

Home Visit Safety Considerations		
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Responsible Person: ADRC Office Managers/Regional Manager		Author: Ingrid Kovars, Administrative Secretary
Reference:		Approved By: ADRC of Eagle Country Governing Board
Cross Reference: Columbia County Health and Human Services Personal Safety for Home Visiting Document		

Purpose

The purpose of these considerations is to help assure that Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) staff know how to assess/approach situations outside of the office in a manner that will maximize personal safety.

Policy

ADRC staff will assess surroundings and approach all customer visits that take place outside of the office with their own personal safety in mind.

Procedures

Office Procedures:

Make Fellow Staff aware of your day's schedule. Keep address/customer file updated. If the visit is in an unfamiliar location, ask a staff member who may be familiar with the location to brief you regarding any known risks or possible hazards. Ask for precise driving instructions and consult a map before leaving the office. Any incident or circumstance that makes staff 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 customers or family member, and residences where illegal activity appears to be taking place. Contact the customer ahead of the visit so he/she will be watching for your arrival.

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 partially open above ear level while driving. Keep valuables out of sight. Avoid rubble and broken glass that can flatten a tire and 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 residence. Do not park in the driveway to lessen the chance of being blocked in when you want to leave. Park in the direction you want to go when leaving the home. Be wary of dead end streets.

In the Community:

Work with a partner, if possible. Be alert and observant; develop a sense of consciousness regarding your immediate environment. Walk confidently and purposefully. Arrange your work schedule so you can make new or questionable visits early 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. Avoid carrying a purse while in the field. Carry a minimal amount of money, your driver's license, and your keys on your person, not in a purse. Lock your purse in the trunk of your car before leaving the office if you must have it with you. Make yourself known to businesses and institutions and also to management and security personnel in public housing and other high-rise buildings. Carry a cellular phone if possible. Look for public telephones. You don't need money to call 911. Call the office at scheduled times to check in.

Approaching the Residence:

Trust your instincts. If you feel uncomfortable in any given situation, leave. Drive around the area of the residence looking for unsafe conditions like poor lighting, limited visibility (bushes, fences) unsecured animals, people yelling, drinking, fighting, loitering. Also look for sources of help like pay phones, neighbors at home, 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 customer by knocking on strange doors. Call your office instead. If you suspect you are 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 in 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 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 Residence:

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 and listen. If you hear loud quarreling or fighting or other disturbances, leave immediately. If an unfamiliar person answers the door, find out if the customer is home before entering. Use extreme caution 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 customer or family members. Make a note of other exits/entrances as soon as you enter the residence and where the telephone is located. If there are people present that you feel are a danger, reschedule the visit. Be aware of traffic in and out of the home while you are there. If there are pets in the home, note this on your record. Should the pet be a nuisance, ask the customer to put it in another room for the duration of the visit. Do not go into a dark room, basement, or attic first. Have the customer go in first and turn on the light. Follow, never lead, even if you've been to the residence before. While it is legal to have a firearm in the home, its casual display is inappropriate. You should consider pre-advising all customers of this issue. If you see a firearm, or become aware of one in the room, or see someone is armed, 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 customer to put the firearm in another room during your visit(s). This included individuals with concealed carry permits. If you need to retrieve something from outside, knock again or say hello when you reenter. 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 so your back is to a solid wall, not an unknown space. Sit as close to an entrance/exit as possible.

Dealing With Hostile/Angry Customers:

Customers 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 customer in a calm but firm manner. To help the customer define their anger, verbally acknowledge it, “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 customer calm down. Encourage the customer to sit down. Rehearse ahead of time what you’d say or do in these situations. If a situation appears dangerous, leave and call 911.

History: New policy 6/2016

Annual Review Dates:

Updated at 1/2017 Manager’s Meeting to change the title from “policy” to “considerations.”