

CHICHESTER DIOCESAN ASSOCIATION for FAMILY SUPPORT WORK

Lone Working Guidance

It is a commitment of the Chichester Diocesan Association for Family Support Work (CDAFSW) to maintain the safety and protection of lone workers. The following guidance applies to all employees of CDAFSW inclusive of volunteers. (Please note Volunteers do not carry out assessment visits.)

Violence and Aggression

We all go about our daily working routine often without realising how vulnerable we can be in certain situations. When we are interviewing or holding meetings or consultations with clients and/or their friends and relatives, we can be placed in potentially vulnerable situations depending on the people involved.

Experience gained from many organisations has produced the following as useful guidance in preparing for, and undertaking, interviews or meetings. The guidance is comprehensive and presents a range of alternative settings. There are some factors common to each setting

a) Planning an Interview or Meeting at a Base or Identified Venue.

- Try to arrange an interview/meeting when there are others in the building.
- Make sure that the interview or meeting is not conducted in isolation, i.e. make sure someone knows where you are and whom you are with.
- Make sure that the client knows that others know of their presence, for example by telling a receptionist or named other in front of them, of your location in the building (respect their confidence by not using their name in public areas).
- Ensure that you have direct contact with somebody outside the room, for example by telephone.
- If there is only one door, i.e. one means of escape, ensure that you are nearest to it or that you have quick and easy access to it, for example by moving such obstacles as chairs or other furniture that may be in your direct line.
- Keep equipment to a minimum as it can be used as a weapon.

- The type of furniture in the room is important. Try to ensure that furniture is used which cannot be picked up and thrown easily or used as a weapon.
- Try to make sure that the room is well lit but not too bright.
- Study record/case files carefully prior to meeting.
- If you know that a client has been violent or aggressive in the past find out about the incident, plan accordingly and be aware.
- Avoid wearing such things as ties or necklaces which can be grabbed, or earrings which can be pulled or torn off. Even long hair can be caught and pulled.
- Wear shoes that enable you to move quickly if necessary.
- When setting up the room ensure that seats are of equal height and avoid direct confrontation in the placing of chairs by facing them slightly away from each other at say an angle of 45 degrees.

b) Meeting the client

- Reduce waiting times beforehand wherever possible.
- If there is a waiting time try to make sure that the individual is kept informed of when they will be seen and what is causing the delay.
- When meeting the person/people involved, shake hands and introduce yourself by name, explaining, if they do not already know, who you are and what your job is.
- Use language that a client will understand, but without being condescending and talking down to them.

c) During the Meeting

- People who are agitated may need a wider space. Be aware not to invade this by standing or sitting too close.
- Try not to stand over somebody who is sitting as this gives an impression of superiority.
- Explain that you are taking notes and why – this can help to show the client that you are taking them seriously.
- Eye contact is important but do not constantly stare, as this can be perceived as threatening. Blinking regularly relieves the continual stare.
- Problems may arise during the course of the interview/consultation. Try and resolve these as you go, in order to show that you are trying to find solutions.

- Present yourself as a person rather than an official representing the Association. On the other hand depersonalise issues, e.g. if you are governed by rules or policies, explain the limits of your own discretion at that time.
- It is easy to make promises that you cannot keep later, but try to avoid this as it could raise expectations that cannot be met and will cause difficulties for you at a later time.
- Tapping pens, doodling or fiddling with something shows impatience or inattention and should be avoided.
- If a situation escalates, take a break because a rest or even change of situation may diffuse things.
- If the individual reacts badly to you for reasons such as your gender, age or background, it may be better to withdraw and ask somebody else to see them.

d) Home Visits

People can feel an intrusion into their private life or homes when being attended by a formal worker, which can be a trigger to aggressive or violent behaviour. Much will depend on the reason for the worker's visit to the home.

The FS worker / volunteer should reassure clients of the limits to which their visit is dominated by policies and procedures whilst being honest about boundaries.

- Study records/case files carefully prior to a visit – check for information regarding previous difficulties.
- Seek out information from others who have visited the home or who have experience of the client and/or their relatives.
- Obtain information from the referring agencies where they have been involved.
- Always diarise your visits for the day, a copy to be sent to Church House so that your schedule of visits is known. Volunteers are required to inform their FSW worker of their visits.
- Make arrangements for keeping in touch with an identified central base.
- Ensure that clients are informed beforehand of any delay in reaching them.
- Ensure that you have a method for contacting base. In the event of a volunteer not having access to a mobile phone arrangements can be made with FSW to loan a phone.
- Ensure that FSW staff at Church House or the Volunteer Co-ordinator know the make, colour and registration of your vehicle.
- Ensure that there is a known procedure for action in the event that you do not report in at specific times.

- Ensure that there are arrangements for maintaining contact out of hours.
- Ensure you have as much information as possible when making first contact with a client.
- Where little information is known about a client, arrange for the first contact to be at a base or identified venue rather than their home. Telephone the client first and say who you are and what your role is.
- Always take a cautious approach.
- Use the three V's – Vet, Verify, and Vigilance.

e) Where Previous Difficulties are Known.

- Arrange for clients to be seen at a base or identified venue rather than at their home.
- Where a visit is necessary, always attend with a colleague or member of another agency (e.g. Police, Social Services) or reliable relative.
- Where necessary, contact a colleague or a base before the visit, set a time to report in again, and call the colleague or base at the set time.
- In extreme cases, ask your manager to write to the client to emphasise that no home visits will be made.
- Where domestic animals cause difficulties, ask your manager to write to the client to agree that the animal is under control or in a separate part of the house.
- Your own safety is a priority – leave a situation where you do not feel safe.

f) Problem Locations

- Try to make visits during certain times of the day e.g. mornings when others are around and when alcohol or substance abuse is minimal.
- In an area which poses a risk to personal safety or damage to vehicles or property, use a separate driver or taxi so that your car does not have to be left where it might be vandalised or where you may have to walk through unsafe areas.
- Try to arrange visits during daylight hours.
- Conceal any bags or equipment left in your car.
- Be alert – continuously assess your situation.
- Withdraw if you feel unsafe.

Travelling

Travelling alone can present its own risks. Car breakdown in a remote area or at night, road rage and tiredness all contribute to the risks involved. The greater the time spent travelling, the greater the level of risk. The following advice will help reduce that risk:

- Always check inside the car before entering.
- Lock your car doors whilst driving.
- Conceal bags, laptop computer or equipment whilst driving.
- Keep your vehicle in good condition through regular servicing in order to avoid breakdown.
- Carry emergency equipment in case of breakdown or accident e.g. warning triangle, torch, blanket, and communication device.
- Carry a map of the area to avoid getting lost.
- Ensure that you know what to do in the event of a breakdown i.e. contact rescue services or Police, remain in the vehicle if it is in a safe position and lock the doors. (if appropriate ensure you carry your rescue service card with membership number with you).
- If you are being followed or harassed in your vehicle, do not make eye contact, lock the doors and close windows, drive to a Police station or busy area.
- Adopt a defensive driving attitude by not 'cutting up' other vehicles, not reacting when 'cut up' by other vehicles, never making constant eye contact with another driver, never 'racing' others.
- Never shout at or blame the other driver following an accident, but calmly note the location and conditions, take the vehicle and insurance details of the other driver and note the names of any witnesses.

REMEMBER

Your personal safety is paramount.

If after considering the above information you still remain unsure about visiting a client, DO NOT carry out the visit.

Contact your FS worker / manager / team leader for further discussion.

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