

OUTREACH SAFETY PROTOCOL – (guideline)

CMH Protocol for Promoting Personal Safety during Outreach and Home Visits

At all times during a field visit, staff should assess for risks to their personal safety and avoid exposing oneself to undue risk. The approach to outreach or a home visit and whether it should be undertaken alone is dependent upon the risks associated with the consumer and the situation, as well as any applicable policies or procedures. Staff is encouraged to assess all factors carefully and terminate the visit if needed or alter the approach to the visit to assure their personal safety.

Any suspicion of excessive substance use, the presence of a weapon, and/or a history or threat of violence would dictate that the necessity of the visit be evaluated. Consult with your supervisor as to whether to delay the outreach or involve law enforcement for your visit. Otherwise, abandon the visit and re-evaluate the need and approach to achieving the goal.

The accompaniment of another staff person may decrease risk when a person is known to be aggressive or agitated but the presence of a weapon is unlikely.

1. Preparation

- Make sure that you sign in/out as to where you are going and alert other staff.
- Maintaining locations on your Outlook/CRCT calendar is another way to alert team and leadership as to your outreach location.
- Always wear your county ID.
- Double team when needed.
- Have your cell phone available and ready
- Dress appropriately. Wear shoes and clothes that make it easy for you to move around.
- Avoid wearing expensive jewelry or carrying a purse.
- Be aware of your surroundings.
- Carry a minimal amount of cash.
- Conduct visits during daylight hours when possible, and appropriate for your team.
- Avoid leaving items visible on the car seats during visits.

- Prepare the materials needed for the visit in advance and carry them with you.
- Know the layout of the site you are visiting.
- Identify locations where other people may be present and possible escape routes.
- Have knowledge of the activities of the neighborhood in advance and avoid visits when the risk may be higher such as times of increased drug or alcohol use.
- Know the location of the local police or fire department so that driving there for safety is an option.
- Avoid areas with poor visibility by others such as alleys or isolated buildings.
- Be aware of your personal behavior and the risk it may pose to others, for example in domestic violence or child abuse situations.
- Be aware that your behavior may unintentionally trigger a response in another person that could not be predicted.
- Be prepared to respond with de-escalation techniques or escape.
- Report all incidents occurring in the field according to CMH and Washtenaw County policies and procedures and to Environment of Care and/or your Site Safety Team. Use the WC Incident Report form when appropriate.

2. While you are driving:

- Always wear your seatbelt
- Lock all doors
- Follow all traffic laws
- Do NOT use a cell phone or text while driving
- No smoking or vaping in the vehicle
- Keep radio and other noises to a minimum so you can hear emergency vehicles
- Refrain from eating while driving

3. When you park:

- Plan where you park, circle the area once
- Park in a well-lit area with a good view of the destination
- Park so you can easily enter and exit your car and the destination
- Lock your car

4. When you transport clients:

- Always lock the car doors

- Ensure all passengers use the seatbelt
- No smoking or vaping in the vehicle
- Drive in the right-hand lane if possible
- Take all objects that may be used as a weapon out of the car

5. Approaching a consumer's home:

- Always wear your County Identification
- Carry medications in a briefcase or non-see-through bag of some kind
- When approaching a home and loud noises are heard from within the house, get a clear understanding as to what you are actually hearing. If there are loud voices, don't enter the home unassisted.

*NOTE: If you decide to get the attention of the people inside, knock on the door and stand on the sidewalk away from the home. Or stand near the car with car door open (ajar). These would be safe areas to communicate until things are calmer.

6. Stay one step ahead

- Know where the exit is.
- Don't turn your back.
- Be aware of your surroundings.
- Be aware of anything that looks like it could be used as a weapon.
- Know the person's history especially of any violent or aggressive behavior.
- Take time to survey the area through the open door before entering. Once in the apartment/home, look around for alcohol, drug paraphernalia or other people present.

7. Move one step at a time

- Take your time to look and listen.
- How does consumer respond to your approach and greeting? (Do they smile back, move away,) i.e., probe and check their reaction. If they back away, they may feel threatened or be trying to hide something.

8. Attention/awareness

- Pay full attention to what is spoken and unspoken.

- Be aware that words often do not convey true meanings i.e. “Hi, how are you?” “Fine” (When the individual does not appear to be fine.) Tone and pitch of voice serve as good indicators of intent of the speaker.

Pay attention to EVERYTHING in the home and position yourself closest to the door.

- Always keep a safe, but non-suspicious, distance from the consumer.
- Avoid sitting while others are standing
- Never let anyone get between you and the door.
- Avoid a sitting position when the consumer leaves you alone in a room. Stand until everyone returns. If consumer should return angry, you are in a position to leave.
- Avoid being with a person while they are or have been drinking alcohol or using drugs. Tell them you can talk when they are not using.
- Avoid discussing problem areas when consumer is in the kitchen preparing meals or making coffee. Try to get consumer to sit and talk.
- Avoid discussing problems when visitors are present.
- Avoid discussing problems when family members are present unless this has been prior agreed upon.

9. Working together

- Teamwork- relay important information especially about consumer behaviors to one another.
- Tell the team if you are uncomfortable with seeing a consumer or going into a specific environment. Have the courage to say, ‘I’m scared’ and the maturity to say “I hear you” “Let’s figure this out”
- Discuss Safety frequently at Multi-disciplinary meetings.

CMH Communication Protocol for Field Visits and End of Day Check Out.

This section provides information on protocol/strategies that can be used to assure that an identified person knows of field staff intended whereabouts and can raise the alarm if staff signals a personal threat or does not return or make contact at the appointed time.

1. Procedures: Staff

- Designate a responsible person who is aware of field staff daily activities or to whom field staff reports his/her daily schedule of activities. (Usually the Supervisor.) Agree on the method and timing of check-in contact.
- Identify a code word or phrase that indicates the existence of a hazardous situation. Have a plan in place that the code word or phrase will trigger.
- Staff should carry a cell phone and numbers for emergency contacts.
- When possible, use a county vehicle with the Washtenaw County sign on the side of the vehicle. Ensure the vehicle being driven is in good condition, with a full tank of gas and stocked with emergency supplies and a BBP kit.
- Know agency policies related to automobile accidents and medical emergencies.
- If staff ends the day in the field or is working after normal hours, they must call supervisor at the end of the last outreach to check out for the day. No exceptions. The Supervisor is responsible for knowing that all staff have returned safely at the end of the day.

2. Procedures: Supervisor

- Must be available to the staff during the time they are in the field including after hours.
- Be ready to act if staff calls with a problem, uses the identified code word to signal a hazardous situation, or misses a scheduled call or check in. Have this information available:
 - ✓ Make, model, and color of the vehicle.
 - ✓ Staff's cell phone number
 - ✓ Staff's home, or alternate, phone number
 - ✓ Names, addresses and telephone numbers of clients or sites to be visited.
 - ✓ Approximate times of visits
 - ✓ Agreed time for the field staff to make contact during the day or after the last visit

- If a field staff fails to make contact at the agreed upon time and/or to check out at the end of the day, the supervisor will:
 - ✓ Telephone the staff cell phone.
 - ✓ If no answer, telephone the home, or alternate number.
 - ✓ If not there, telephone the phone numbers of the clients or sites visited.
 - ✓ Inform the Program Administrator. Contact police of a suspicious incident and/or respond in accordance with your Program Administrator's instructions.