



**SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK**

SOCIAL WORKER SAFETY TIPS

☐ WORK ARRIVAL:

- Organize before leaving home
- Visually check parking lot when you arrive
- Are suspicious vehicles or persons in the lot?
 - Obtain plate number if possible
- Vary your parking
- Do not park next to van or truck
- Do not accept unsolicited offers of assistance
- Do not unlock the door to admit stranger
- Sound your horn if menacing stranger remains around your vehicle
- Cellular phone – call 911 assistance
- Be alert and aware of surroundings
- Visually check building when arrive
- Have key or swipe card ready
- Do not converse with strangers

☐ PLAN FOR THE VISIT

- Notify office of destination with the name, address, phone number, time of visit, and reason for the visit
- Notify client your are coming and purpose of the visit / meeting
- Obtain specific directions
- Have a street guide / map in car
- Bring cellular phone if available
- Call office before entering home
- Establish office procedure if you do not call in
- Try to conduct home visit in pairs, if possible
- Wear clothes and shoes that provide freedom of movement

☐ TRAVELING TO SITE:

- Do not keep things out in open in car
- Lock purse / valuables in car prior to leaving for visit
- Keep car in working order with at least ½ tank of gas
- Drive with doors locked
- Park in well-lit, visible area and lock the car doors (do not park in the driveway or directly in front of the house)
- Observe the premises for suspicious activity; listen for threatening sounds
- Listen to your body language, if you feel unsafe at any time, LEAVE
- Do not slam car doors
- Do not walk on lawns
- Knock and use doorbell
- Give eyes a chance to adjust to light (before entering)
- Carry as little as possible into home
- Return to car with key ready, check front and back seat and floor before getting in
- If you are being followed, do not drive home; drive to nearest police or fire station and honk your horn or drive to open gas station or business where you can safely call the police
 - Do not leave the car unless you can walk into the building safely
- If possible, have a cellular phone in your car for emergencies; it may save your life!
- Always carry small flashlight with you (in purse or car)

📍 DURING THE VISIT:

- Visually check others present during visit
- Assess person's emotional state
- Avoid sitting in the kitchen (many possible weapons; boiling water, knives)
- Always wait to be invited to sit
- Sit in straight-backed chair (easier to rise from chair in a hurry)
- Be aware of all possible exits in the house
- If there are dogs in house, ask client to remove them due to your allergies
- Ask to turn the TV off, as "I" have trouble hearing
- Restate the goal of the visit
- Maintain a respectful and courteous attitude
- Respect the individual's personal space (maintain an appropriate distance)
- Keep a clear path to the door
- Avoid positioning self so that you become trapped if needed to make quick exit
- If situation escalates, LEAVE
- Avoid giving out personal information, such as address or phone number
- Visually check the surrounding area or parking area when leaving
- ALWAYS carry car keys in same place where they are readily accessible

📍 OFFICE VISITS:

- Plan an emergency escape route
- Beware of how to gain help and to call law enforcement
- Know if 911 can be called directly or if other numbers must be called first
- Arrange furniture in office to prevent entrapment (sit where you have quickest access to the doorway)
- Avoid working alone in office after regular working hours; notify someone you are working late and keep all exterior doors locked
- Avoid seeing clients alone after hours
- Have co-worker 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 (store letter opener in desk drawer)
- Avoid giving personal information during interview
- Keep your automobile locked at all times

📍 DEFUSING TECHNIQUES:

- Keep it from escalating; try to stay calm and listen attentively
- Avoid sudden movements
- Avoid confrontation
- Maintain eye contact and personal space
- Keep situation in your control
- Use calm tone when speaking
- Do not argue with person
- Signal a co-worker or supervisor that you need help (try not to let angry client see this, as it may escalate situation)

Information collected from:

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De-Escalating Volatile Situations Seminar presented by Carolyn Miller