

Safety Tips for Human Services Workers

The following are guidelines and suggestions for social workers, case managers, and others who serve the community. These are not rules one must absolutely follow to be safe, nor are they the only rules. Job specifications, agency policy, various situations, and the people being served may influence what is required or permitted to maintain personal safety on the job.

Environmental Awareness

- Visually check parking lot when you arrive
- Park in a space that is not visually or physically obstructed—not next to van or truck
- If you need help, ask someone. Be careful of unsolicited offers of assistance
- Identify who is at the door before unlocking it
- Sound horn if menacing stranger remains around your vehicle
- Be alert and aware of surroundings
- Have key or swipe card ready

Office Visits

- Plan an emergency escape route
- Arrange furniture in office to prevent entrapment
- Avoid seeing clients alone after hours
- Notify someone if working late and keep all exterior doors locked
- Have a coworker attend meeting when interviewing possibly threatening clients or if you feel your personal safety might be threatened
- Keep desk and office clear of objects that could be used as a weapon

Traveling

- Keep valuables out of sight in car
- Lock purse or valuables in car prior to leaving for visit
- Keep car in working order and at least a half tank of gas
- Park in well-lit, visible area and lock the car doors
- Park down the street instead of in the driveway or directly in front of the house
- Observe the premises for suspicious activity
- Trust your instincts, if you feel unsafe—leave
- Carry as little as possible into home, only those things you are willing to leave behind in an emergency
- Stay in your car until you can get into the building safely

During The Visit

- Be aware of others present during visit
- Assess person's emotional state
- Avoid sitting in the kitchen, there are many potential weapons there
- Be aware of possible exits
- Avoid positioning self so that you become trapped if needed to make quick exit
- If situation escalates—leave
- Visually check the surrounding area or parking area when leaving
- Have car keys in hand when leaving

Meeting Clients Outside the Office

- Notify office of your destination with the name, address, time of visit, and expected time of return
- Notify client you are coming and purpose of the visit, when possible
- Have 911 on speed dial of your cellphone
- Try to conduct visit in pairs, if possible
- Wear clothes that allow freedom of movement

Deescalation

- Try to keep calm and listen attentively
- Avoid sudden movements
- Clarify their feelings, invite discussion
- Avoid confrontation
- Maintain eye contact and personal space
- Change/modify your voice
- Set behavioral limits and physical boundaries
- Maintain two arms length distance between you
- Use calm tone when speaking
- Avoid getting drawn into arguments

Important consideration if you work at an agency:

- Have an agency personal safety policy that every worker is trained on