

How To Keep Yourself Safe in Social Work

Assess the Potential Risks Posed by Clients

- Look through all past assessments
- Liaise with relevant agencies to draw up a risk assessment

Some risk factors to look out for include:

Domestic violence	Anger management issues
High frustration levels	Diagnosed personality disorders
Use of drugs or alcohol	A lack of respect for authority
Poor impulse control	Client feels that he/she has 'nothing to lose'
A criminal record for violent acts	A known owner or user of weapons



Plan your Visits and Meetings in Advance

Not having sufficient time to prepare for meetings with clients may put practitioners at risk. Go through this checklist prior to meeting your clients.



Where possible, schedule visits in advance (although unannounced visits are necessary to assess homes in a natural manner)



Use your risk assessment to determine if it is safe to visit alone or to visit with a colleague



Gather information from colleagues or partner agencies about other people in the home who may pose a risk



Familiarise yourself with triggers/risk factors to avoid that may raise the level of threat (e.g. client is under the influence)



Have a look around the area before entering the home or meeting room to plan your escape route and to avoid dead ends



Arrange for a colleague to call if you are not back at the expected time



Inform your colleagues of your place of visit. Make it a habit to indicate the location and expected duration of the visit on your office board or electronic calendar that can be accessed by colleagues.



Use a code word with your colleagues to indicate when you are in danger. It will come in handy when you make a phone call to alert them of the situation.

Stay Vigilant During Visits and Meetings

Some things to take note of during your visits and meetings:



Have your mobile phone on you at all times and your local police hotline on speed dial



Where possible, position yourself near the exit. Try not to have anyone else between you and the exit route.



Do not allow the house or meeting room door to be locked



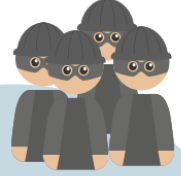
Stay out of kitchens and bedrooms if possible. Kitchens have the most dangerous objects in the home and bedrooms are most commonly used to hide weapons and contraband.



Trust your gut instinct. If anything seems unusual or out of the ordinary, make your excuse and leave.



If the client has a criminal peer network, be cautious of new figures who are present at the meetings. If the new person makes you feel uncomfortable, you could consider calling the meeting to an end.



Remember Three Basic Steps to Staying Safe:

1

Risk assess your clients

2

Plan visits and meetings ahead

3

Stay alert!