

Safety Issues for Child Welfare Professionals

Orientation Activity

Safety and Vulnerability

While the focus of helping children and their families has never changed, our society has become increasingly more volatile. Child welfare professionals – both on-site and in the field, are vulnerable and at risk of having their personal safety compromised. As agents mandated to investigate reports of child abuse and neglect, caseworkers are often perceived as threatening to the families they work with and this can increase their vulnerability to violence even more. This coupled with environments that staff must enter, may leave staff vulnerable to safety risks (PCSAO's *Staff Safety - Standards for Effective Practice* [REV. 2002].)

Factors that may increase child welfare professionals' vulnerability include:

- Volatile case situations such as removal of a child or termination of parental rights
- Co-occurrence of child abuse and domestic violence, substance abuse, or mental illness
- Working in community settings
- Working with non-voluntary, resistant, and angry clients

Note: Safety issues are discussed further in New Caseworker Readiness and Core training.

Safety Critical Incident Forms

PCSAs are concerned about maintaining worker safety and minimizing risk whenever possible. While staff must use sound judgment to assess situations that pose potential danger, PCSAs also provide appropriate supports and safe guards to reduce the level of potential risk. These may include safety trainings, cell phones, buddy systems, close supervision, and collaboration with law enforcement.

To assess the on-going safety of staff, it is recommended that Ohio's PCSAs institute a Critical Incident Tracking Form when there has been a safety incident. The form is available at www.pcsao.org.

Regardless, supervisors should always be notified with any safety concerns, alerts or actual incidents (PCSAO's *Staff Safety - Standards for Effective Practice* [REV. 2002].)

Activity:

Read the parts of your agency's Policy/Personnel Manual(s) regarding safety policies and procedures and arrange an opportunity to meet with your supervisor or identified staff to discuss specific procedures for your unit.