

Staying Safe in Social Work

*Department of Social Work
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Fall Workshop for Field Instructors

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Why concern over safety now?

- ✦ Incidents at Augsburg
- ✦ National safety concern ~ Terri Zenner
- ✦ OSHA statistics
- ✦ Literature

Workshop goals

- ✦ Examine social work best practice in professional safety
- ✦ Examine environment and client risk factors
- ✦ Identify methods for safety in field work
- ✦ Review and critique Augsburg's field policy

Student & Intern Safety: AID-ER

- ★ **A**nticipate (do your homework)
- ★ **I**dentify (be alert)
- ★ **D**e-escalate (good SW practice)
- ★ **E**xit (when it doesn't work)
- ★ **R**estore (document, report, debrief)

Small Group

- ✦ Introductions
- ✦ What do you hope to learn today?
- ✦ What do you expect to contribute?
- ✦ Follow-up with full group report.

Risks, What Risks?

- ✦ Before you think of safety and risk, think of human relationships, positive regard, empathy...
- ✦ Then think about safety for self, client, groups.

Anticipate - Professional Goals

- ✦ Responsibility to your client
- ✦ Respect for your client
- ✦ Client dignity and self-directed goals
- ✦ Seek supervision

Anticipate - Environment

- ✦ Settings are never static time/day
- ✦ Reliability/Validity of information
- ✦ Most at risk from current or former clients
- ✦ Personnel & building policies, practices, and resources.

Anticipate - Client history

- ✦ Severe violent behavior
- ✦ Severe parent/caretaker abuse
- ✦ History of fighting
- ✦ Difficulty getting along with authority
- ✦ Seek supervision

Anticipate - Client history

- ✦ Using weapons in uncontrolled situations
- ✦ Involvement in drug distribution practice
- ✦ Other illegal activities
- ✦ Request supervision

Initial Contact with Individuals



Actions to Reduce Negative Responses to Conflict

Anticipate

- ✓ Expect negative reaction
- ✓ Don't expect it to go away on its own
- ✓ Respect your client

- ☐ Identify choices
- ☐ Seek to expand alternatives
- ☐ Attribute behavior to situation rather than person

- ✓ Plan small, feasible steps
- ✓ Reward efforts and progress

De-escalate

- ✓ Avoid labeling or judgmental language
- ✓ Use empathic communication

- ✓ Identify non-negotiable requirements AND available choices
- ✓ Support wise choices and explain consequences for questionable choices
- ✓ Emphasize freedoms still available

Identify - General

- ✦ Establish rapport
- ✦ Under influence of alcohol or drugs
- ✦ Feels overwhelmed, hopeless, stressed
- ✦ Verbalizes being angry, upset in general
- ✦ Is angry specifically at you or your agency

Identify-Physical

- ✦ Appears Agitated/ Pacing
- ✦ Forced or intrusive eye contact
- ✦ Tense facial expressions
- ✦ Movement into personal space
- ✦ Indirect threats of violence
- ✦ Touch...tight or constraining

Identify-Verbal

- ✦ Indirect threats of violence
- ✦ De-humanizing language
- ✦ Raised voice/labored speech
- ✦ Escalating voice or tone

De-escalate

- ✦ Respect your clients
- ✦ Active use of empathic listening
- ✦ Follow their lead,
 - ✦ “What do you need from me?”

De-escalate

- ★ Interpret their behavior cautiously
 - ★ “You look like you are getting more upset, is that right?”
- ★ Professional self-disclosure
 - ★ (bringing self to forefront) (Weinger, 2001)
- ★ Be sensitive and alert to differences in cultural expression, beliefs

De-escalate

- ✦ Speak with patience, clearly, slowly, firmly
- ✦ Monitor conversation...3 minute rule
 - ✦ (Sheafor & Horejsi)
- ✦ Decreasing agitation? Do not interrupt
- ✦ Increasing agitation? Gently interrupt
 - ✦ “I need to say something right now...”

De-escalate

- ✦ Wear sensible, professional clothing
- ✦ Keep religious apparel/ornaments discreet
- ✦ Your response is based on gender: of both worker and client

De-escalate

- ✦ Reduce eye contact: Don't stare/glare
- ✦ Remain self confident and pleasant
- ✦ Maintain client's hope
- ✦ Support normal emotional responses

De-escalate

- ✦ Announce your actions before you move
 - ✦ You'll see me writing down a few ideas, I need to do this ...
- ✦ Keep hands visible
- ✦ Be sensitive and alert to differences in cultural expression, beliefs

Repair

- ✦ Document events
objective/subjective
 - ✦ Seek supervision
 - ✦ Follow agency policy
 - ✦ Seek support/debrief
 - ✦ Remind of phases of trauma recovery (Weinger, 2001)
 - ✦ Early response: Biology of trauma, Psycho-social aspects of trauma
 - ✦ Adrenaline, shock,
 - ✦ Wide range of emotional states following event
 - ✦ Changes in state up to 24 to 48 hours following
 - ✦ Further changes up to 2-3 months following
 - ✦ Foci might be self, client, agency...
- ✦ Seek supervision

On a scale of 1 - 10

- ★ How certain that your workplace is a safe place at all times?
 - ★ Very uncertain..somewhat uncertain..somewhat certain.. Very certain
- ★ When you are at your internship, how safe do you feel?
 - ★ Very unsafe..somewhat unsafe..somewhat safe..Very safe.

Resources

- ✦ Sheafor, B.W. & Horejsi, C.R. (2006). *Techniques and guidelines for Social Work Practice* (7th edition). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- ✦ Rooney, R. H. (1992). *Strategies for work with involuntary clients*. New York: Columbia Press.
- ✦ Hepworth, Rooney, R.H., Dewberry-Rooney, G. Strom-Gottfried, K. & Larsen (2006). *Direct social work practice: Theory and Skills*. 7th edition. Brooks-Cole.
- ✦ Weinger, S. (2001). *Security Risk: Preventing client violence*. Washington, D.C.:NASW
- ✦ Griffin, W., Montsinger, J., & Carter, N. (1995). *Personal safety handbook: Targeting safety in human services*. Durham NC:ILR, Inc.