions: video and screen sharing.

Pros: free

Cons: free option has 40 minute limit if more than 2 people. No simple chat option.

Available: Browser, Windows, Mac, iPhone, Android

Download: <https://zoom.us/download>

**2. Skype –** Allows unlimited free video calls to other Skype users. No download is required as it can also be used in your internet browser. A good choice for group videoconferencing as it allows up to 50 people on a single call. Also available on phone and tablet.

Key functions: video sharing.

Pros: free

Cons: Complex. No simple chat option.

Available: Browser, Windows, Mac, iPhone, Android

Browser: <https://www.skype.com/en/features/skype-web/>

Download: <https://www.skype.com/en/get-skype/>

**3. Google Hangouts -**  This service boasts the most features and integrates directly with your Gmail and Google calendar for simple and easy use. Allows you to hold larger conferences (of more than 2 people), record meetings, and has no time limit. Sign up requires a Google account.

Key functions: video sharing, phone calls, chat, desktop sharing.

Pros: Free. Very functional. Designed for mobile.

Cons: Must have a gmail account.

Available: Browser, iPhone, Android

Download: <https://hangouts.google.com/>

**4. FaceTime:** A popular application that comes pre-installed on all IPhones. It is only available to IPhone users. Allows group conferencing of up to 32 people. Contacts can be reached through their phone number or Apple ID.

Key functions: video sharing.

Pros: free

Cons: No simple chat. Only works on iPhones and modern Macs

Available: Mac, iPhone

**5. Google Duo:** Google’s version of FaceTime, that comes pre-installed on all Android devices. It is also available for Iphone. Duo’s controls are very simple and the streaming quality is terrific. Allows group calling of up to 8 people. Calls are always encrypted and secure.

Key functions: video sharing.

Pros: free

Cons: Not many users

Available: Browser, iPhone, Android

**6. Facebook Messenger:** Offers free video calls over wifi. It supports group chat and has simple, easy-to-use controls. Contacts can be reached through Facebook, so there is no need to exchange phone numbers.

Key functions: IM and video

Pros: free, simple, pervasive due to Facebook use

Cons: Facebook. Very simple. Must have a Facebook account.

Available: Browser, iPhone, Android

**7. WhatsApp:** Owned by Facebook, this app allows you to send messages and make audio or video calls. It only requires a wifi connection and offers end-to-end encryption, meaning the information you share is safe. Also allows seamless document sharing.

Key functions: IM and video and phone calls

Pros: free, simple, pervasive globally

Cons: None

Available: Browser, iPhone, Android

**8. SnapChat:**

Key functions: Video Calling, Text Messaging, Video Messaging

Pros: free, popular

Cons: None

Available: Browser, iPhone, Android

**9. Signal:** Most secure messaging app. More secure than any on this list.

Key functions: Texting, messaging, file sharing, voice notes

Pros: Very secure

Cons: Voice and videocalling is one-to one, only. No groups.

Available: Browser, iPhone, Android

**10. Marco Polo –** A secure alternative messaging app. A “video walkie-talkie”.

Key functions: Video messaging, texting, no OS restrictions, safe and private

Pros: An encompassing free version, doesn’t require both parties be online simultaneously, more safe for children

Cons: Consumes a lot of data

**TELEPHONE SERVICES**

**FreeConference OR FreeConferenceCall OR FreeConferenceCalling** - Conference calling services. Create the account online using an email address and use the service with a phone.

Key functions: Voice conference calling.

Pros: free, easy

Cons: Heavy traffic, as with the crises, has put many of them offline and inaccessible. Can be unpredictable in availability. Voice only. No video. If phone plan doesn’t include unlimited long distance calling will be charged a fee.

**Google Voice** - Google Voice is an app for your smart phone, tablet, or desktop computer. It is a way to have a separate phone number for texting, calling, and voicemail. You can choose to have calls forwarded to your cell phone or to a landline. You can also set the app to “Do Not Disturb” when you do not want to be notified about calls or text messages. Texts received through Google Voice can be stored on the app, so they don’t mix with your personal text messages. Voicemail works the same way.

Pros: Allows you to have a separate phone number to give to clients and others without paying for another line. Substitute caregivers can use it to arrange phone calls between children and their parents.

