

# Safety when making Home Visits

by Jo Walker, suzy lamplugh trust



Every year thousands of employees encounter some form of violence or aggression during their working day. Sadly this includes those whose work involves offering support and guidance to clients in their own homes.

Employers have a legal responsibility to try to prevent violent or aggressive incidents as stated in the Health & Safety Act 1974 and the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999. They are responsible for providing a safe place of work; safe systems of work and suitable training. Your employers



should carry out risk assessments to identify the risks involved in your job and introduce and implement the right policies and procedures in order to minimise those risks. However, they can't always be eliminated entirely so it is always advisable that employees are given proper safety training. Good personal safety training is a vital part of any safety system for workers at risk. Learning to recognise danger signs, seeing how our behaviour affects others and employing effective diffusion techniques and exit strategies can all help staff to avoid or deal with aggression much more effectively.

Suzy Lamplugh Trust recommends that, whether or not your employer has implemented suitable safety systems or you have been given personal safety training, there are a number of precautions that you can take to improve your own safety when making home visits. These include:

- Check any records prior to your visit. If the client, or another member of their household, has any history of aggression, question whether the visit is necessary or if you would be safer going with someone else - and make sure you are extra vigilant.
- Make sure someone knows where you are going, when you expect to leave and what to do if you do not return/call in at the expected time.
- Plan how you are going to get there and back. If taking public transport, check times of buses/trains and work out the best route to/from the station or bus stop.

- If driving, check the parking situation in advance if possible. When you arrive, try to park in a busy, well-lit area - especially if you will be leaving after dark.
- Check in when you arrive. As soon as you enter the property, say you have to make a call and phone, in front of the client, your office/buddy or even your own answer machine if necessary, saying "I've just arrived at ABC address and I'm with Mr. C now. I'll be leaving in half an hour and will call you then." This lets the client know that your arrival has been logged in with a third party.
- Study your surroundings and try to sit nearest the door.
- Stay alert. Watch for changes in mood in the person/people you are visiting.
- Do not be enticed into an argument. If someone does behave aggressively towards you - stay calm, speak gently, slowly and clearly.
- Avoid an aggressive stance. Crossed arms, Hands on hips, a wagging or pointing finger will only aggravate the situation.
- Keep your distance and never turn your back or put a hand on someone who is behaving aggressively.
- If you feel at risk - leave as soon as possible. Have an excuse ready, e.g. that you need to get something from your car.

Visiting clients in their own homes is normally a pleasant experience but it is important to remember that you are going alone into strangers' or relative strangers' houses and therefore you should be taking certain personal safety precautions. The chance of suffering from violence or aggression during your visits is very small but it is there so it makes sense to reduce any risks as much as possible.



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