

## REFERENCES

### WORKER SAFETY IN CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE

Annie E. Casey Foundation, Family to Family: Tools for Rebuilding Foster Care (2002). Safety First: Dealing with the Daily Challenges of Child Welfare- Building support for child welfare's frontline workers, part one. Retrieved on June 4, 2002 from [http://web.archive.org/web/20060117000238/http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/family to family/tools/16939.pdf](http://web.archive.org/web/20060117000238/http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/family%20to%20family/tools/16939.pdf)

(K1, K2, K8)

#### About the study/citation-

This paper focuses on tools, skills, and issues related to safety for workers and others concerned with helping families in their homes and communities. The paper addresses assessing for the potential for danger during visits, traveling to and from a family's home, preventing violence while with the family, and other recommendations/guidelines.

#### Findings/content-

- Assessing the potential for violence during visits-
  - 1) Talk to the referring person and ask if there has been reports of violence related to the family; if so, what type of violence; what the neighborhood; are there any weapons in the home; and does the family support or discourage violent behavior?
  - 2) Begin a relationship over the phone with the family before the first visit. If the family expresses concern that the worker will be hurt on the way to their home, the worker should ask if the family can meet him or her somewhere else safe, consider seeing them during the daylight, or the worker can consider bringing someone with him or her.
- Traveling to and from the family's home-
  - 1) Dress as though you belong in the area
  - 2) Stay focused and act as though you know where you are going
  - 3) Stay close to buildings

4) Get maps and figure out how to read them. Staying on the main roads as much as possible in urban areas, and using only the rural roads most likely to have traffic so that someone can rescue us if we do break down.

5) Ask the family or the referral worker if there is anything happening that might make the main route a problem.

6) When leaving the family's home, do not write notes or talk on the cell phone until the worker is in a safe place.

7) When entering the home, stay alert, notice where doors and windows are, notice who the neighbors are, and listen for anything happening inside the house.

- Preventing violence while with the family and general strategies in the home-

1) Use active listening

2) Use "I" messages

3) Show respect

4) Talk first with the most reluctant person

5) Be responsive to the family's pace

6) Acknowledge your limitations and call a supervisor, if needed

7) If things get intense, ask for all to take a break

8) If violence breaks out, leave immediately

9) When dealing with people who appear drunk or high, it is better to make sure the children are safe than to have a problem solving conversation.

### Implications for CWS-

The worker should be aware of the tools and skills needed to assess for danger on home visits and how to prevent or reduce violence when a worker is with the family in order to ensure worker safety.

Eastern Washington University Counseling and Psychological Services (n.d.). Defusing Anger in Others. Retrieved on June 4, 2009 from <http://www.ewu.edu/x6755.xml>

(K4, K5, K6)

### About the Study/citation-

This citation provides information regarding anger and recommendations to defuse anger in others. Six elements of defusing anger in others are discussed.

#### Findings/content-

- The six elements of defusing anger in others are communicating respect, cooperating, effective listening, reframing, asserting and disengaging
- Communicating respect- Demonstrating respect is a primary way to de-escalate hostility.
  - 1) Communicate respect with listening skills and non-aggressive body language.
  - 2) Show an interest in resolving the issue or meeting the other's needs.
  - 3) Acknowledge the importance of their concern.
  - 4) Refrain from judging his/her behavior.
- Cooperating- Try to cooperate unless doing so can cause harm to you or others.
  - 1) Show that you understand he/she is upset and angry.
  - 2) Refrain from pointing out some reason why the person should not be angry.
  - 3) Do not disagree...rather focus on communicating some empathy for the person's feelings.
  - 4) Your objective is simply to avoid escalation.
- Effective listening- In any attempt to defuse anger, the focus must shift from getting your point across, to understanding the person, and allying with them toward a common goal.
  - 1) People often become angry or aggressive only after a lengthy period of not feeling acknowledged.
  - 2) Do not interrupt or correct the angry person. Rational arguments may provoke their hostility.
  - 3) When people are under stress associated with conflict, the potential for misinterpretation is increased.
  - 4) Paraphrase, clarify, and gather information.
  - 5) Validate the person's experience. You do not have to agree with them, only that you have listened to them and understand how he or she might be feeling.
  - 6) Use 'open-ended' questions

- 7) Be aware of your reactions, and attempt to change your 'judgment' into 'curiosity.'
  - 8) Generally, match, then lower the person's intensity.
  - 9) Watch nonverbal communication
  - 10) Standing at an angle (sideways), rather than directly opposing someone.
  - 11) Don't talk too much, and use the person's name (if known).
- Reframing- Redirect aggression into a non-threatening discussion of the person's possible needs.
    - 1) Reframing is a way to change directions.
    - 2) Reframing reflects understanding, but changes the emphasis from differences to commonality, from the negative to the positive. A reframe upon what the person obviously values, can lead to new directions and common ground.

