

Personal Safety Tip Sheet for Human Service Workers

| The Basics | In Your Client's Home | On the Job | In the Car |
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| <p>Be aware of your surroundings and your feelings.</p> <p>Trust your instincts.</p> <p>Be assertive (verbally and non-verbally) to protect your safety.</p> <p>Take a deep breath to help you remain calm and in control.</p> <p>If threatened, assess the situation and decide on a course of action.</p> <p>Think about acting, bluffing, or faking compliance to buy time.</p> <p>Raise your voice to distract a perpetrator or draw attention to yourself. Scream, yell or talk loudly.</p> <p>For de-escalation, use a calm, low voice.</p> <p>Use the element of surprise and react quickly if you need to escape.</p> <p>If you are unable to escape harm, do what you need to do to survive.</p> <p>Use evasion, pushing and deflection as escape techniques. If you have no choice, use your fingers, fists, palms, elbows, knees, and feet as weapons.</p> <p>Respect and believe in yourself.</p> | <p>Make sure you understand that you are on their turf – a natural safety dilemma.</p> <p>When you schedule a visit, if possible, let the client be your safety partner by letting them advise you about any concerns in their area. Ask them to watch for you as you arrive and when you leave.</p> <p>Drive past the home and around the area. Step back and observe the home. Look for its' hiding places, vulnerable points, blocked exits and escape routes.</p> <p>Listen at the door before knocking and stand to the side before the door is opened.</p> <p>As you enter the home, notice the layout, exits and phones. Position yourself for an easy exit should you need to leave quickly. Avoid the kitchen and other tight quarters.</p> <p>Wear comfortable shoes and clothes that allow you to move easily.</p> <p>Keep your purse locked in the trunk unless you really need it. Keep keys, a little money, and your phone in your pockets, a small cross-body bag or waist pack (on your person).</p> <p>Play "what if" games to mentally prepare for various situations (threats by a client, suggestive comments, stranger threats, and out-of-control family or neighbors).</p> <p>Look around and think of what objects could be used as weapons (by you or against you).</p> <p>If anything looks or smells out of the ordinary in or around the dwelling, or if you feel uneasy about your situation, leave and call your supervisor or the police/sheriff. Go with your gut!</p> <p>Travel with a cell phone. Keep it on and programmed to call 911 for help in any emergency or threatening situation. Two-way radios may be needed in rural settings.</p> <p>Take a "buddy" or law enforcement with you on potentially dangerous home visits. Have a safety plan.</p> <p>MOST IMPORTANTLY, KNOW YOUR CLIENT! Consider how their size, gender, mental health status, medication and substance use, IQ, legal status, or personal history may raise the threat level. Do a thorough violence risk assessment before going into the field.</p> | <p>Tune in to your surroundings and be aware of possible safety threats.</p> <p>Use confident body language and verbal skills.</p> <p>Know the location of all safety aids and systems.</p> <p>Avoid impolite behavior. Be calm, courteous and gracious. Listen more than you talk.</p> <p>Identify and avoid potentially dangerous locations or situations, if possible.</p> <p>Dress sensibly to allow for comfort and ease of movement.</p> <p>Anticipate how you would respond to threatening events and stay alert.</p> <p>Attend training on conflict resolution, personal safety, teamwork and stress reduction.</p> <p>Know your job's safety plans, grievance procedures, harassment policies and employee rights.</p> <p>Know predictors of imminent violence (abusive language, threats, violent history) and that violence rarely strikes without warning.</p> <p>Establish an employee safe-room, and use a buddy system, a tag-team, or ALERT device.</p> <p>Keep your distance (safe space) from strangers and be aware of boundaries with clients.</p> <p>Avoid discussing plans and personal information within earshot of people you don't know.</p> <p>Assess possible weapons (books, scissors, clip board, keys, pen, umbrella) you may have at your disposal, or that could be used against you.</p> <p>Seek peer support. Ask peers to share their successful reactions to threatening incidents.</p> <p>Have good post-incident protocols to aid victims and witnesses.</p> | <p>Make certain your car has gas, water, a spare tire with jack, a working horn, spare change, a flashlight, jumper cables and a first aid kit.</p> <p>Ask to see identification of anyone stopping to assist you. Law enforcement too!</p> <p>If you have a flat tire and cannot change it, call for help or try to keep driving slowly until you reach a safe stopping point.</p> <p>Park for a quick exit and avoid getting blocked in. Use extra caution in parking garages. Scan the garage as you enter and spot the exits.</p> <p>Have your car keys in hand as you approach your car. Use the remote panic button if needed.</p> <p>If stranded and you accept assistance, pretend that someone else will soon be arriving. Stay alert and prepared to not be victim of a "Good Samaritan" ploy.</p> <p>Car hijacking is life-threatening. Consider turning on the flashers, pressing the horn, stopping suddenly, getting out and running.</p> <p>If someone approaches your car to force entry, lay on the horn and drive off quickly.</p> <p>If you have your windows open, be aware of what's going on around you.</p> <p>Keep car doors locked while in or away from your vehicle.</p> <p>Scan the area as you approach your parked car, looking around it and checking the floor/back seat.</p> <p>If being forced into your car, throw away the keys (distracting the attacker) and run.</p> <p>Be careful about what you leave on your seats or dashboard. Avoid valuables or items that include your personal information.</p> |