

Worker Safety in Child Welfare has continued to be an ongoing issue, but one that we tend to overlook due to the ongoing demands of our profession. Yet, everyday child welfare workers are sent into situations and homes that most people would turn away from. Child Welfare workers have very difficult jobs that involve at times a high

potential for risk when many times they come "armed" with only a notebook. Safety should be an ongoing discussion at your agency, within your department and individually with workers in order to ensure safety inside the agency as well as when they are interacting with families in their homes.



## Making Worker Safety a Priority

### Elements to consider when working with a family where domestic violence is present:

- Seek out information on the perpetrators risk level: criminal record, past child welfare assessments, interviews with family members & collaterals.
- Ask the Domestic Violence survivor how they believe the perpetrator will respond to the presence of child welfare.
- Seek out information on whether the perpetrator has access to or a history of weapon possession.
- Consider interviewing perpetrators in safe locations, such as at the police dept. or the Social Service agency.
- Process the worker's fears and concerns, talk about de-escalation tactics to assist them in the interview.
- In situations that are high risk, consider having law enforcement accompany the worker. Additional considerations in lower risk situations would be to pair the worker with a coworker or consider going with the worker to the home visit to assist.

*Safe and Together Model*

### Safety within the office setting:

- Make sure all workers, even those that are not in a social work role, know the emergency procedures at your agency. These should be posted and reviewed on a regular basis.
- When meeting with someone that is considered at risk for violence, have a colleague or supervisor sit in on the office visit. Law Enforcement should be called if the person is considered dangerous.
- Keep your door open if confidentiality allows, so that others can come to your aide if needed.
- Meet in a space that allows for easy exit in potentially violent situations.

# Worker Safety

## During Home Visits

Our philosophy in social work is to focus on the strengths of the family, not the likelihood of them doing harm to workers; yet, we walk in the homes of families who are quite literally having one of the worst days of their life. It would be shortsighted to overlook and ignore the safety concerns that potentially lie within that home visit. It is best to be prepared for the worst should it happen.

**So, what are things to consider when you have workers meeting with families in their homes?** One of the most important items as a supervisor is to know **when** and **where** workers are conducting home visits. Are workers making you aware of their home visits, and when they plan to return? Workers should be providing up to date schedule of the visits, where the family is located and the date and time of the visit, so that someone from the office is aware of their location.

**Prior to the home visits, consideration should be given to the following:**

- Is there previous history of violence by family members?
- Do family members have history of mental illness?
- Is there a history of alcohol and/or drug abuse?
- Have there been serious physical injuries to children in the home?
- Is it likely that a child will be removed from the home during the visit?
- Does the family live in a dangerous neighborhood, a rural or isolated location?

Basic information for safety in the client's home, on the job and in the car is accessible at: [A Personal Safety Tip Sheet for Human Service Workers.](#)

**Additional concerns arise when there are situations where drugs and illegal activity are involved.**

Unfortunately, this affects many of the families that we see in child welfare today. Agencies should consider ongoing safety

training from law enforcement and their drug task force on recognizing drug activity and what protocol should be followed. Creating positive relationships with your local law enforcement agencies also increases the chance that workers will reach out to them for assistance when necessary and assistance will be provided.

**Additional Resources:** The NASW created a helpful resource for workers and supervisors in order to consider safety for workers. This includes information on office safety, use of cell phones as well as risk when conducting home visits and transporting clients: [Guidelines for Social Work Safety in the Workplace](#) .

Information regarding staying safe on the job, guidelines for situations that involve domestic violence as well as staying safe when guns are present or around animals can be accessed at: [Practice Notes Volume 21, Number 2](#)

References: National Association of Social Workers (2013) Guidelines for Social Worker Safety in the Workplace. Accessed 3-16-18, <https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=60EdoMjcNC0%3D&portalid=0>; Everyday Self Defense; Personal Safety Tip Sheet. Accessed 3-16-18. [http://www.everydayselfdefense.com/uploads/4/7/1/5/47555789/esd-pdf\\_tip\\_sheet\\_july\\_2016.pdf](http://www.everydayselfdefense.com/uploads/4/7/1/5/47555789/esd-pdf_tip_sheet_july_2016.pdf); North Carolina Division of Social Services and the Family and Children's Resource Program; Children's Services Practice Notes (April 2016, Vol. 21, No 2) [http://www.practicenotes.org/v21n2/CSPN\\_v21n2.pdf](http://www.practicenotes.org/v21n2/CSPN_v21n2.pdf) Paying Attention to worker safety in domestic violence cases. (2011) Selleck, Kristien MSW , Safe and Together Institute. Accessed 3-14-18. <http://endingviolence.com/2010/01/paying-attention-to-worker-safety-in-domestic-violence-cases/>

*Child Welfare Supervision* is published by the UND Children and Family Services Training Center under the sponsorship of the Division of Children and Family Services, North Dakota Department of Human Services. It is intended for all supervisor of child welfare in the state of ND. Comments should be directed to the Training Center.

