

Ohio Child Welfare Training Program

Supervisor Checklist

Safety for Direct Services Staff

June 2010

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Ohio Child Welfare Training Program and
The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services

Safety for Direct Services Staff

Safety of direct services staff, in the office and in the field, is a vital issue that must remain forefront at all times. Supervisors should stress the importance of all staff maintaining attention to safety issues.

Items to Review in Unit Meetings

Following are items to periodically review, at regular intervals or when a safety incident warrants immediate focus. *Supervisors should stress the importance that all staff consistently follow safety policies and procedures.*

- Accessing and using resources available through the agency to establish and maintain staff safety:
 - Use of Agency security personnel to protect staff and manage dangerous individuals
 - Safety equipment and communication technology
 - Use of Critical Incident Reports
- Agency Safety policies and procedures regarding:
 - Disclosing personal information
 - Work-related driving, transporting clients, or using public transportation
 - When to “team” a field or home visit with another caseworker
 - Role of Community law enforcement in accompanying workers on home visits in potentially dangerous situations
 - Reviewing case information to determine potential for danger prior to the first home visit
 - Reviewing potential for danger throughout the worker’s involvement in the case

- Agency policies and protocols for safety issues in the physical environment in the agency. Ask if staff have additional suggestions or concerns.
 - Positioning of furniture in office or interview room
 - Alerting nearby staff if sensing hostility in client
 - Using in-agency safety equipment (panic buttons, etc.)

- Safety policies and protocols for home visits – Acknowledge that working with clients in their homes increases caseworkers’ feelings of vulnerability.
 - Asking for a police officer or co-worker to accompany a worker who feels vulnerable
 - Continually assessing the environment for danger; being aware of non-verbal behavior
 - Maintaining a respectful personal demeanor to clients
 - While in the home, not separating oneself from coat/purse/keys/work bag
 - Knowing when situation is escalating and how to affect a “strategic” retreat if the situation becomes unsafe

- Have all staff attend training in the following safety topics, and then periodically review strategies in unit meeting:
 - Strategies to disarm anger and de-escalate a potentially dangerous situation
 - Behavioral indicators and verbal and non-verbal cues that clients or co-workers may be dangerous to themselves or others, including erratic or despondent behavior, symptoms of substance abuse, and escalating hostility

Additional Items to Review in Unit Meetings

- Require staff to keep the office notified of their whereabouts when they are in the field and on home visits

- Periodically schedule practice of de-escalation and self-defense techniques during unit meetings

Items to Review in Case Conferences

- Review all cases for potential danger to worker at each case conference:
 - Does the caseworker have current safety concerns about any case
 - Is danger increasing or decreasing?
 - Does the worker feel vulnerable?
 - What are the worker's choices of action based on risk? Team approach, law enforcement back up?
- Reiterate the importance of following safety protocol:
 - Checking case information before making an initial home visit or interviewing a client in the office
 - Making sure the office knows caseworker's location at all times
 - "Teaming" a home visit or requesting law enforcement back up if the worker has safety concerns

Supervisory Strategies

- Take supervisory responsibility in modeling and communicating to staff the agency's commitment to worker safety
- Keep safety issues forefront with staff, in day-to-day work and by reviewing safety issues and procedures in unit meetings
- Be consistent in requiring unit staff adherence to agency policies and protocols regarding safety
- Clearly communicate safety information to staff in a way that will alert staff of possible danger without creating rumors or unnecessary alarm

- Review the following case information before each first visit by a worker to identify client-related factors that would indicate a potential dangerous situation when interviewing the client in the workplace or on home visits.
 - Factors regarding the client’s functioning and history (including history of violence, mental illnesses, substance abuse or volatile behavior)
 - Case situations that may be inherently threatening and stressful to clients, and may result in desperate behavior (including removal of children, filing criminal charges against client)

- Regularly review cases for potential danger. Always consider safety and issue in volatile case situations such as removal of child, termination of parental rights, or difficult visitation situations

- Monitor workers’ schedules. Ensure that the office knows whereabouts of workers at all times when they are out of the office

- Be supportive of workers’ fears and concerns about safety. Ask staff whether they have current safety concerns with their caseloads

- Remind caseworkers to evaluate safety on continual bases. They should also be encouraged to listen to their own concerns. If a situation, client, or home feels dangerous, the worker must be given explicit permission to act

- Has a new worker participated in safety training prior to going out on a home visit? If not, review basic safety precautions with worker, and use a team approach in any case the risk may be present

- Attend training with unit staff that addresses safety in the work place and the home. After training, provide opportunities to practice skills. Suggested training topics include:
 - Immediate and ongoing assessment of the environment – “situational awareness”
 - Crisis intervention
 - Verbal de-escalation
 - Personal defense techniques
 - First aid and CPR procedures

- Are experienced workers confident about their ability to use de-escalation and self-defense techniques? If not, allow the worker to attend additional training, repeat the basic training or provide them an opportunity to practice the skills in a safe environment
- Coach staff in day-to-day work – how to critically assess danger and plan action
- Recognize and supervise a response to dangerous situations in the workplace, including:
 - Dangerous behavior of clients or co-workers due to substance abuse, unstable mental condition, or anger
 - Exposure to infectious, air or blood-borne pathogens
 - Fire and weather emergencies, terrorist threats, etc.
- Assess the safety issues inherent in the location of the unit. Where is the unit located? Are workers vulnerable due to physical space issues? Are there doors that should be locked, cameras installed?
- Identify additional safety issues for staff. Advocate for responsive action by administration, and participate in formulation of safety policies and protocols for the agency