



Safety and the Home Visitor

From the Basic Home Visitation Skills™ Training Curriculum - 2017

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YOU and the Families YOU Serve are the Main Focuses of Being SAFE.

Do what you have to do to ensure the safety for all concerned. Don't let your guard down. Protect all concerned. You are valuable and YOUR safety is paramount. Use caution, teamwork and rely on your instincts and intuition. Repeat safety training often and refine procedures as needed. Think proactive, not reactive!

POTENTIAL RISKS IN COMMUNITY SETTINGS

- Being unfamiliar with your surroundings
- Risks associated with traveling to the site
- Risk of the unknown
- Risk of weapons and illicit drugs
- Walking into a situation where the crisis is more severe than expected
- Environmental factors such as dogs, cats, lack of physical upkeep of structures, potential exposure to communicable diseases
- Potential theft of personal items
- Potential for uncooperative client/family/neighbor, client/family/neighbor under the influence of substances, violent client/family/neighbor

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Some people aren't addicted to drugs or alcohol, but abuse them. The American Psychiatric Association (DSM-IV) definition of substance abuse is at least one of the following four criteria.

- Continued use despite social or interpersonal problems
- Repeated use resulting in failure to fulfill obligations at work, school, or home
- Repeated use resulting in physically hazardous situations
- Use resulting in legal problems

Combinations of Mental Health Disorder with Substance Abuse are more likely to be violent.

Substance Abuse

- Update substance abuse definition to current DSM V
- New DSM V definition
 - In DSM V the substance abuse and substance dependence criteria were combined into one disorder, with additional changes; Legal problems was removed
 - New name: Substance Use Disorders
 - SOURCE for new criteria:
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3767415/figure/F1/>
- I know you are talking about substance abuse and not specially alcohol, but this is an informative resource about the differences between DSM IV and V for alcohol abuse
 - <https://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/dsmfactsheet/dsmfact.pdf>

Associations with Violence

- Ecstasy
 - https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Christopher_Salas-Wright/publication/273702430_Crime_and_Violence_among_MDMA_Users_in_the_United_States/links/5509851c0cf2d7a2812cfe8a.pdf
- Alcohol
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/aag/pdf/2015/alcohol-aag.pdf>
- Methamphetamine
 - http://www.atdc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/2015_06_03_EVENT_ARTICLE_McKetin-2014-Does-methamphetamine-use-increase-violence.pdf
- Prescription drug abuse
 - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3002271/>
- Cocaine/Crack
 - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25879478>**
- Heroin
 - <file:///Users/aletheachiappone/Downloads/HARCP-2012-V14-I4-P81.pdf>

- Steroids
 - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2636528/>

Combinations of Mental Health Disorder with Substance Abuse are more likely to be violent.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3907744/>

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Risk Management – Policies / Procedures

- At the agency keep an appointment calendar listing which clients are on the schedule to be visited each day. Stick to the order. If plans change, call the changes in to the Supervisor. Be sure someone writes the changes and the client's address and phone number on the calendar.
- Arrange your work schedule so new or questionable visits are early in the day. You'll be less likely to find people congregating on street corners, and you won't get stuck in a potentially unsafe neighborhood after dark.
- Each Agency should have a word that they can say on the phone or text to someone to let them know they need help. If you are in a dangerous situation and unable to call the police and you are on the phone with another staff member:
 - Try not to lose the connection - don't hang up
 - Identify yourself and your location if possible
 - Tell the staff member you are at the home of (individual's name) and you would like to speak to ____CODE WORD ____.
- Let the Supervisor know when you leave the office, each client's home / visit by phoning as you are leaving in your car, and when you return to the office.
- Tell the Supervisor if you are driving a different car than you normally drive in case your description needs to be given to the authorities or someone needs to meet up with you to accompany you on a visit.
- The Supervisor should set a timer for the time allotted for the visit. The Supervisor should contact you if you do not call within the agreed-upon timeframe.
- If you plan to go home after your last visit, call your Supervisor when you have finished your duties for the day and that you are now home/off-duty.
- Before you leave the office, check the visits you have scheduled to be sure you have each address, phone number, directions and correct time of appointment.
- Don't transport anyone with whom you do not have a signed transportation release form. Do not transport any child under 8 years old without an approved car seat. (Check with your state authorities for the laws in your state.)
- Have specific policies regarding males transporting females, and females transporting males.
- Never take a client to your home.

- Never give out your home telephone or address.
- Report to police and/or other authorities if abuse, violence or other illegal activities take place or if you observe the home environment being unsafe or unhealthy. Complete an incident report and file it appropriately with the Supervisor and in the respective client file.
- Encourage Supervisors and Agency management to poll all personnel who serve clients for suggested emergency and safety procedures.
- Debrief with Supervisor and fellow staff, as appropriate. Process experiences and incidents then document files accurately in a timely manner.

