

## Office Procedure:

- Make fellow staff aware of your day's schedule.
- If the visit is in an unfamiliar location, ask a staff member who may be familiar with the location to brief you on known risks or possible hazards.
- Ask for precise driving instructions and consult a map before leaving the office.
- Contact the individual served ahead of the visit so he/she will be watching for your arrival.

## Before the First Visit:

- Review case history. Is there a history of violence?
- Have a clear understanding of the services you are to provide to ensure it is appropriate for those services to be provided in the home environment.

## The First Visit:

- Hold your first visit with a new individual served at your office or in another public place.
- If the visit cannot be held in a public place, request a partner go to the first meeting with you.
- Try to make new visits in the early or mid-morning. Loitering and illegal activities are less likely to occur.

## In the Car:

- Keep your car in good working order and make sure you have enough gas to carry you through the day. Before entering your car, check the back seat.
- When approaching, be sure to look under the car.
- Lock your car doors and keep windows up at all times. If necessary, keep windows only partially open above ear level while driving.
- Keep valuables out of sight.
- Avoid rubble and broken glass that can flatten a tire and immobilize your car.
- If possible, try to park where you can see your car from inside the home. Also, park in the direction you want to go when leaving the home.
- Choose a parking space that is well lit, or that offers the safest walking route to the dwelling.
- Be wary of dead end streets.

# Home and Community Safety for Health Care and Social Service Professionals



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## In the Community:

- Be alert and observant; develop a sense of consciousness regarding your immediate environment.
- Walk confidently and purposefully.
- Wear shoes and clothing that make it easy to move quickly.
- Avoid carrying a purse while in the field.
- Carry a minimal amount of money, your driver's license, and your keys on your person, not in a purse. Interweave your keys in your fingers; they can be excellent for self-defense if needed.
- Lock your purse and credit cards in the trunk of your car before leaving the office if you must have them with you.
- Don't wear expensive jewelry and dress appropriately.
- Make yourself known to businesses and institutions and also to management and security personnel in public housing and other high-rise buildings.
- Carry a cellular phone if possible.
- Call the office at scheduled times to check in.



- If people are loitering on the street or sidewalk, walk around them or cross the street.
- If you are verbally confronted, maintain a professional manner and don't attempt to answer verbal challenges.
- If you are using an elevator, use an empty one if possible. Always stand next to the door and the control panel. If you have a problem, push all the buttons so the elevator stops on all the floors, providing a better chance of escape. Press the appropriate floor number yourself. Don't ask someone else to do it. If someone suspicious gets on while you're already in the elevator, get off as soon as possible.
- Keep your cell phone out. Act like you are talking on it. You are less of a target if an assailant thinks you may be able to get help.



## At the Dwelling:

- Pay attention to signs like "No Trespassing", "Beware of the Dog", etc., as they may be an indicator of the residents' attitudes toward strangers.
- Pause at the door before knocking and listen. If you hear loud quarreling or fighting or other disturbances, leave immediately.
- If an unfamiliar person answers the door, find out if the individual you serve is home before entering.
- Do not enter a home when you suspect an unsafe condition exists.
- If you decide it's safe to enter, don't let your guard down. Be alert to signs of violence or sexual advances from anyone in the home.
- Make a note of other exits/entrances as soon as you enter the dwelling.
- If there are people present that you feel are a danger, reschedule the visit.
- If there are pets in the home, note this on your record. Should the pet be a nuisance, ask the resident to put it in another room for the duration of the visit.

## Approaching the Dwelling:

- Drive around the area of the dwelling looking for:
  - Unsafe conditions like poor lighting, limited visibility (fences, bushes), unsecured animals, people yelling, drinking, fighting, loitering.
  - Sources of help like neighbors at home, open businesses, other community workers such as police and fire personnel, utility trucks.
- Trust your instincts. If you feel uncomfortable in any given situation, leave.
- If you find you have an incorrect address, don't search for the individual by knocking on strange doors. Call your office.
- If you suspect you are being followed, enter the closest public place. If a car is following you, turn around and walk in the opposite direction.

- Should you observe illegal activity, excuse yourself, leave the residence and contact your supervisor on how to proceed.
- Do not go into a dark room, basement or attic first. Have the resident go first and turn on the light. Follow, never lead, even if you've been to the dwelling before.
- While it is legal to have a firearm in the home, its casual display is inappropriate. You should consider pre-advising all individuals served of this issue. If you see a firearm, or become aware of one in the room, or see someone is armed, leave immediately or as soon as possible within the range of your professional responsibilities. Notify your supervisors and assess the risk level. Minimally, require the resident to secure the firearm in another room during your rescheduled visit and tell them to not allow armed individuals in the residence during your visit(s).

- If you need to retrieve something from outside, knock again or say hello when you re-enter.
- If you feel unsafe because of a heated family argument that erupts, leave as soon as possible.
- When sitting, choose a hard chair, if possible, so you are able to get up more quickly. You're also less likely to sit in icky things or acquire insects like fleas and bed bugs.
- If possible, sit so your back is to a solid wall, not to an unknown space.
- Sit as close to an entrance/exit as possible - leave yourself a way out.
- Any incident or circumstance that makes staff uncomfortable in a location or on a home visit should be reported to a supervisor immediately. Examples of such situations at a home visit are: unsecured weapons, unsecured pets, threatening residents, and residences where illegal activity appears to be taking place.
- Trust your instincts. If something doesn't feel right - leave.

