



State of South Carolina Department of Social Services

Policies and Procedures: Child Welfare Manual

Subject:	740. Worker Safety Procedures for Child Welfare Field Visits
Chapter:	Family Preservation
Effective Date:	01/14/2010
Standards:	Guiding Principles and Standards (GPS) Practice Model
Application:	Child Welfare Services Staff

PURPOSE STATEMENT:

To outline procedures to assist workers in maximizing their personal safety while making home visits or carrying out other job-related functions.

Every CW case has the potential for unexpected confrontation due to the involuntary nature of investigations and assessments. It is important for case managers to understand and acknowledge the nature of CW intervention and the client's view of their role in order to protect themselves

While difficulties may occur at any point in the process, threats and volatile situations are more likely to occur during the initial assessment or investigation, during crisis situations, and when dramatic action is taken (e.g., removal of a child or informing the family of the decision to take a case to court).

The first step in ensuring case manager safety is to assess the risk of the situation before the initial contact. Consider all information known at intake or discovered through the records search as part of your preparations for the initial contact.

Worker safety is very important as an unsafe worker is not likely to be able to ensure the safety of a child in the home. Use the following information to guide the decision to ask law enforcement or a coworker to accompany you on the initial contact.

PROCEDURE:

Case Manager and Team Leader:

1. Considers all information available at intake or at other points in life of case to make best decision about worker safety and how to approach the family.

A dangerous situation may be one where:

- There is a serious allegation and immediate danger threat to the child.
- There is previous history of law enforcement involvement, family violence or spouse abuse.
- The report or LE records search notes violent or aggressive behavior of family members.
- There are firearms/weapons noted in the report along with the belief that they are used in aggressive behavior towards others.
- The family's geographical location is isolated or dangerous.
- The family members belong to or identify with a "hate group" or other

organization that advocates violence.

- There have been multiple reports on this family.
- The family has lived at the present address less than six months.
- The initial contact would be made after regular working hours.

2. Considers following questions in analysis of worker safety:

- Are the subjects violent or hostile?
- Does the situation involve family violence, including partner, elder, or child abuse?
- Does the situation involve physical or sexual abuse or a fatality?
- Are the family members exhibiting behaviors that indicate mental illness?
- Are the family members presently abusing or selling substances?
- Are the parents or caregivers involved in ritualistic abuse or cult practices?
- Does the information note life-threatening or serious injuries to the children?
- Will the children be removed from the family situation on this visit?
- Is the family's geographic location potentially dangerous?
- Will the caseworker go into an area with limited available supports?
- Is the area known for high crime or drug activity?
- Does the housing situation or neighborhood increase concerns for staff personal safety?
- Does anyone in the home have a previous history of violence or multiple referrals?
- Have there been previous involuntary removals of family members?

Case Manager

1. Takes preventive measures to ensure personal safety by the following:

Families experiencing multiple issues (e.g., substance use disorders, mental health problems, domestic violence, criminal behavior) can make it more dangerous for CW caseworkers going into homes to investigate cases of child maltreatment. While on a home visit, caseworkers should remember the following safety tips:

- a. Ensure that the CW supervisor knows the time and place of the appointment and the expected time of return.
- b. Dress appropriately and in a manner that blends into the community.
- c. Walk close to buildings or close to the curb in an effort to have at least one safe side. Stay away from bushes, alleys, and dark corners, if possible.
- d. Know the route in and out of the area by examining a map or by talking with others beforehand.
- e. Do not wander or appear lost or confused.
- f. Park as close to the home as possible and in a way that helps ensure an easy exit.
- g. Keep the car keys in hand while entering and exiting the home so they are easily available.

- h. Be aware of your surroundings at all times.
- i. Enter and leave homes carefully, noticing doors, windows, neighbors, loiterers, and anything or anyone that may be a risk to safety.
- j. If unsure of the safety or surroundings of the location, move to another spot by suggesting taking a break or getting a cup of coffee and finish talking there.
- k. Attempt to keep a clear path to an exit. Be aware of dogs that may pose a threat.
- l. Follow intuition and take action if feeling afraid or threatened. Leave the home or call 911 if necessary.
- m. Have access, if possible, to technology that may assist with safety issues (e.g., GPS systems, cell phones).
- n. Assess whether it is safe to accept refreshments.
- o. Learn how to decline offers of food or other refreshments tactfully.

In cases where drugs and alcohol may be an issue in the family or the surrounding community:

Go to the home with another case manager or law enforcement officer, particularly if the home is in an area known for drug dealing.

- a. Know the local signs that indicate a drug deal is occurring. In such situations, do not enter the home without law enforcement personnel.
- b. Be aware of homes or other living environments that may be used as a clandestine drug factory. Do not attempt to investigate such places alone, and immediately contact the police or sheriff if such a lab is suspected.
- c. Anyone without proper training and protective gear should stay at least 500 feet away from any suspected laboratory. The following are signs of a possible lab:
 - Strong or unusual chemical odors
 - Laboratory equipment, such as glass tubes, beakers, funnels, and Bunsen burners
 - Chemical drums or cans in the yard
 - A high volume of automobile or foot traffic, particularly at odd hours
 - New, high fences with no visible livestock or other animals.

If one or both parents appear to be intoxicated, high, incoherent, or passed out, ensure the safety and supervision of the children. Once that has been accomplished, it is appropriate to reschedule the appointment. It may be appropriate to call the supervisor for guidance.

Remember - When in doubt; take law enforcement or a coworker with you if the report information suggests a dangerous situation.

Referenced Documents Revision

Comments

Jan. 2009 - New section created to outline issues to consider in worker safety as well as preventive measures.