

Making Virtual Assistants Accessible

4. Safe and Secure Use of Virtual Assistants

deafscotland is the user led, membership organisation for the deaf sector in Scotland. For more information, go to <https://deafscotland.org/> .

The current UK-wide COVID-19 pandemic has brought the impact and understanding of social isolation into the mainstream and raised awareness of the devastating effects isolation can have. We have seen a recent increase in the use of virtual communication technology which is allowing people to stay connected. Virtual Assistants are being used more regularly to bridge the communication gap.

This factsheet explores the safe and accessible use of Virtual Assistants.

By following these steps, users can help protect themselves and use Virtual Assistants securely.

1. Two-way Communication:

Many Virtual Assistants have features which allow two way communication. This can help you to stay in touch with family and friends, but you need to take to make sure strangers and people you don't want to be able to use them, can.

2. Friends and Family feature:

Virtual Assistants can allow friends and family to 'drop in' on you and take control of your Smart heating, lighting and white goods in your house. If you want this to happen, make sure your safety and security in your home is controlled by a friend or family member who you trust and who you have given access to your virtual assistant.

This person must make sure that they have **the passcode** for your virtual assistant. This stops strangers and others getting **unwanted access**.

Keep passcodes safe and secure.

3. Importance of obtaining consent:

Virtual Assistants store your personal user information and it is important to make sure that everyone using your virtual assistant is aware of this, and that you have given them permission to use your assistant.

3.1 Using your Virtual Assistant to keep in touch with someone in residential care:

If you are intending to use Virtual Assistants to speak to a loved one or family member who is in a residential care setting, then it would be best to set up a meeting with care professionals in advance of using the technology. If your relative/friend's decision making is impaired, it is vital that everyone, including all staff in the home, make sure that the personal information stored on the assistant is not shared with anyone else and is kept safe and secure according to GDPR.

3.2. How Virtual Assistants work:

Make sure the person using the Virtual Assistant knows how to use it if they can. If the person does not understand or is too frail to use the device, a meeting should be set up with any relevant care professionals before you install the device to make sure everyone knows how to work it, when it can be used and what to do if something goes wrong.

4. Check and maintain the Virtual Assistant:

Make sure that the Virtual Assistant is in safe working order.

If any device has to be plugged in to an electrical socket, make sure that loose cables are attached to the wall or secured out of the way of the person's walking.

We welcome your feedback

To make sure that this factsheet always has best practice and shows the best use of Virtual Assistants and related technology, we invite you to share your experiences both positive and negative. Please contact us at admin@deafscotland.org with your experiences.