

Box 8.7 Safety Principles and Precautions inside and outside of the Agency Setting (Continued)

9. When traveling by foot or public transportation, it is advisable to carry as few valuables as possible. Money, license keys, and other essentials might be carried in a pocket if a handbag carried under the arm is grabbed, it is best to let go of it. It is advisable to dress in comfortable clothes that are loose fitting and sturdy, flat walking shoes. Be alert to the surroundings and walk with purpose and a clear destination. Be aware of people in the immediate area, without staring or maintaining eye contact.
10. Prior to an in-office meeting with a client with whom the social worker does not feel safe, the social worker should discuss the situation with the supervisor. When considering the location of the meeting, think about what is in the room, whether there is more than one exit, and where each person might sit. Think about whether to include someone else in the meeting. When discussing the time of the appointment, consider whether people are around at the time. Discuss the plan for backup and assistance in the event that the client becomes agitated. Do not meet a potentially dangerous client alone.
11. Prior to meeting with clients in their homes, determine whether there is a question of safety and plan accordingly with your supervisor. Meeting at a neutral place or going with another worker may be the most appropriate plan. Again, always make sure that someone at the agency is aware of itineraries.
12. Follow agency procedures during a fire alarm, power outage, and natural disaster.
13. The following safety precautions are strongly advised:
- Take a cellular phone or pager to the meeting.
 - Lock personal items (e.g., jewelry and purse) in the vehicle's trunk prior to departing for the client's home.
 - Be aware that items such as a necklace, earrings, a necklace, or a scarf can be used in a harmful way.
 - Use all five senses when approaching the neighborhood, leaving the car, and when entering and departing the premises.
 - Keep car keys handy/accessible while in the client's home.
 - Park vehicles so that it is possible to make a safe and quick departure in an emergency.
 - After leaving a client's home, stay near the door if possible. Observe all exits in the home.
 - Ask for permission to write/take notes.
 - Listen to clients and allow them to ventilate.
 - Should clients seem threatened by your presence in their home, do not force the issue. Politely excuse yourself and leave immediately.
 - If an incident occurs in which you are personally threatened or hurt, immediately contact 911 and inform your supervisor (see Appendix D for ways to deescalate potentially volatile situations).

In preparation for the first meeting, the social worker (or designated office personnel) may call or text to confirm the appointment a few days prior to the scheduled appointment. This can serve as a reminder as well as convey that you are looking forward to meeting the client. Of course, some clients cannot be reached by phone. In that case, you may want

Assessment

Behaviors: Collect and organize data, and apply critical thinking to interpret information from clients and constituencies.

Critical Thinking Question: As you plan for a first home visit in a neighborhood about 35 minutes from your office in what is considered a "rough" part of the city, what are some important steps and pieces of information you will need?

to send a short note or an e-mail reminder of the appointment. It is a good idea to leave a number where you can be reached as well as the exact location of your office to facilitate the client in making the appointment on time. It is also important to schedule visits, when possible, during a time of day that is convenient for the client. A person working a 3 p.m.–11 p.m. shift may be sleeping during your normal office hours. Asking a client how he or she will be getting to your office can also be helpful in planning a time to meet. A client may be relying on a neighbor for a ride, a taxi, or public transportation.

Keep in mind that you will not click with every client you meet. Clearly, the social work adage *goodness of fit* applies here. It is sometimes difficult to admit when the fit between the client

and social worker is not good, and the time may come when you have to refer the client to another person, in part because your interactions may cause the client frustration at best and harm at worst. For example, you may have very strong feelings against abortion, and your 23-year-old client is considering this intervention for resolving her unwanted pregnancy. You realize that you cannot be objective in your work with her because your personal beliefs are in conflict with her right to self-determination. Rather than convey a sense of disapproval or disgust either consciously or unconsciously, refer her to an agency or worker who can provide this service in a more accepting way. To do otherwise would be in violation of the NASW Code of Ethics, specifically the ethical principle that social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person and their right to self-determination.

Regardless of how unprepared you may feel, your clients have a set of expectations that you may be unaware of. It is up to you to come across as a caring person who is interested in learning about the client and helping him or her. The responsibility for this initially rests with you. To accomplish a favorable outcome, you as the social worker must know what you are doing, communicate with the client that you are prepared to help, and plant the seed for change and hope (Kotler, 2010). Clients who seek help want to be assured that the worker is credible, knowledgeable, and committed to helping them through the long haul.

Although most social workers with a bachelor's degree are trained in the generalist practice mode, you may have developed a specialization along the way. For example, you may be a child welfare worker, and your area of practice is within the foster care arena. The expectation would be that you have a unique perspective, expertise, experience, and understanding of the issues facing the children, biological parents, and the foster parents. Additionally, a first-year master's degree in social work education focuses on generalist versus specialization of practice. Regardless of your level or area of practice, social work skills must be applied within the values and ethics of the profession in your first meeting with the client and throughout the helping relationship. First meetings set the climate and tone within which the relationship will develop.

The First Face-to-Face Office Meeting with the Client

Social workers should do an occasional visual survey of their office reception area. Is it welcoming, does it have a quiet area for clients to fill out paperwork, and is there a play area for children with age-appropriate toys? Are the restrooms clean and the hallways and stairways well lit? Are there pieces of artwork and magazines that represent the clients who access services? Does the agency appear welcoming? As a client, would you want to sit in a dirty or uncomfortable chair waiting to be greeted by a social worker? As a social worker in your agency, advocate for some of these very inexpensive modifications. There are easy ways to let the clients know that the agency and, by association, the social worker are invested in them.

Watch this video clip with the volume off and just look at the physical space of the shelter, the waiting room and office. Does this shelter provide a warm and welcoming environment? What suggestions might you make for improvement?