Cons: You do have to have a Gmail account in order to set it up.

**EXPANDED INTERNET NOW AVAILABLE FROM MANY CARRIERS**

Recently, over 750 service providers took the “Keep Americans Connected Pledge” which commits them to maintaining connectivity for Americans during the COVID-19 epidemic.

Many of these same companies have elected to do even more than just that, including major providers like:

* **AT&T:** Providing all consumer home internet wireline customers, as well as Fixed Wireless internet customers, with unlimited internet data, offering free data plans for certain school-issued tablets for 60 days, waiving wireless voice and data overage fees for all customers, expanding eligibility for its low-income internet program and offering new program participants two free months of service, and creating a $10 million fund to support distance learning, committing more than $500,000 to organizations focused on connecting young people with meaningful online mentor relationships, offering free telehealth services for 60 days, introducing a new low-cost prepaid plan for new and existing customers, increasing data allotments for new and existing prepaid customers for 60 days, and increasing hotspot plan data allotments for new and existing prepaid customers through June 30.
* **Comcast (Xfinity) :** Increasing broadband speeds for internet Essentials low-income customers from 15 Mbps to 25 Mbps, offering broadband service for free for 60 days to new internet Essentials customers, and offering all customers unlimited data through June 30.
* **T-Mobile:** Offering unlimited smartphone data and additional mobile hotspot data for 60 days, providing additional free data to Lifeline partners’ customers, increasing data usage limits for schools and students using EmpowerED digital learning programs, assisting with connectivity solutions for over 500,000 students across more than 820 schools and districts nationwide, offering $15/mo pay-as-you-go plan with 2GB of data, offering free international calling to COVID-19 impacted countries, introducing new low-cost smartphone plans, and reducing prices for hotspot devices and doubling the data allotment for those devices.
* **Verizon:** Automatically adding 15GB of high speed data for wireless consumers and small businesses, and no data caps for DSL and FIOS broadband internet plans, introducing a new broadband option for low-income households, increasing data allotments for wireless customers and allowing that data to be used for hotspots, waiving activation and upgrade fees, waiving wireless data overage charges for impacted customers, providing free international calling to COVID19-impacted countries, tripling the data usage limit for students in Title I schools that are part of the Verizon Innovative Learning Program, and providing free online learning tools to home broadband customers for 60 days, waiving internet and voice charges for Lifeline customers for two billing cycles.

For a full list of companies that have taken the pledge and their specific offerings please visit: <https://www.fcc.gov/companies-pledging-keep-americans-connected-during-pandemic-go-above-and-beyond-call>

Additionally, the FCC has temporarily waived Lifeline usage requirements and general de-enrollment procedures until June 30, 2020. Three FCC orders, released on March 17, March 30, and April 29, will help ensure that no current Lifeline subscribers are involuntarily removed from the Lifeline program during this time of national crisis. The orders also direct the Lifeline program administrator to pause any involuntary de-enrollment of existing subscribers until that date. Additionally, on April 29, 2020, the FCC temporarily waived the requirement that consumers seeking to qualify for the program based on their income must provide at least three consecutive months of income documentation.

To see if you qualify please visit: <https://www.mass.gov/how-to/apply-for-a-discounted-communications-service-through-the-lifeline-program>

For additional help in finding low-cost internet service or computers in your area please visit: <https://www.everyoneon.org/find-offers>.

Recently, many of the top telecommunications companies took measures to alleviate some of the burden of the current need for remote communication. Though most aren’t going so far as to waive home Wi-Fi bills, depending on your provider you may be receiving added benefits to your existing plan. You don’t need to do anything special to receive these benefits; most were rolled out this past weekend. These expanded services can be particularly helpful for our clients, who may have very limited phone/internet plans.

* Comcast, AT&T, and Charter customers can receive free access to their many public wi-fi hotspots for the next two months. All you need is a valid account.
* If you do not currently have a Charter subscription, they are offering free broadband to households with K-12 and college age children.
* Comcast and AT&T are also lifting data caps for smartphone plans.
* Verizon has announced a moratorium on late fees and disconnections.
* T-Mobile and Sprint proving unlimited smart phone data to all current customers.
* Cox is increasing speeds on low cost broadband plans.
* Assurance wireless by Virgin mobile offers a free phone and subscription plan to qualifying candidates. Enrollment is available to individuals who qualify based on federal or state-specific eligibility criteria, including those on certain public assistance programs, like MassHealth or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Individuals may also qualify based on household income.