Asserting- There are times when you clearly need to assert your own needs and interests in order to effectively manage the situation.

- 1) Set clear, firm boundaries, and expectations for appropriate behavior.
- 2) Be 'hard' on the issues, but not on the person.
- 3) Use 'I' statements. For example, "I feel anxious when you pound on the desk...and it makes it hard for me to listen to you effectively."
- 4) Use 'and,' rather than 'but' (e.g., "I can see your point, and I can also see the need for..."). 'But' is known as the 'verbal eraser,' as it tends to erase everything that precedes it in a statement.
- 5) Assertive requests are not always appropriate, especially with high threats.

Disengaging- Remove yourself from the threatening situation when listening and other methods are failing to reduce threat.\

- 1) Disengage when you are also angered and/or fear for your safety.
- 2) Explain the need for a break or 'time-out,' and also a commitment for you (or someone else) to return to the matter.
- 3) Request assistance of supervisor, co-worker, or others.
- 4) Debrief your experience with someone you trust.

### Implications for CWS-

Since the worker can often be placed in potentially unsafe situations, it important for the worker to understand how to de-escalate a potential crisis or angry person.

Murdach, A. (1993). Working with Potentially Assaultive Clients. *Health and Social Work, 18(4)*.

(K1, K2, K6)

#### About the study/citation-

This article examines the potentially assaultive or preassaultive client and offers some ways to minimize the risk of assault by clients. The data used in this article are derived from the author's 10-year experience in providing social work services on an acute psychiatric ward in a large public medical center. Although the data are limited to one setting, recent studies indicate they may be generalizable to other settings as well (Newhill, 1992).

#### Findings/content-

- The following describes the categories of client who may become assaultive or situations that may lead to assault:
  - 1) Panic- Client can sometimes become so overwhelmed with fear that they lash out in panic at others who attempt to influence their choices and constrain their behavior. Because such clients feel under attack, it is important for the practitioner to avoid an appearance of threatening behavior. Responses to the client should be calming and reassuring, deliberate and with purposeful avoidance of eye contact since for some, eye contact can be interpreted as a threat. Do not position yourself in directly in front of the person since this might appear to block the person's path of retreat or escape.
  - 2) Rage- Clients who exhibit rage may demonstrate impulsiveness, immaturity, and explosive behavior if the person's wishes or needs are not met. They also be identified by their extreme defensiveness, lack of insight, low frustration and tolerance level. To control such behavior, the practitioner should demonstrate both concerns for the client's valid requests and firmness in the face of hostility. Set forth clear expectations that the client will adhere to certain behaviors. Verbal communication and tone of voice must demonstrate that the practitioner is not only in charge, but can impose external controls.
  - 3) organicity- Impaired intellectual functioning can cause severe disorientation and intense anger. It may also result from alcohol or drug abuse. These people may also appear dazed, emotionally labile and drive by impulses. Verbally attempts to reasons with such people are generally ineffective. Practitioners must be aware that some clients' responses may be unpredictable; therefore, one should emphasize consistency and repetition when working with these clients.

4) antisocial behavior- These people may use threats of violence or assaultiveness in order to meet their needs or control the behavior of others. These people are identifiable by their hypervigilance, menacing demeanor, and attempts to present themselves as “ticking time bombs.” Practitioners need to communicate clear consequences of the threatening behavior to such clients. When working with a team setting, a united front should be presented. The worker should avoid presenting an appearance of weakness or indecisiveness. Common errors when working with type of client include excessive familiarity with the client, being reluctant to set limits, giving the client too much control and overreliance on external control.

### Implications of CWS-

In order to defuse a potentially dangerous situation or client, the worker needs to be aware of what category of potentially assaultive behaviors the client may be exhibiting; therefore, determining how to approach this person based on the demonstrated behaviors.

Smith, J.C. (2002). Stress Management: A comprehensive handbook of techniques and strategies. New York: Springer Publishing Company.

(K9)

### About the study/citation-

This clinical manual addresses stress management and relaxation. It contains tools for training the user in the methods of relaxation, positive thinking, and time management. It also describes hyperarousal and hypervigilance.

### Findings/content-

- Hyperarousal is an exaggerated manifestation of the stress arousal “fight-or-flight response.” Hyperarousal can be manifested as hypervigilance.
- Hypervigilance can be described as a heightened sensitivity and feeling of “being on guard.”
- Schiraldi (2000) notes important signs of hypervigilance to include:
  - 1) feeling vulnerable, fearful of lots of things, unable to feel calm in safe places
  - 2) fear or repetition

- 3) anticipating disaster; needing to sit in the corner of the room with the back to the wall, looking for exits
- 4) rapid scanning of surroundings
- 5) keeping a weapon or several weapons
- 6) being overprotective of loved ones

#### Implication for CWS-

The worker should be aware of the difference between awareness and hypervigilance and also that if he or she is experiencing hypervigilance, this may be an indication for concern. Awareness of surroundings is helpful in promoting worker safety. However, hypervigilance can be an indicator of other issues, such as secondary traumatic stress.

