**GUIDELINES FOR ENHANCING**

**SAFETY AND MINIMIZING RISK IN FIELD**

GUIDELINES FOR ENHANCING SAFETY AND MINIMIZING RISK IN FIELD

1. Have written agency policies to address any work situation that entails risk such as the following: home visits; services in isolated or high crime areas; services at night or on weekends, services to clients with infectious disease as well as any required immunizations; working around special equipment or chemicals, what to do in case of fire or other disaster; politically-sensitive services that may result in violent threats to agency staff (abortion counseling, for example). This list is not to be considered exhaustive, and each agency is responsible for determining its own sources and levels of risks and taking reasonable precautions with these risks.

2. TRAIN YOUR INTERNS IN THE ABOVE POLICIES AND DOCUMENT THAT YOU HAVE DONE SO.

3. Remember that according to the School-Agency agreement, students have both the right and responsibility to refuse any assignment that they deem too dangerous to pursue at the time. The Director of Field is available for consultation and problem-solving on such issues.

4. Do not have students seeing clients alone in the building. Be sure other personnel are nearby. Examine your office arrangements: Is your desk positioned so that you are "boxed in" and cannot get to the exit easily? Do you have sharp or other potentially dangerous objects lying around? If so, remove them and rearrange your furniture for the "worst scenario."

5. Familiarize students with your agency environment, especially all entrances and exits, evacuation routes, potentially dangerous areas. Health care settings should provide proof of orientation to the environment, particularly infection control policies.

6. PROVIDE SUPERVISION THAT IS CONSISTENT AND ADEQUATE IN TIME SO THAT YOU KNOW WHAT YOUR STUDENT IS ACTUALLY DOING! Do not expect students to be able to fully represent your agency in making critical decisions about patient disposition with physical and legal implications, such as involuntary hospitalization, threats of suicide or homicide. If the instructor is not available in such situations, THERE MUST BE A WRITTEN AND FULLY UNDERSTOOD PROTOCOL FOR NOTIFYING ANOTHER WORKER OR A PSYCHIATRIST ON CALL, OR FOR GETTING THE PATIENT TO AN EMERGENCY FACILITY THAT CAN MEET THEIR NEEDS.

7. Train students on confidentiality policies. Students SHOULD NOT be taking any identifying information on clients out of the agency, unless required for outreach centers and only with clear guidance on protection of records, NOT TO COMPLETE AGENCY PAPERWORK.

8. If students are required to make home visits, train them on your written policies and personally provide orientation to neighborhoods.

PRECAUTIONS TO FOLLOW IN MAKING HOME VISITS

1. Review the agency's written policies regarding home visits (as well as all other safety issues). A staff member familiar with the area should personally orient students.

2. Be familiar with the environment: entrances, exits, places to avoid. Beware of "looking lost", and project an image of knowing where you are going and what you are doing, even if you don't.

3. OBSERVE how clients are dressed. Are they wearing coats, jackets, or other clothing that can conceal a weapon?

4. Park your car a few spaces down from the house as opposed to directly in front. If you have to exit quickly, do not give a pursuer the opportunity to catch up too soon. If it is unsafe to jump into your car, run to the nearest spot where there are people, activity and hopefully security.

5. ALWAYS BE SURE YOU HAVE ENOUGH GAS IN YOUR CAR.

6. Visit at high activity times, like 8:00 - 10:00 a.m. or 2:30 - 4:00 p.m. Also choose to visit at times when people known to be violent are out of the home.

7. Be aware of your own clothing that may misrepresent you. (Flashy jewelry, provocative clothing, "salesperson" look, etc.)

8. Ask clients to walk around their neighborhood or sit on their porch with you from time to time, so that others can see that you are there with the client’s permission.

9. Answer questions about who you are and what you are doing, without violation confidentiality. The purpose is to demonstrate to neighbors that you are not a salesperson, an evangelist, a policeman, or a new drug dealer.

10. ALWAYS LET STAFF KNOW WHERE YOU ARE GOING AND WHEN YOU WILL BE BACK.

11. CALL CLIENTS TO LET THEM KNOW TO EXPECT YOU AT A CERTAIN TIME. Ask them to contact the agency if you are late.

12. At the door of a home, LISTEN BEFORE YOU KNOCK. If sounds of any threatening situation are going on, LEAVE IMMEDIATELY. Stand to one side of the door when you knock, not directly in front. DO NOT accept invitations such as "Is that you? Just come on in." Identify yourself and ask the occupant to come to the door to let you in.

13. Once inside, BE ALERT AND OBSERVANT of your environment. Are there dangerous weapons lying about? Are there drugs being used in the house? Is someone drunk and physically acting out? In such cases, tell your primary client that you cannot remain and to reschedule or have them see you at the agency. Regardless, GET OUT!

14. If a client escalates, DO NOT GET PHYSICAL when the interaction is verbal. SEE TIPS WHICH FOLLOW:

**IF YOU ARE IN AN ESCALATION:**

DIVERT --Switch attention to another subject, ask for a glass of water, change seats. Separate agitators.

DIFFUSE --Use soft voice, agree, focus on how the person feels she/he has been treated. Assure the person they are safe.

DELAY --Ask to postpone, get back-up, practice "strength in numbers".

LEAVE -- Get out of Dodge any way you can. While none of us like to think of the possibility that any of the aforementioned will happen to us, it is much better to be safe than sorry. If students and/or the Field Instructors have questions or need further guidance on specific issues, they should contact the Field Coordinator immediately.