*For more information please follow any of the links below:*

**Comcast:** <https://corporate.comcast.com/covid-19>

**AT&T:** <https://about.att.com/pages/COVID-19.html>

**Charter:** <https://corporate.charter.com/newsroom/charter-to-offer-free-access-to-spectrum-broadband-and-wifi-for-60-days-for-new-K12-and-college-student-households-and-more>

**Verizon:** <https://www.verizon.com/about/news/update-verizon-serve-customers-covid-19>

**T-Mobile:** <https://www.t-mobile.com/brand/ongoing-updates-covid-19>

**Sprint:** <https://www.sprint.com/en/landings/covid-19.html>

**Cox:** <https://www.cox.com/residential/internet/connect2compete/covid-19-response.html>

**Assurance:** <https://www.assurancewireless.com/>

**TELEPHONES AND COMPUTER DEVICES**

Some clients may not have access to a smartphone or other device that they can use to communicate with their attorneys or participate in school, family time or court hearings. Below are some resources for obtaining needed devices for clients.

**Schools:** Schools should be assisting parents in resolving technology-related barriers. Some districts are making Chromebooks or similar devices available to students who need them, and you should reach out to your client’s school district as needed. All children in foster care should be provided the same access to needed resources as other students. If your child client does not have access to school because of technology related barriers, consider reaching out to the EdLaw Helpline at 617- 910-5829 or edlawproject@ publiccounsel.net.

**Lifeline**: This is a government run program that provides free cell phone and service for eligible low-income persons. You can find more information here:

<https://www.freegovernmentcellphones.net/states/massachusetts-government-cell-phone-providers>

**One Can Help**: This non-profit provides assistance for families involved with the Juvenile Court, including one-time financial assistance, grocery gift cards, and laptops. They only accept requests from attorneys. To request assistance on behalf of a parent or child client, visit <https://onecanhelp.org>.

**DCF**: DCF is in the process of procuring a large number of Chromebooks for parents, youth, young adults, and substitute care providers to facilitate virtual family time.  We do not yet know how these Chromebooks will be distributed or to whom at DCF we will need to contact to request a Chromebook for our clients.  In the meantime, it is important that you reach out to your clients (and substitute caregivers for young children) to determine whether they already have a device that will support video contact, or would benefit from a Chromebook.  You should also ask whether your client (or the caregiver) has data/wifi to support video contact.  It is possible that some of the purchased Chromebooks will come with several months of prepaid data.

**HOW TO SEND AN ENCRYPTED ATTACHMENT**

We will need to email confidential information to clients and others more and more from now on. It is best if you can send confidential documents as an encrypted, password-protected attachment. Microsoft Office allows you to send an encrypted, password-protected attachment to ensure an unwanted or inappropriate party can’t open it.

Remember:

The receiving person must have the password to open the file. **However,** never give them the password in the same email in which you attached the encrypted, password-protected file.

Send the password separately or phone the recipient to communicate the password.

Also, don’t make the password too easy to guess, and don’t continually reuse the password.

Here are instructions on how to password protect and encrypt a file:

For Office files (Word, Excel, PowerPoint), follow these instructions:

1. Click the **File** tab.
2. Click **Info**
3. Click **Protect Document**, and then click **Encrypt with Password**.
4. In the **Encrypt Document** box, type a password, and then click **OK**.
5. In the **Confirm Password** box, type the password again, and then click **OK**.
6. Save the file.

For a PDF using Adobe, follow these instructions:

1. Open a file in Acrobat and choose **“Tools” > “Protect.”**
2. Select whether you want to restrict editing with a password or encrypt the file with a certificate or password.
3. Set **password** or **security method** as desired.
4. Click **“OK”** and then click **“Save.”**

For a PDF using PDF Pro, follow these instructions:

1. Click **View** in the toolbar, then **Organizer Panels** and choose **Security**
2. **Security** panel will open (typically to the right)
3. Click **Password Protect**
4. Enter the password you want and save the document.