

# Home Visit Safety Procedure

(Text copied and adapted from The Economic Opportunity Program, Inc.)

Purpose: To promote personal safety while working with families in their homes.

Overview: Home visitors need to be alert to personal safety. It is likely that you will go into some unfamiliar or risky neighborhoods. You may be entering homes in which not all family members welcome your visit. You may be alone with families much of the time. There are practical steps you can take to increase your safety. Following is a set of steps to take promote safety:

1. It is wise for every agency to have a sign-in/sign-out log. Prior to leaving the office for a home visit, you should enter the visit address and expected time of return. If you are going to be more than 15 minutes past the documented expected return, call the office and notify a designated staff member. The staff member should document the new expected time of return on the log. Upon returning to the office, be sure to sign in.
2. You must take precautions when conducting home visits in a family's home where there is known domestic violence and/or drug/alcohol concerns. (See #6 for precaution measures). In these circumstances, visits may be conducted in a safe public place such as a school, library, or an agency office.
3. Park your car so you can head out easily and quickly if necessary. Preferably park on street when possible, so you can't get blocked in. For example, back into a driveway instead of planning to back out at the end of your visit. Lock your car door before going into a home visit. This step is especially important if you carry confidential records in your car. If you feel embarrassed about locking your car door, thinking it sends a message of distrust, you can mention that it is agency policy.
4. Present your employee identification badge during home/school visits. To protect a family's confidentiality, turn the ID badge around or take it off when they are in a public place.
5. Carry only what you need in your bag; leave your credit cards, checkbook, and other personal valuables at home. Don't carry a big bunch of keys to your office or home with you. Put a single car key on a key ring or chain, and keep it in your pocket, easily accessible if you need to leave quickly. Keep your car in good repair, with a full gas tank. Use a bathroom in a public place like a gas station, diner or community center before going out on a home visit.
6. Follow your instincts while on home visits. If a situation feels wrong, request that the visit be rescheduled or moved to another location. Always discuss any concerns with your immediate supervisor. Request that the supervisor (or other staff member) attend the next scheduled visit, if necessary. In this instance, inform

the family that a supervisor (or other staff member) will be attending the next scheduled visit. Survey the surroundings and notice any Alcohol/Drug use items such as beer cans, pipes, bags, etc. Observe for any weapons such as knives, baseball bats, guns, etc.

7. If you begin to feel uneasy as you enter the home, sit between the door and the family so you can exit quickly if you need to. If you feel you need to leave quickly, you can ask the family member you trust most to walk with you to your car to get something you want to give him/her (it could be just a brochure from your agency). If you have to, just look at your watch, say, "I have to go now", and leave, even if you're in the middle of a sentence or activity. Always have an excuse ready to avoid triggering a family's anger or making it worse (Discuss this with your supervisor and team members). Never discuss Domestic Violence activity if perpetrator is in the house.
8. In known cases of risk, always consult with your supervisor prior to a home visit. A decision may be made for accompaniment to the visit.
9. Check in with your office, by phone, after visits designated as potentially risky.
10. Do not approach animals you do not know. Aggressive animals in particular, should be put into a separate room. Request this if the family does not offer.
11. Avoid taking an argumentative stand with a person. If there is unpleasant information to share, consider safe locations other than the home.
12. In circumstances that are risky due to chemical use or any other serious condition:
  - Talk slowly, directly and continuously in non-threatening manner.
  - Stand still with eye contact (however, do not communicate aggression by staring).
  - Keep distance 7 - 10 feet
  - Keep hands in front of you in view
  - Slowly walk out maintaining eye contact until you get out

Summary: While it is important to have safety policies to help protect home visitors, your most important safety resource is your own intuition. If you have a "funny feeling" when you are approaching a family's home, stop and listen to your own inner voice. Too often people ignore these warnings because they are supposed to be at a certain place at a certain time, and just keep going. Pay attention. **Put your own safety first**, even if it means canceling an appointment for what seems like "no good reason." You can always reschedule at a time when you can take someone with you. If you are worried about a particular family (for example, if you see a weapon or drugs in their home), ask them to meet you in your office or at a community center where there will be other people around.