
Environmental Safety Awareness

The following are best practices of environmental safety for social workers, case managers, and others who see clients at their office or in the community. These are not rules one must absolutely follow to be safe, nor are they the only guidelines. 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. An important consideration for an agency is to have a personal safety policy that every worker understands and is trained on.

Environmental Safety Awareness at the Office

Interacting with Visitors

- Have a comfortable and supportive atmosphere in the building including
 - a clean, well maintained exterior
 - a clean, well maintained interior
 - lack of clutter
 - good signage
 - friendly staff/friendly greeting
- Have visitors sign in and wear I.D. badges or name tags when in the building.
- Escort visitors while in the building.
- Have front desk staff that are skilled in reading potentially dangerous behavior and alert caseworkers of challenging behavior of clients.

Building Safety

- Have a secure lobby area.
- Know what's behind all interior doors.
- Know where all the exit doors are.
- Working spaces that allow staff to exit easily in potentially violent situations.
- Know which doors lock behind you or require a pass card or key.
- Have a secure place to keep personal belongings.
- Be aware of the potentially dangerous places where someone could be hiding or waiting.
- Pay attention to your surroundings when walking to or from your car in the agency parking lot.
- Park near an exit door or under a light if working late.
- Doors that are meant to be locked are kept locked.
- Broken locks, door closers, or other security devices are repaired in a timely manner.

Getting Help

- If you know might be dealing with a difficult client, notify other staff nearby ahead of time you that you might need help.
- Have an internal communication system in place with security or others to alert them you need help.
- Have staff trained in how to deescalate emotionally charged people.
- Have 911 on speed dial or download an emergency contact app for your mobile phone.

Protecting Yourself

- Have a clean and clear desktop or tabletop where you interview clients. Keep scissors, letter openers, or other potential weapons out of sight.
- Be aware of what you can use as a barrier to defend yourself. (A barrier is an object to keep someone from getting to you.)
- Be aware of what you can use as a shield to defend yourself. (A shield is an object to deflect something thrown at you.)
- Access to visually open meeting spaces (“Risk Rooms”) or presence of another staff team member when meeting with a client who may be verbally abusive or aggressive.

Environmental Safety Awareness in the Community; Neighborhoods, and Homes

Traveling

- Know where you are going and have good directions.
- Keep valuables out of sight in your car.
- Give yourself adequate time to arrive.
- Keep your car in good working order and at least a half tank of gas.
- Drive around the block/neighborhood to become aware of possible danger such as:
 - abandoned houses or cars
 - houses with drug activity
 - places where youth hang out (when they should be in school this time of day)
 - high crime/vandalism
 - gang activity
 - other suspicious areas or activity
- Park on the street instead of in the driveway of the house. Use the first or last space in a line of cars so you are not blocked in.

Getting Help

- Know where safety is in the neighborhood and where to go for help such as:
 - places with more people and/or more light
 - police or fire stations
 - businesses; convenience stores/gas stations
 - or create your own safe haven
- Know where the service areas and dead zones are for your cell phone and have it adequately charged.
- Have 911 on speed dial or download an emergency contact app for your phone. Know your location to give the dispatcher.
- Your office (e.g., supervisor) should be aware of where you are and when you are expected back.
- Know what to expect from your agency if you need help or are in danger in the field.
- Wear comfortable clothing and shoes which comply with agency policy that you can move or run in.

In the Home or Location

- Carry as little as possible into the home/building, only those things you are willing to leave behind in an emergency.
- Be aware of pets or other animals in the home or on the property. If you haven't been informed before the first visit, look for evidence as you approach the home.
- Taken precautions for infestations before entering and during the visit.
- Be aware of others present during the visit.
- Decide where you sit or if you sit in the home. Sitting close to an exit may be best.
- Pay attention to evidence of firearms or other weapons in the home. Ask the client to secure them during the visit.
- Know where possible exits are in the home/building.

Protecting Yourself

- When possible, visit the client in a room that lacks clutter or weapons. Keep in mind any object can be used as a weapon.
- Be aware of what you can use as a barrier to defend yourself. (A barrier is an object to keep someone from getting to you.)
- Be aware of what you can use as a shield to defend yourself. (A shield is an object to deflect something thrown at you.)