

Safety and security manual for members of the External Program Review Committee

This manual is meant to be a general guide for members and may not cover all scenarios. If members have concerns or would like to make changes/additions, please contact the committee coordinator.

Important numbers you might want to save in your cell phone

- Stacie Enders: 651-508-2321
- Ari Dionisopoulos: 651-272-6116
- DSD Response Center: 651-431-4300 or 866-267-7655

Preparation for a field visit

1. Send an email to the committee coordinator that includes where you are going, when you will be there and whom you are meeting with.
2. If you have concerns or are working with someone who might become agitated or violent, consult with the coordinator or your colleagues about the situation and invite someone to join you.
3. Share the phone numbers listed above with a family member so they know whom to contact in the event you do not return home.
4. Bring a cell phone with you.
5. Thoroughly review the person's documentation before the visit so that you can be aware, build a connection and have understanding.
6. Keep case notes updated.
7. Let teams know that if someone is ill with a contagious disease at the time of the visit, you are happy to reschedule.
8. Consider what you will be wearing and if you can move safely. Wear comfortable, close-toed shoes. Do not wear jewelry, non-detachable lanyards or other items that may be grabbed. Consider the person's culture and how your outfit might be interpreted. Consider pulling long hair back into a ponytail.
9. If the visit is in an unfamiliar location, ask someone who is familiar with the location to brief you regarding any known risks or hazards. Ask for precise driving instructions or study a map before leaving the office/home.
10. Contact the person ahead of the visit so they will be watching for your arrival.
11. Arrange your work schedule so you can make new or questionable visits early in the day. You will be less likely to find loitering or illegal activities.
12. Carry a small amount of money, your driver's license and your keys on your person, not in a purse. In fact, carrying a purse is not advisable while in the field. Lock your purse or wallet in the trunk of your car before leaving the office.

In the car

1. Lock your car doors and keep your windows up.
2. Keep any valuables out of sight. Put your purse, computer, etc. in the trunk or on the floor. If you don't need your computer, do not bring it.
3. Keep your car in good working order.
4. When approaching your car, try to look under it and check the back seat.
5. Choose a parking space that is well lit or in the open that offers the safest walking route to the dwelling.
6. To lessen the chance of being blocked in when you want to leave, do not park in a driveway.
7. Park in the direction you want to go when leaving the home.
8. Beware of dead-end streets.
9. If possible, try to park where you can see your car from inside the home and check on it periodically. Try to park in front of the person's home.

Approaching the dwelling

1. Trust your instincts. Leave if you feel uncomfortable.
2. Report any incident or circumstance that makes you uncomfortable to the coordinator or her supervisor immediately.
3. Drive around the area of the dwelling looking for unsafe conditions (poor lighting, limited visibility fences and bushes), unsecured animals, people shouting, drinking, fighting or loitering, sources of help like neighbors at home, open businesses, other community workers such as police or fire personnel and utility trucks.
4. If you find you have an incorrect address, do not search for the person by knocking on strange doors. Call your office from a cell phone or public facility.
5. If a group of people is loitering on the street or sidewalk, casually cross the street.
6. If you suspect someone is following you, enter the closest public place. If a car is following you, turn around and walk in the opposite direction.
7. If you are verbally confronted, maintain a professional manner and do not attempt to answer verbal challenges.
8. If you are using an elevator, use an empty one if possible. Always stand next to the door and the control panel. If you have a problem, push all the buttons so the elevator stops on all floors, providing a better chance of escape. If someone suspicious gets on while you are already in the elevator, get off when possible.

At the dwelling

1. Do not enter a home when you suspect an unsafe condition.
2. Pay attention to signs like "No Trespassing," "Beware of the Dog," etc., as they may be indicators of the residents' attitudes toward strangers.
3. Pause at the door before knocking and listen. If you hear loud arguing, fighting or other disturbances, leave immediately.
4. If an unfamiliar person answers the door, find out if the person you were going to meet is home before entering.
5. If you decide that entering is safe, do not let your guard down. Be alert to signs of violence or sexual advances from either the person, staff or family members.
6. Note other exits/entrances when you enter the dwelling, also where the telephone is.
7. If there are other people there that you are not comfortable with, or traffic in and out of the home, reschedule the visit.
8. If you detect evidence of clandestine lab activities ("chemical" odors, gas smell, lab type equipment, etc.) leave immediately.
9. If there are pets in the home, note this on your record. Should the pet be a nuisance, ask the person to put it in another room for the duration of the visit.

