

Basic Principles to Assure Physical Safety

- Always tell someone where you are going and approximately when you will be back (verbal, e-mail, sign-in sheet, outlook calendar).
- Ensure there is a record of the client's name, address and phone number in the office file.
- Discuss potential threats with your supervisor and strategize with him/her. Whenever possible, find out if there are firearms or other weapons in the home and if anyone in the home has a history of violence.
- Wear comfortable clothing, including shoes in which you can run.
- Carry only what you need.
- Schedule visits or park in such a way that you can leave easily and quickly, if needed.
- Be aware of your surroundings.
- Try to avoid isolated and unlit areas.
- Carry a phone or other means of communication with you whenever possible.
- Use the buddy system with another caseworker, if appropriate.
- Stand slightly to the side when knocking on the door/ringing the bell.
- Look inside to assess for threats before you enter the home. Determine if there are any strange or noxious odors before entering.
- Watch where you walk and look overhead and to the sides for any threats from exposed electrical wiring, other fire/health hazards, pets or biohazardous materials.
- Introduce yourself and explain your presence, reassuring the family that your purpose is to assure the child's protection and help the family, and that you are interested in working collaboratively with the family to do this.
- Know where the exits are and make sure you have a clear pathway to the exit.
- Treat others with respect and listen attentively to what they say.
- Continually read the person's body language and be aware of signs that indicate their mood or attitude.
- Distinguish between when a person is angry and needs to vent/wants to be heard versus

them becoming hostile.

- Recognize typical signs of escalation, such as crossed arms, tense muscles, foot-tapping, pacing, raised voice, verbal aggression, increase in offensive language, increased rate of speech, more rapid breathing and change in the tone of voice.
- Understand that escalation may move from non-verbal cues, to verbal cues to physically acting out.
- Always retain a calm, matter-of-fact and supportive demeanor, regardless of the threat. "I understand how angry you are, Mr. Jones. Most people are. I would be too, at first. Even so, I would like to try to work with you. You're an important part of this family, and I need your help. Let's sit down, shall we?"
- Use de-escalation strategies, such as slowing down your responses and lowering your voice, as well as interactional skills to defuse hostility and resistance. Acknowledge the client's expressions of anger or fear and provide reassurance. Show empathy, share information and explore alternatives.
- Depending on the age and culture of the client, eye contact and physical touch may escalate the situation further or may help to de-escalate the situation. Know how your client will react before employing these techniques.
- Try to keep the interaction as private as possible; use any support people available to help de-escalate.
- Keep outside interference (neighbors, family members who are helping escalate the situation) to a minimum.
- When coming and going, walk with purpose and carry your keys in your hand. Look around/under your car before getting into it.
- If the situation continues to escalate, leave. If you are unable to get out or to get completely away, try to find cover and leave when you can.
- Use law enforcement as back up.
- If you return with law enforcement, reinforce that your main purpose is to keep everyone safe. Try to respect as many wishes of the angry, volatile client as possible, without compromising the safety of the child or the integrity of the contact.
- **IMPORTANT:** If de-escalation does not help to defuse the client's anger and hostility appears to escalate, take steps to leave. Temporarily discontinue the interview. Tell the client quietly that you'll come back at another time when there isn't so much tension. Then leave. Return as soon as possible with police protection.