CPR and First Aid

- ✓ Stay current with your certification in CPR and First Aid.
- ✓ Designate 2 people, if possible, to call 911.
- ✓ Stay with the client until emergency help arrives if it is safe for you to do so.
- ✓ Carry a First Aid Kit in your car including medical grade rubber gloves. (Non-latex)
- ✓ Wear a mask if you know there is someone in the home that has an infectious disease such as Tuberculosis.
- ✓ Wear gloves when handling any blood, vomit, urine, stool or trash.
- ✓ Wash your hands (Germ-X, Hand sanitizer) between client contacts. Examples: Before and after helping a client to feed her infant; sickness in a home; or, help with cleaning.
- ✓ Cover any open wounds or broken skin with a bandage.
- ✓ Contact emergency personnel if there appears to be evidence of self-harm behaviors.
- ✓ Take a change of clothing and large garbage bags with you in case of an emergency. Keep in trunk of car.
- ✓ Use the guidelines in the First Aid book and training, company policies, and rules and regulations to base your behavior and activities in various situations.
- ✓ Treat everything as hazardous and communicable.
- ✓ Get the tetanus, hepatitis, and all other related vaccines.
- ✓ Complete the incident report notifying Supervisor as soon as possible.

Preparation for the Visit

- Take a self-defense class. Request additional safety training as needed and available.
- Collect as much information about the client as possible whether from a referring source or from a conversation with the client.

- If possible, call ahead to be sure your client will be home for your visit and get specific directions to the visit location.
- Know your neighborhoods. Pinpoint ahead of time areas where you can seek help. Go and introduce yourself. Example: fire station, police station, neighborhood gas station or grocery store, community buildings, apartment complex offices. “911” provides maps.
- Charge your cell phone.
- Take only the few items necessary to do your job. Select forms, brochures, etc., that you will need each day and arrange them to fit in a briefcase or tote bag.
- Arrange with clients to have all pets secured during each visit.
- Prepare and rehearse an excuse for cutting a visit short in case of an unsafe circumstance.

Attire and Belongings

- ★ Wear pants to visit each new client for the first time.
- ★ Wear clothes and shoes that you can move in quickly, if needed.
- ★ Avoid wearing expensive jewelry or any accessory, which could be dangerous. (i.e. long hoop earrings)
- ★ Wear medical bracelets, if appropriate.
- ★ Women with long hair - pull back in a bun or clip / not a pony-tail.
- ★ Men - don't wear ties.
- ★ Don't wear lanyards with name badges. Wear name badges with magnet strips - not pin on or clip on name badges.
- ★ Hide your purse in the trunk of your car. Lock the trunk before leaving the office.
- ★ Carry a minimal amount of cash.

Cell Phone Usage

- Carry a cell phone and an extra battery charger, in case of car trouble or dead car battery.
- Program the cell phone for a 911 call.
- Always make sure you have a cell phone signal in the home and in the vicinity of the home.

Vehicle / Transportation

- Carry two (2) sets of car keys. One set to use and one set to have in reserve and hidden in your notebook or bag or pocket. Also, hide a key under your car.
- Be a member of AAA or other roadside service plan.
- Keep your car in good repair. Make sure tire pressure is adequate.
- Always have enough gas.
- Have the knowledge and equipment to change a flat. Keep a can of “Fix-A-Flat” or “Air in a Can” in your trunk.
- Keep a “JumpStart” box in your trunk (\$35).
- Keep a flashlight in the car with fresh batteries.
- Always wear your seat belt. (All passengers wear seat belts and shoulder straps. Children are to ride in the back seat at all times.)
- Always lock your car.
- Park in the direction you want to go when leaving the home visit and where there is no danger of being blocked in when you want to leave.
- Choose a space to park, which is near light source and populated area.
- Beware of dead-end streets.
- Check the tires, the inside of the car and underneath the car for any objects, children, etc. before you get into the car.

- Don't forget there may be small children under or around your car. Be sure to check both sides of your car before moving from your parking space.
- If someone is leaning up against your car or tampering with your vehicle return to the home and call for help, if needed.
- If pulled over by police, put on emergency flashers and then only stop in a well-populated and lighted area. "711" informs local police station that you have been pulled over by a police car and you are verifying that the patrolman has called in this activity. (Check with your local police department to see if this service is available in your area.)