Spencer, P.C. and Munch, S. (2003). Client Violence Towards Social Workers: The role of management in community mental health programs. *Social Work, 48(4), 532-544.*

(K1, K2)

#### About the study/citation-

The article addresses the critical role of supervisors and administrators in community mental health programs in developing proactive prevention and postincident response policies. These policies should create an organizational climate of safety awareness, training, and psychological support to traumatized worker-victims. Recommendations for macro-level intervention are suggested, and implications for social work education and the profession are addressed.

#### Findings/content-

- The percentage of social workers experiencing violence varies greatly in the research, ranging in estimates from 50 percent to 88 percent (Weinger, 2001). The most common form of violence is verbal threat (Kadushin, 1992). Physical assaults were reported by 25 percent of the 175 licensed social workers and 98 agency directors surveyed in a western state (Rey, 1996).
- Social workers often deny that they can become victims at the hands of their clients, thus overlooking the potential for danger (Maier, 1996). Coworkers avoid the topic of worker safety even after an act of violence to a co-worker has occurred (Shulman, 1993; Weinger, 2001); acknowledging the event forces coworkers to admit that they, too, are vulnerable.
- Social workers may experience compassion fatigue, which is also known as secondary or vicarious trauma (Figley, 1995). *Compassion fatigue* is the possible

psychological result of workers experiencing the symptoms of their clients, disruption of self-protective beliefs about safety, control, and predictability; sometimes being a witness to clients' repetitive self-destructiveness. (Sexton, 1999).

- Client assessment is important in identifying foreseeable risks before and during the outreach visit and instituting appropriate precautions. Clients should be assessed for acute symptomatology, noticeable behavioral changes, medication compliance, known or suspected use of drugs nor alcohol, mandated treatment, and known history of violence.
- An environmental assessment evaluates conditions workers might encounter during outreach. The environment includes workers' vehicles, the community and clients' residences. The worker's vehicle is an environmental concern because it is used for transport of worker and clients.
- On approach to a client's residence, workers should take note of the external appearance of the building and individuals in the client's home or vicinity poses a concern. Inside the home, workers should scan for observable illegal drug paraphernalia, locations of exits, and location and types of potential weapons.
- Instinctual responses such as the psychophysiology of fight-flight, combined with a gut instinct should be acknowledged as a powerful resource for knowing. Workers should trust their intuition and immediately leave the environment if something feels amiss.

#### Implications for CWS-

It is important for the worker to acknowledge the possibility of becoming a victim of a client's violence. Awareness of environmental cues and this awareness can assist in preparing for such possible behavior by a client, promoting greater worker safety.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – Administration for Children and Families (2000). "Preventing Family Crisis." from Supporting Families in Crisis: Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Community. Retrieved on June 8, 2009 from [http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/Family%20and%20Community%20Partnerships/Crisis%20Support/Family%20Support/famcom\\_fts\\_009541\\_091705.html#3](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/Family%20and%20Community%20Partnerships/Crisis%20Support/Family%20Support/famcom_fts_009541_091705.html#3).

(K3, K4)

#### About the study-

This citation provides information regarding preventing family crisis. Sections of this site include identifying families at risk for crisis, engaging families in crisis prevention, stress reduction and solution-focused plans.

## Findings/content-

- No family is immune to crisis but some are vulnerable to it.
- The following are stress-producing situations and events include;
  - 1) Family situations- examples include abandonment by a parent, unplanned pregnancy, a serious illness, a child abuse and neglect investigation, illegal drug abuse and spousal abuse. Also positively viewed events, such as marriage, the birth of a child, a new job or a grown child leaving the home, can also be stressful events.
  - 2) Economic situations- sudden or chronic financial stress caused by loss of a job or public assistance, high medical expenses, missed child support payments, and money spent on gambling and drug addiction can lead to family crisis.
  - 3) Community situations- These situations include deliberate acts of violence, such as drive-by shootings, neighborhood riots, and lack of access to culturally appropriate community resource and may contribute to family crisis.
  - 4) Natural elements- Disasters such as floods, hurricanes and fires can create crises in families. Even extended periods of high heat and gloomy weather can be very stressful.
- A Solution-Focused approach may assist the family in crisis in identifying solutions to the problem.
- One way to prevent crisis is stress reduction. Such strategies include practicing self-talk and physical activity.
- Using guided conversations can assist in finding solutions to stressful situations or a crisis. Guided conversations include questions, such as exception-finding questions, scaling questions, coping questions, wish questions and “What’s better” questions.

