

Replace Your Center MHMR Here

# **Remote Site Safety**

Compiled by Texas Council Risk Management Fund

Safety precautions and procedures when providing consumer services away from Center facilities.

## BACKGROUND

On occasion, service needs require visits to the homes of consumers or to non-Center locations. You are familiar with the locations of exits, furniture, and the availability of staff when at a Center facility. These familiarities disappear when you meet someone away from a Center facility.

When at a Center facility, you have an expected level of safety because of your familiarity with your surroundings and of the people around you. With each new remote location that you visit and each occasion of those visits, you may find changed conditions and attitudes.

No brochure can alert you of all possible hazards. Nor can it provide every possible action to avoid risk to co-workers, consumers or yourself. The following represents, however, sound procedures to follow during the timeline of a remote service visit.

## VISIT PLANNING

- Gather/assemble all pertinent facts/information regarding the client by reading all available files, consulting and Center employees who have worked with the individual prior to setting the appointment. Discussions with staff and reading notes can offer amazing resources of ideas, experiences, and solutions.
- If you are unfamiliar with the neighborhood, get input from co-workers. Is this a high crime area? Is there parking off the street? Will a cell phone get a signal?
- Plan to meet clients during daylight hours. Plan to end the session during daylight hours. (These may change as seasons change.) If the appoint involves other than daylight hours, is adequate neighborhood lighting present?
- Is your vehicle fully fueled and properly serviced?
- Might there be any roadway construction on your planned routes? Again, co-workers may be a good resource for such activities. Alternatively, you might contact city or county planning.
- Assure that you have an umbrella in your vehicle.
- What steps could be taken to avoid this remote visit? If possible, meet the consumer at a Center facility.
- Plan, plan, plan! If the consumer is a habitual ‘no-show’, assess all possible reasons why (indifference, mental instability, transportation, non-cooperativeness, etc.) and chart out plan(s) in order of priority. When possible, schedule appointments at the Center. Leave remote visits as the **last** option.
- Especially with state hospital discharged consumers, if a remote visit is necessary, the ‘visiting’ employee should meet with his/her supervisor beforehand to assess, evaluate the situation before going to the remote location. This aftercare option, upon approval, will be exercised only after any other options have been exhausted (i.e. attempted telephone calls, letters, etc.). Some ‘no-shows’ for aftercare have justifiable reasons. Some do not. So, each individual case will be weighed on its own merits or circumstances.

## SETTING APPOINTMENT

- If you know that the client has a dog or other potentially dangerous animal, request that the client secure the animal prior to your visit.
- Prepare the consumer as best you can before the remote visit. Inform the client of what is expected, the purpose, goal(s), etc. of the visit. Be efficient, friendly, caring...and be gone!
- For remote visits in “high risk” areas, staff should be accompanied by a co-worker. If possible, plan those visits for times of low activity (i.e. early morning).
- Arrange for a Center cell phone, if necessary.
- Arrange, if necessary, for a co-worker to accompany the visit.

## PLANNING THE VISIT

- Phone the client prior to the visit to attempt to determine that they will keep the appointment and to determine their status. If you suspect the need, be sure that another staff member accompanies you. Listen for background indicators. Do you hear other voices that you do not expect to hear? Will visitors be gone from the premises before your arrival or will they only go to another room. Discuss with your supervisor as needed.
- Did you check the readiness of your vehicle and the cell phone?
- If you are unsure of the mental status of a consumer, arrange for another staff person to accompany the visit. Assess the mental status of the individual early on during the visit to determine the consumer's emotional stability.
- Arrange for co-worker accompaniment when the consumer contacted has a history of fabricating abuse charges (sexual, physical, or otherwise). This provides protection in the form of a witness.
- Sanitize toys and other learning aids that might transmit contagious disease.

## ARRIVAL AT REMOTE SITE

- Keep valuables out of sight. Preferably put valuables in trunk. Do not leave on the seat or in the glove box.
- Park in a highly visible well lighted area.
- Lock the vehicle before entering the remote location.
- Try not to take your valuables, (i.e. purses, exposed wallets, excessive jewelry, etc.) into 'unsafe area'. Carry only what you need so as to decrease your risk of robbery.
- If the consumer seems agitated when they open the door, remain outside out of the reach of the consumer. Make the visit brief if the consumer appears agitated. Reschedule the visit, if needed. Leave at once if the consumer poses a safety threat to you.
- When knocking on the door, stand to the side. Do not stand in front of the door. Should the client be agitated and have a weapon, you will be safer at the side of the door.
- If you arrive at the remote location and hear or see dogs running up to your vehicle, stay in it! Honk your horn or call the consumer to alert the consumer to attend to the dogs.
- Take your umbrella with you. Preferably, the kind that opens with the touch of a button. If a dog rushes at you, aim the umbrella at it and press the button. This might scare the dog off and also act as a shield until you can get out of harm's way.

#### INSIDE THE REMOTE SITE

- If, upon arrival or during the visit, you smell liquor on the consumer's breath, do not enter the residence. Make an appointment to see them another time.
- Try to keep yourself between the consumer and the door.
- Look for and expect unanticipated behavior from the client. Also, look for family-type situations that may fuel or defuse negative situations. If doubt arises, LEAVE IMMEDIATELY. Do not risk life or limb. Sometimes, the next day is a better day for certain circumstances.
- Make all remote location visits as brief and thorough as possible. Prolong visits sometimes invite unwanted or unnecessary problems. The client and/or family members may fatigue. You might also invite curious neighbor intervention. Unproductive time/activity may result from their intervention.
- Know your consumer's history and be aware of potential problems. Do not put yourself in a dangerous situation by surprising an unpredictable consumer. Do not enter a remote location if you sense danger. Do not enter any location where you feel unsafe. Use a 'buddy system' or police assistance in potentially dangerous situations. Do not get into a situation where you cannot get out the door or close enough where the consumer can reach out and grab you.
- Do not attempt to pet dogs or other animals at remote locations.

#### AFTER VISIT

- Document the file with anything that might affect the answers to the above questions should future remote visits to this location or with this consumer be required.
- Document the file with any condition or situation not covered above.

#### OTHER THOUGHTS

- Clinical staff should always sign out listing the places and times that they plan to visit that day.
- NEVER transport a psychotic consumer alone!
- When you will be out all day monitoring, check in with the office periodically to update Center staff on your schedule.