



Stony Brook University
School of Social Welfare
Office of Field Education

SAFETY TIPS IN FIELD PLACEMENT
For Field Instructor conversations with students

Safety is a topic in field education that must be addressed and continuously incorporated into our work with students. Safety has various aspects: self care, and emotional safety, physical safety, safety in the work with clients and safety in the community and during home visits. Orientation is a good place to start this conversation. Agency safety protocols should be addressed. Helping the student clearly understand her/his role, ensuring an understanding of agency policy and procedures, addressing how to engage with clients and show concern for and validating their circumstances, making sure student has regular access to supervision to process work, teaching how to focus on strengths as a problem solving strategy and how to set firm and clear boundaries in a compassionate and respectful manner, as well as understanding when and how to de-escalate a situation are all social work skills and/or values that work toward ensuring safety.

CONSIDER:

- **SELF- CARE**
- Create a self-care plan with and for your student (exercise, nutrition, socialization, boundaries.)
- Share (and model) how you practice self care
- Discuss concerns about work at the end of the day.
- Share agency safety training information with your student.

HOME VISIT SAFETY: Teach and encourage your student to:

- Engage clients with respect and compassion
- Respect client's space and property.
- Show concern about client and their situation.
- Get to know the police officers in the neighborhoods they frequent.

- Keep a detailed calendar with addresses, names and phone numbers and file numbers at work so that others know where they are.
 - Look at the size, number and kinds of shoes sitting by the door or around the apartment so they have a sense of who is in the house.
 - Consider keeping hand sanitizer, wipes, anti-bacterial soap/lotion handy.
 - If s/he senses a safety issue, find something to agree about with a client, instead of escalating a situation and then leave.
 - Always wait to be invited to sit; sit in straight-back chair and close to an exit.
 - Set firm limits in a compassionate, respectful manner. Use specific behavioral language.
 - If verbal redirection does not work, move to limit setting in a firm but flexible manner, offering choices when possible.
 - Following resolution of a crisis debrief with the supervisor and all involved staff.
- **DE-ESCALATION TECHNIQUES: Suggestions to offer your student:**
 - Use observational data to recognize the signs of escalation (client posture, eye contact, facial expressions, physical gestures, muscle tone, voice and speech patterns, etc).
 - Call for back up assistance (supervisor or another clinician) when possible for direct assistance or to simply stand back and observe discretely.
 - Choose the safest possible location to talk to the client. Consider moving other clients out of the waiting area, step just outside the front door. Get assistance as needed.
 - Use your own body language (keeping a relaxed and empathic stance, reasonable distance, lowered voice with slow speech, friendly and confident) to cue the client's body language toward calming down and self-control.
 - Identify what the client's immediate goal is at the time.
 - Express a desire to help without making promises you can't keep.
 - Avoid questions, statements, or information that may imply the client is to blame for his/her circumstance.
- **COMMUNITY SAFETY: Help your student think about these things:**
 - Know the agency's policies and procedures for safety in the community
 - Make sure her/his car has gas, is well maintained and has a local map available
 - Park her/his car facing the direction s/he will be going when leaving
 - Drive around the community prior to parking, taking note of key places -grocery stores, community center and people.
 - Carry a charged cell phone and know how to use it to call emergency numbers.

- Always leave your destination and contact numbers with office staff.
- Carry an emergency health bag in her/his car (latex gloves, first aid kit)
- Walk confidently to the home, while using your eyes to scan the area.
- **AGENCY SAFETY: Students should:**
- Know the safety related policies and procedures for the practicum agency
- Know the policies and reporting procedures related to sexual harassment in the practicum agency
- Know how to enter and leave the building safely (including before /after business hours).
- Know the check-in and check-out procedures.
- Know any internal code for signaling the need for help.
- Know if it is acceptable to work with clients with the doors open.
- Know if staff and students ever physically hold a client, and under what conditions.
- Know procedures for handling blood related incidents.
- Know where the fire extinguisher nearest you is located, as well as the nearest stairway.
- Know what to do and where to go in case of a fire or tornado.
- Know what to do if another staff person creates an unsafe or uncomfortable environment.
- Know where emergency numbers are posted (police, fire department, poison control).
- Know process for reporting injury at the agency.
- Know how to de-escalate angry clients.
- Know the agency policy in regards to clients who are inebriated or high.
- Know how to safely position self in office.
- Know how to use building security.
- Know how to use phone to access help.
- Know how to and uses supervision in regard to safety issues.
- Know what to do and how to document when clients make threats towards others.
- Know who to contact at the placement site when there is an incident or threat.
- Know when to inform Practicum Supervisor and Field Director
- Know what the procedure is if there is a suspicion that someone has a weapon.
- Know where to store personal items (purse).