



Employee Safety in Community Settings

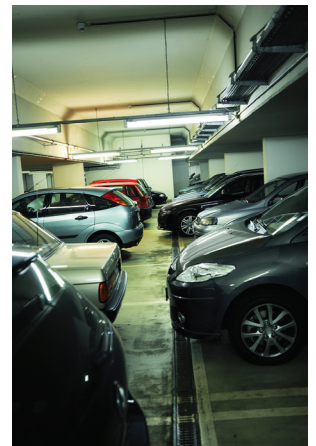
When your job requires that you are out in the community, it is important to stay alert. By following some simple guidelines you can greatly increase your safety.

Office Procedures

- Make teammates or other employees aware of your daily schedule.
- Ensure that client records are updated with accurate phone number and address for the client.
- If the visit is in an unfamiliar location, ask a team member who may be familiar with the location to brief you regarding any known risks or possible hazards. It is important to have a good working knowledge of the surrounding community. Viewing the location with a program such as Google maps will also help to familiarize you with the surrounding area.
- Ask for precise driving instructions and consult a map before leaving the office. GPS devices are a useful tool, but not a substitute for knowing where you are going.
- Any incident or circumstance that makes an employee uncomfortable in a location or on a home visit should be reported to a supervisor immediately. Examples of such situations at a home visit are: unsecured weapons, unsecured pets, threatening clients or family members and residences where illegal activity appears to be taking place.
- Contact the client ahead of the visit with an estimated time of arrival so he/she will be watching for you.

In the Car

- Keep your car in good working order and make sure you have enough gas to carry you through the day.
- Before entering your car, check the back seat. When approaching, be sure to look under the car.
- Lock your car doors and keep windows up at all times. If necessary, keep windows only partially open above car level while driving.
- Keep valuables out of sight to decrease the chances of a break in.
- Avoid rubble and broken glass that can flatten a tire or immobilize your car.
- If possible, try to park where you can see your car from inside the home.
- Choose a parking space that is well lit, or that offers the safest walking route to the dwelling.
- Do not park in a driveway to lessen the chance of being blocked in when you want to leave.
- Park in the direction you want to go when leaving to go home.
- If you are transporting a client with a teammate, the client should always be in the front seat and the teammate should be in the middle seat in the back. This will allow for intervention in the event the client threatens or exhibits any untoward behavior.



In the Community

- Whenever possible, work with a teammate.
- Be alert and observant; develop a sense of consciousness regarding your immediate environment. This is something that should be considered in your day to day activities.
- Walk confidently and purposefully.

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- Arrange your work schedule so you can make new or questionable visits earlier in the day. You'll be less likely to find loitering and illegal activities.
- Wear shoes and clothing that make it easy to move quickly. Consult your organizations dress code policy for what is appropriate for your position.
- Avoid carrying a purse while in the field. Carry a minimal amount of money, your driver's license, a phone and your keys in your pocket, not in a purse.
- If you must have your purse with you, lock it in the trunk of your car before leaving the office. If you are carrying a purse in the field, wear the strap across your chest and clutched under your arm.
- Make yourself known to businesses and institutions and also to management and security personnel in public housing.
- Carry your cellular phone with you. Call the office at scheduled times to check in.
- Look for public telephones. You don't need any money to call 911.

Approaching the Dwelling

- Trust your instincts. If you feel uncomfortable in any given situation, leave.
- Drive around the area of the dwelling looking for:
 - o Unsafe conditions: poor lighting, limited visibility (fences, bushes), unsecured animals, people yelling, drinking, fighting, and loitering.
 - o Sources of help: pay phones, neighbors at home, open businesses, other community workers such as police and fire personnel, and utility trucks.
- If you find you have an incorrect address, don't search for the client by knocking on strange doors. Call your office.
- If you suspect you're being followed, enter the closest public place. If a car is following you, turn around and walk in the opposite direction.
- If people are loitering on the street or sidewalk, walk around them or cross the street.
- If you are verbally confronted, maintain a professional manner and don't attempt to answer verbal challenges.
- If you are using an elevator, use an empty one if possible. Always stand next to the door and the control panel. If you have a problem, push all the buttons so the elevator stops on all the floors, providing a better chance of escape. Press the appropriate floor number yourself. Don't ask someone else to do it. If someone suspicious gets on while you're already in the elevator, get off as soon as possible.

At the Dwelling

- Pay attention to signs like, "No Trespassing," "Beware of the Dog," etc., as they may be an indicator of the residents' attitudes towards strangers.
- Pause at the door before knocking or ringing the doorbell and listen. If you hear loud quarreling or fighting, or other disturbances, leave immediately.
 - o If you don't hear anything and you knock on the door or ring the doorbell, step back to provide adequate space when the door is open to quickly assess the client and the situation inside the dwelling.
- If an unfamiliar person answers the door, find out if the client is home before entering.

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- Do not enter a home when you suspect an unsafe condition exists.
- If you decide it's safe to enter, don't let your guard down. Be alert to signs of violence or sexual advances from either the client or family members.
- Make a note of other exits/entrances as soon as you enter the dwelling and where the telephone is located.
- If there are people present that you feel are a danger, reschedule the visit.
- Be aware of the traffic in and out of the home while you are there.
- If there are pets in the home, note this in the client's record. Should the pet be a nuisance, ask the client to put it in another room for the duration of the visit.
- Do not go into a dark room, basement, or attic area first. Have the client go first and turn on the light. Follow; never lead, even if you have been to the dwelling before.
- If there is a weapon in the home, its casual display is inappropriate. You should consider pre-advising all clients of this issue. If you see a weapon, or become aware of one in the room, leave immediately or as soon as possible within the range of your professional responsibilities. Notify your supervisors and assess the risk level. Minimally, require the client to put the weapon in another room during your scheduled visit and tell them not to allow armed individuals in the residence during your visit.
- If you need to retrieve something from outside, knock again or say hello when you re-enter.
- If you feel unsafe because of a heated family argument that erupts, leave as soon as possible.
- When sitting, choose a hard chair, if possible, so you are able to get up more quickly.
- If possible, sit with your back to a solid wall, not to an unknown space.
- Sit as close to an entrance/exit as possible.

Dealing with Hostile/Angry Clients

Clients can react with anger because of difficulty in finding help with their situations, emotional pain or discomfort, or fear and anxiety about the results of your visit.

- React and respond to the client in a calm but firm manner.
- To help the client define their anger, verbally acknowledge it by stating, "I understand that you are upset" or "It sounds like you're really angry about this."
- Reinforce the positive long-term benefits of your assistance, your commitment to their best interests, and your role as their ally.
- A lower volume of voice can help the client calm down. In addition, be cognizant of your body language and how the client may perceive you.
- Encourage the client to sit down.
- Rehearse ahead of time what you'd say or do in these situations.
- If the situation appears dangerous, leave and call 911.