## Implications for CWS-

The worker needs to understand what types of elements can contribute to a family crisis. This can assist the worker in identifying potential ways to prevent escalation of a crisis and how to intervene in the crisis.

University of Wisconsin-Extension (n.d.) Personal Safety for Visiting Professionals.  
Retrieved June 4, 2009 from <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/homevisit/program/pdfs/safety.pdf>

(K1, K2, K6, K8)

#### About the study/citation-

This information is provided in a brochure format. The information offers some personal safety recommendations or guidelines for professionals who conduct home visits. It also has some information regarding how to deal with an angry or hostile client.

#### Findings/content-

- The safety recommendations discussed include those for at the office, in the car, in the community and approaching/being the client's home or dwelling.
- Office procedures include:
  - 1) Make co-workers aware of your day's schedule.
  - 2) Keep address/client file updated.
  - 3) If the visit is in an unfamiliar location, ask a co-worker who may be familiar with the location to brief you regarding any known risks or possible hazards.
  - 4) Ask for exact driving instructions and consult a map before leaving the office.
  - 5) Any circumstance that makes the worker 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 member, etc.
  - 6) Contact the client ahead of the visit so he/she will be watching for your arrival.
- In the car suggestions include:
  - 1) Keep your car in good working order.
  - 2) Before entering your car, check the back seat.
  - 3) When approaching, be sure to look under the car.
  - 4) Lock your car doors and keep windows up at all times. If necessary, keep windows only partially open while driving.
  - 5) If possible, try to park where you can see your car from inside the home.
  - 6) Choose a parking space that is well lit, or that offers the safest walking route to the home.
  - 7) Do not park in a driveway to lessen the chance of being blocked in when you want to leave.
  - 8) Park in the direction you want to go when leaving the home.
- In the community suggestions include:

- 1) Be alert and observant; develop a sense of consciousness regarding your immediate environment.
  - 2) Walk confidently and purposefully.
  - 3) Arrange your work schedule so you can make new or questionable visits earlier in the day.
  - 4) Wear shoes and clothing that make it easy to move quickly.
  - 5) Avoid carrying a purse while in the field.
  - 6) Lock your purse in the trunk of your car before leaving the office if you need to bring it with you.
  - 7) Make yourself known to businesses, management and security personnel in public housing or other housing.
  - 8) Carry a cell phone.
- Approaching the dwelling suggestions include:
    - 1) Trust your instincts. If you feel uncomfortable in any given situation, leave.
    - 2) Drive around the area of the dwelling looking for:
      - Unsafe conditions like poor lighting, limited visibility, unsecured animals, people yelling, etc.
      - Sources of help like pay phones, neighbors at home, open businesses, other community workers, etc.
    - 3) If you suspect you are being followed, enter the closest public place. If you are verbally confronted, maintain a professional manner and don't attempt to answer verbal challenges.
    - 4) If you are using an elevator, use an empty one if possible. Always stand next to the door and the control panel.
  - At the dwelling suggestions include:
    - 1) Pause at the door before knocking and listen. If you hear loud arguing or fighting or other disturbances, leave immediately.
    - 2) If an unfamiliar person answers the door, find out if the client is home before you enter.
    - 3) Do not enter a home when you suspect any unsafe condition exists.
    - 4) If you decide it's safe to enter, don't let your guard down.
    - 5) Make a note of other exits/entrances as soon as you enter the home and where the telephone is located.
    - 6) Be aware of traffic in and out of the home while you are there.
    - 7) Do not go into a dark room, basement, or attic first. Let the client go first and turn on the light. Follow and never lead, even if you've been to the home before.
    - 8) If you feel unsafe because of a heated family argument that erupts, leave as soon as possible
    - 9) If possible, sit so your back is to a solid wall, not to an unknown space.
    - 10) Sit as close to an entrance/exit as possible

- Dealing with angry/hostile clients recommendations include:
  - 1) Respond to the client in a calm but firm manner.
  - 2) To help the client identify their anger, verbally acknowledge it.
  - 3) Reinforce the positive benefits of your assistance and your commitment to their best interests.
  - 4) Speaking in a lower volume can help the client calm down.
  - 5) Encourage the client to sit down.
  - 6) Rehearse ahead of time what you'd say or do in these situations.
  - 7) If situation becomes dangerous, leave and call 911

### Implications for CWS-

The worker must be aware and prepared for any possible dangers to ensure his or her own safety. The worker needs to assess the situation, people and cues in the environment to determine if their safety is at risk.