



In This Issue

- **Working Off-site: 10 Safety Tips for Social Workers**

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[Working Off-Site: 10 Safety Tips for Social Workers](#)

Often risk managers focus their efforts on asset and third party risk. In reality, costs from personnel risk are hugely expensive. Employee injuries are among the most frequent, consistent and costly risk-related expenses.

Employees facing the greatest threat are those who work alone; especially those whose social services job requires them to enter client's homes. A task as seemingly simple as assessing a client's qualifications for funding or access to low-cost housing can be a high risk situation.

Clients, and their families, who look to social workers to save them from a crisis situation are typically seriously stressed before the worker arrives. Workers should carefully plan home visits by keep in mind that there is potential for anger with the system, especially if the worker is unable to provide service the client considers satisfactory.

Inform workers of this potential for violence and suggest strategies that assist them to a) identify if there is a real threat of violence and b) be prepared to leave quickly if they feel uncomfortable. (Note that I said 'feel uncomfortable'. There are times when we do need to listen to our instincts and not be overly rational. Fear for personal safety is nature's way of offering us protection. Workers should be encouraged to pay attention to fear in any work situation.)

What follows is a list of tips for employers to help keep employees safe while working off-site:

1. Establish a check-in procedure. Direct employees who will be working alone need to have a 'buddy' who knows where they are going and how long they expect to be there.
2. Ensure there is a reliable means of communication between the buddies. This can be by telephone, email or other mutually acceptable arrangement.
3. Create a password or phrase that both persons know is a code indicating the off-site worker is in danger.
4. Include information in each client's file if there is any indication of previous aggression or anger toward the

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*"Mistakes are a fact of life.
It is the response to the
error that counts. "*

~ Nikki Giovanni, Poet ~

- worker or organization.
- Workers should remain alert when arriving at a new location. Such things as parking their vehicle on the roadway, leaving their shoes and/or coat on and staying near the door can allow them to leave quickly if they feel unsafe.
 - Dressing in a manner suitable to the profession and carrying corporate identification emphasizes the worker reason for being there. (e.g. photo ID with corporate logo)
 - They should only take those items necessary to the appointment to improve their ability to leave quickly. Cell phones should always be readily accessible.
 - Maintain a distance from the client. If using reference material, bring two copies so that both persons can view them comfortably.
 - Finally, if the worker is uncomfortable due to a previous negative experience with the client, encourage him/her to meet in a neutral environment where other people will be present. (E.g. hotel lobby, coffee shop, office or other workplace.) If this cannot be arranged, two workers should attend the appointment.
 - When a client is belligerent or exaggerates issues, workers should not debate the client's position. Remaining calm, objective and professional goes a long way toward keeping the meeting calm and manageable.

(Adapted from CCOHS *Violence in the Workplace Prevention Guide*)

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