



Home Visitor Safety

PREPARED FOR ILLINOIS MIECHV

BY THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Learning Objectives

- List rationale for ensuring personal safety
- Describe agency policies and procedures that support family support professional safety
- List potential dangers to home visiting professionals
- Identify strategies for coping with these dangers
- Describe basic safety measures for home visiting professionals
- List basic health, safety and other precautions that protect family support professionals and their clients



Overview

- Home visits, if not conducted properly, can pose a threat
- As a home visitor, you are an invited guest in a family's home
- You may be walking into an uncertain environment with unknown obstacles, scenarios and dangers
- Always be friendly, but aware of your surroundings, under all circumstances
- Set safety responsibilities and guidelines for home visiting agencies, supervisors and staff
- Provide safety-related best practices and resources



Organizational Responsibilities

- Create a Culture of Safety
- Develop and Implement Safety Policies
- Provide Initial and Refresher Trainings Annually for All Staff
- Equip Home Visitors with Safety Resources
- Encourage and Promote Safe Practice
- Develop and Implement an Incident Reporting System
- Support Home Visitors In the Event of an Incident



Supervisor Responsibilities

- Maintain updated information on all home visitors
- Maintain updated information on all home visitor schedules
- Establish a safety code word and training on how to best deliver code words (email, text, call) and in what situations the safety code word should be used
- Mandate home visitors attend annual trainings on prevention strategies that will help keep them safe; periodically review key points from annual training with staff
- Maintain open communication about safety concerns and incidents
- Create a culture of safety for your team



Home Visitor Responsibilities: Before a Visit

- Thoroughly review intake information to screen for possible safety concerns, including a history of domestic violence or substance abuse
- Schedule visits early in the day and/or during daylight, whenever possible
 - Keep an updated schedule easily available to supervisors
- Call ahead to make sure the family is home and will be there to answer the door when you arrive
- Ask the family who will be at the home and how to identify and best reach their home
- Organize your materials in advance



Home Visitor Responsibilities: Before a Visit

- Make sure you have the correct address, phone number and driving directions along with the appointment time
- Review emergency procedures with your supervisor so you know what to do in an emergency
- Drive by the home and locate safe spots in the neighborhood (police or fire stations, restaurants or shopping centers), as well as a safe parking location
- Make sure to let your supervisor or co-workers know where you are and when you will be back
- Keep your phone charged and programmed with emergency numbers (supervisor, police, child protection, roadside assistance, etc)



Home Visitor Responsibilities: During a Visit

- Do not wear or bring valuables on a visit
- Wear comfortable clothing and shoes that allow you to move easily (eg, dress comfortably)
- Avoid wearing known gang colors
- Avoid wearing necklaces or scarves that could potentially be grabbed
- Carry or wear work-related identification (eg, badge) and show it when the door is answered at your destination
- Consider carrying a whistle or noisemaker
- Carry your phone on your person



Home Visitor Responsibilities: During a Visit

- Set your phone to vibrate during visits
 - If you feel threatened you can pretend you feel it vibrate and use the call as an excuse to leave the home or send a message to your supervisor
- Pay attention to your environment as you walk to and from your visit
 - Do not make phone calls or get distracted
 - Note any strange noises or smells that may indicate fights or drug use
- If strangers or animals are present outside a home, do not enter
 - Do not enter a home unless you see the participant from the doorway
 - Check for exits and for any visible dangers (drug paraphernalia, strangers, weapons)
- Sit close to an exit, facing the door
 - If possible, sit in a hard-backed chair for easy exit



Weather Safety

- Pay attention to weather reports
- During winter, carry an ice scraper, shovel and lock de-icer
- Consider keeping extra clothes, snacks, and blankets in car in case of white out or accident
- Keep agency instructions on what to do in case of an accident in your glove compartment



Vehicle, Driving Safety

- Make sure your vehicle is in good running condition and has enough gas
- Keep a flashlight and a first aid kit in your vehicle
- If you have a purse, leave it in the trunk before arriving at the home
- Drive with your car doors locked and your windows rolled up
- Park in a well-lit, easily accessible location
 - Back into parking spaces, if possible
- Check your car and the area around it before entering and exiting
 - Lock your doors immediately after entry and exit
 - Keep your keys in your hand when walking to and from the home



Animal Safety

- Before meeting with a family, ask them to restrain pets
- Call out or whistle to attract any dog to the front of the yard before opening the gate
- If a dog appears—and appears unfriendly—call out to the occupant of the house or sound the car horn
 - If no one responds, do not proceed—contact the person later to arrange a mutually convenient time for the meeting
 - Face the dog and leave the property immediately by slowly walking backwards—do not run
- Record details about the dog in the person's file as an alert for future home visits
- Do not touch or pet animals



Insect Safety

- Ask about bugs before scheduling a visit
 - If home is contaminated, reschedule visit, if possible
- Bring materials in a clear, sealable plastic box or bag to avoid contamination at the home
- Bring only necessary items into a home
- Avoid placing materials or sitting on upholstered furniture or bedding
- Do a self-inspection after a visit
- If you find a bug, crush it and wipe the surrounding area
- Remove clothing and place in closed plastic bag
 - Wash it in hot water and dry on highest heat setting possible



Drug Safety, Fights

- When approaching a home, note any strange noises or smells that may indicate fights or drug use
- Do not accept food or drink during a visit
- Make excuse to leave if drug use or fighting starts during a visit or if you feel you are in imminent danger
- If no imminent danger, discuss dangers of exposing children to drug paraphernalia and activities in the home
- Discuss effect of drug use on parenting
- Encourage parents to seek help for substance abuse issues



Weapons Safety

- Assume that every home has a weapon
- Assume that every client could access a weapon
- Watch for signs of escalation
- Know when to leave or request help
- Look for weapons when you are in someone else's space
- Guns are often in bedroom, knives in kitchen
- Never reach for a weapon

What to Do if You Feel Unsafe

- Set your phone to vibrate during visits
- If you feel threatened you can pretend you feel it vibrate and use the call as an excuse to leave the home or send a message to your supervisor
- Safety code training, ask to use the restroom



What to Do in an Emergency

- Leave immediately, if possible
- Call 911 when you have reached safety
- Call your supervisor
- Debrief with your supervisor once you return to the office
- Contact the family when it is safe



Staying Healthy

- Postpone visits if family members are sick
- Stay up to date on immunizations and annual physicals
- Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer after each visit



Setting Boundaries

- Do not reveal too much personal information about yourself or your family
- Use only your first name and do not share your personal contact information or interact with participants on social media
- Use only business or public phones to prevent identification of personal phones with caller identification



Resources

[*Home Visits: Tips and Resources for Making Safe and Effective Home Visits*](#)

[*Oklahoma's Safety Guideline Manual for Home Visitors*](#)

[*National Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention*](#)

[*Idaho's Home Visitor Safety: MIECHV Program Training Module*](#)

[*Oregon's Home Visitor Safety Guide, Revised May 2014*](#)

The [*Healthy Moms Healthy Babies*](#) initiative from [*Futures Without Violence*](#)



Thank you!

For more information, contact the Illinois MIECHV team at 312/814-8903 or visit igrowillinois.org

