

SAFETY IN THE FIELD PLACEMENT

In a 2000 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics report, 48% of all non-fatal injuries from assaults and violent acts in an occupational setting took place in health care and social services settings. Between 2011 and 2013, that number increased to 70% to 74%.

Salisbury University believes in promoting safety of all students in field placements and is committed to promoting a climate of safety in our program.

NASW Standards on Workplace Safety

- I. Office Safety:** Safe work and meeting spaces; restricted client access to sharp or potentially dangerous objects; well-lit hallways and outdoor areas; secure entrances; keep belongings secure
- II. Technology Safety:** Panic buttons; GPS, audio/video recording devices (be aware of confidentiality and informed consent risks!); Cell phones (be mindful of risks of personal cell phone use and don't allow this to foster a false sense of security)
- III. Home Visit Safety:** Knowledge and assessment of client's demeanor and history; Environmental/neighborhood factors; travelling alone; accessibility to exits; awareness of others in the home including pets and of possible health concerns or pests
- IV. Client Transport Safety:** Initial assessment of the client's demeanor; assessment of the vehicle; knowledge of other risks associated with transporting children

Things to Consider for Field Supervisors:

- ✓ What are my agency policies related to safety?
- ✓ How do I make my student aware of the policies?
- ✓ How can I make safety policies a part of the orientation process?
- ✓ What is the procedure for reporting incidents and how would you know if a student experienced a safety incident?
- ✓ Reassess agency safety policies on a regular basis
- ✓ Provide post-incident debriefing as part of the learning process
- ✓ Trainings should include ways to prevent or diffuse volatile situations or aggressive behavior, an action plan for violent situations, ways to protect oneself, risk factors, and all agency safety policies and procedures including policies regarding obtaining medical care, counseling, or other assistance post-incident

Tips for Students:

- ✓ Practice Universal Safety Precautions- Violence is not isolated to one economic, social, gender or racial group; Be Prepared!
- ✓ Know the risk factors of your clients when meeting with clients - history of mental illness, substance abuse, violence including possession of a weapon
- ✓ When meeting with clients, learn to appreciate realistic limitations. Be reasonable about what is and is not possible. Know when to stay and when to leave.

- ✓ Act calmly. An emotional or aggressive response to a distraught individual is likely to reinforce and escalate the aggression. Remember, clients and others who are violent are often reacting to feelings of helplessness and/or loss of control. Therefore, you need to be in control of the situation.
- ✓ Notify the agency of important details when conducting home visits: who, where, when?
- ✓ Learn to anticipate the need for forms and gather information prior to the visit
- ✓ Carry a small amount of cash, including change
- ✓ Don't appear timid, vulnerable, lost or confused
- ✓ Be mindful of your attire and appearance- dangling earrings, valuable jewelry, high-heeled shoes, etc.
- ✓ Walk with a sense of purpose. Be aware of your body language
- ✓ Be alert! Don't walk "in a daze."
- ✓ Do not walk on the side of the street where you see a group of people loitering
- ✓ Be aware of safe places where you are walking or visiting, such as stores, a library, schools, and community centers which you might use as a refuge
- ✓ Assess multistory building for safety. If you need to take an elevator, check-out the interior before entering. If it appears unsafe, do not enter. If you can't exit, stand next to the control panel and press all the buttons in an emergency.
- ✓ If you need to take stairs in a multistory building, be aware of who is in the stairwell and how far apart the exits are.
- ✓ Be mindful of the types of personal information made available through social media
- ✓ If an incident occurs, notify the field supervisor immediately, follow agency protocol, and inform the Field Office

For complete NASW Guidelines for Safety in the Workplace:

<https://www.socialworkers.org/practice/naswstandards/safetystandards2013.pdf>