Transporting Clients

- ✓ Always consider the use of natural supports (family / friends) for transportation of clients if you believe it is safe to do so.
- ✓ Try to make sure no one sits behind the driver.
- ✓ Never place infants or children in child safety seats unless you are certified in child seat safety. Have parents place children in child safety seats, whenever possible.
- ✓ Always place infants and children in approved child safety seats in the rear seat of the car. (Check the state laws regarding the direction the car seat should face based on the age of the child.)
- ✓ If providing transportation, use the client's car seats if they have them available. (Again, check the state laws regarding the liability for providing car seats.)
- ✓ Don't smoke and don't allow your passengers to smoke in your vehicle.
- ✓ If an individual acts out unexpectedly during transport, the staff member should pull vehicle over at a safe location (gas station, store parking lot, etc.); summon authorities; and then follow the procedures of removing yourself from a potentially dangerous situation.
- ✓ Allow individuals to get out of the car. Not allowing an individual to leave the car could be considered kidnapping.
- ✓ If a client gets out of the car, do not attempt to run after the individual.

Possible Threats

- Don't be afraid to ask for help from whomever and wherever you can receive it.
- Attract someone's attention if animals are loose and pose a threat to your safety. Ask the owner to hold or remove the animals.
- Always carry dog biscuits in tote bag or keep them in the passenger area of the car (glove box), not the trunk.
- When tense situations arise or when you feel that you being there will further aggravate a situation or escalate into a dangerous situation, ask when a better time would be for you to visit, or tell client that you will call to reschedule the visit.
- Use an excuse to leave the visit if:
 - Another person / family member enters the room and is dressed inappropriately
 - You see illegal drugs, weapons, evidence of other illegal activity or extreme changes in behavior

While at a Client's Home

- ◆ TRUST YOUR GUT: do not enter or stay in neighborhoods, streets, driveways, or homes when you suspect an unsafe situation may exist. Call the Supervisor if you don't feel right about the visit.
- ◆ When approaching a house, observe the surrounding, cars, people, animals, streets, roads, etc. Be aware of your surroundings regarding biohazards, animals, criminal activity, fire or chemical hazards and leave, if appropriate.
- ◆ If a group is blocking the doorway of your client's dwelling, look for another entrance. If there isn't any and the group seems hostile, walk away and reschedule your visit.
- ◆ If you are verbally confronted, maintain a professional manner. Do not answer to verbal challenges.
- ◆ Before knocking, pause and listen for loud sounds of quarreling, sounds of fighting or other disturbance. If any of these are occurring, leave immediately.
- ◆ Standing to the side, knock at the door, identify yourself, and use the client's name.
- ◆ Do not enter a home unless there is an adult present. If a child answers the door, tell the child to go get their parent. If the child's parent or another adult caregiver isn't in

the home, speak to your Supervisor and together decide if Child Protective Services needs to be notified.

- ◆ If you are outside with the client, always let the client enter their home first.
- ◆ When choosing a seat, find a hard chair if possible, or bring in your own chair. (You decrease the risk of carrying home-unwanted organisms and / or sitting on a wet, unknown substance or a hypodermic needle.)
- ◆ Choose a seat near the door.
- ◆ Before going into another part of the dwelling or using the phone, ask permission.
- ◆ Feel free to move the visit to a safer or more comfortable environment, if needed.
- ◆ When leaving the home visit, have your keys in your hand.

Communication / Interactions with Others

- Includes listening, speaking, hearing, interpretation, and observation (looking/seeing)
- Be respectful and not demanding, which could work against you.
- Don't talk down to a person using language or clinical terms the other person might not understand. Use an interpreter as needed.
- Take time to explain reasons, techniques, procedures, etc. Ask client if they understand what you are trying to explain and see if they can repeat it in their own words. Encourage them and give positive feedback as appropriate.
- Respect each individual's personal space maintaining appropriate distances and time schedules. Avoid standing too close or too far. Use the step-kick distance method.
- Always ask permission before you touch someone.
- Maintain a self-confident, self-assured posture and attitude.
- Be aware of how clients respond to you (your mannerisms/gestures, style of communication, dress, tone of voice, posture).
- Avoid, whenever possible, turning your back to the person or family.

- Use common sense and courtesy when working with people in their homes. Remember, you are their guest.
- Avoid sharing too much personal information. Stay in the supportive, non-enabling role of the home visitor.
- Avoid trying to communicate with a lot of noise or background commotion occurring. Trying to speak over loud noises can be interpreted as being yelling.
- Leave your bias at the door. Be competent in the client's culture, respecting differences. Work around the prejudices of others without judging them.
- Do not attempt to reason with someone out of control, under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or in an acute psychotic state.

Tight Situations

- Don't show fear.
- Try to show a calm, self-assured facial expression.
- Control your breathing.
- Speak slowly and lower the pitch of your voice.
- Watch your hands and feet so they don't move nervously.
- Maintain eye contact, but don't try to stare anyone down.
- Don't challenge: be assertive, especially if lewd comments are made.
- Check your watch; say you "need to call your office because they are waiting for your call."
- Do not tolerate nonsense or crazy behavior, rudeness, or name-calling.
- Repeat the purpose of your visit.
- Stand up and leave.
- If you are in trouble, attract help any way you can. (Scream, yell, and/or blow your car horn)
- When teaching a parenting class at night, never leave alone.