10. If there is an unsecured firearm in the home, you should leave the home immediately. Note the weapon on the person's record and let the person know that the firearm must be secured before you will make the next visit.
11. Rely on the person's team to guide you, as they know the person best. Ask staff not to leave you alone with the person because you have not been fully trained on that person's plan and have not had a chance to get to know each other.
12. Pay attention to your own and other's body language.
13. Do not put yourself in danger for the purpose of observing a challenging behavior. Rely on staff descriptions as needed.
14. Listen, get to know the person, build rapport, drop judgments and preconceived ideas about what must happen and be aware of the big picture of the person's situation.
15. Avoid blaming and the "DHS vs. the provider" scenario. Committee members are tasked with providing guidance and should not confuse their roles with that of Licensing.
16. Keep cell phones, laptop computers or other valuable items in your line of sight. If you do not need the equipment for your visit, do not bring it.
17. Do not go into a dark room, basement or attic first. Have the person go first and turn on the light. Follow; never lead, even if you have been to the dwelling before.
18. If you need to retrieve something from outside, knock again or say hello when you re-enter.
19. If a family argument erupts, leave the person's home if you feel unsafe.
20. When sitting, choose a hard chair to help you to get up more quickly.
21. If possible, sit so your back is to a solid wall, not to an unknown space. Sit as close to an entrance or exit as possible.
22. End the home visit if the person is under the influence of illegal mood-altering chemicals.
23. Any incident or circumstance that makes you uncomfortable in a location or on a home visit should be reported to the coordinator. Examples of such situations at a home visit include: unsecured weapons or pets, threats, exposure to contagious disease or possible illegal drug activity.

Dealing with hostile or angry people

1. Think about the person's history. Rehearse ahead of time what you would say or do in these situations.
2. Leave at least two arm's length or more if the person is upset.
3. Assume a nonthreatening position. Try to be at eye level with the person. Assume the same posture as the person (sitting or standing). Don't ask the person to change their position.
4. Do not physically corner yourself. Leave a way out.
5. Do not physically or psychologically corner the person.
6. Stay with the person and let them know that you want to help solve the problem.
7. Listen to the person and let them talk.
8. Remove all emotion from your face and speak clearly, calmly and softly.
9. Be respectful.
10. Do not argue, demand, command or disagree.
11. Before ending the visit, involve the person in a conversation or activity different from the one about which they were in conflict or in crisis.
12. When possible, interview potentially aggressive people in the office. If the person becomes aggressive or threatening, let the person know that you take threats seriously and end the meeting. If necessary, call for assistance.

If violence or harassment occurs

If a physical or verbal threat occurs, take immediate steps to ensure your safety. Also, consider the following responses, depending on the situation:

1. If threatened or assaulted during a meeting, get out of the situation and get to a secure place.
2. Self-defense actions should be an attempt to ensure your safety or reduce additional risk rather than inflict harm on a person. Your defense should be reasonable and proportionate to the situation, with a minimum of contact or injury to the person. Leave as soon as possible.
3. If you see or overhear a violent incident in progress, determine if intervention will help calm the situation. If not, call the police.
4. If needed, get medical help.
5. Immediately notify the committee coordinator and document the event.
6. Discuss with the coordinator whether criminal charges should be filed.
7. Follow up with the coordinator if you need support after the event or if you think changes are needed to these safety guidelines.

Technology

1. Do not store private information on your desktop because that information can be accessed if the computer is stolen.
2. Store private information in the committee's S drive folder. Members are welcome to create folders for themselves within the subcommittee folders.
3. Store private information specific to committee members (like invoices or contract agreements) on the H drive.
4. Use [SECURE] in the subject line whenever sending an email outside of DHS that contains private, identifying information.
5. Be cautious of suspicious emails. If the email conveys a sense of urgency, comes from a suspicious sender, asks for personal or work information, forward the message as an attachment to spam.reporting@state.mn.us to report it immediately.
6. Only download files from trusted websites or email links. Watch for suspicious links and attachments in emails. Be wary of downloading files from unexpected popup windows in your browser.

Other

1. In the event of a major catastrophe in which multiple DHS staff members are killed (such as a bombing), please contact the division to identify yourself and explain your role, as it is possible that this group might not be a priority during a major incident.
2. Committee members are encouraged to view the [Active Shooter Training](#) before conducting onsite committee work.