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Policy

Personal safety guide 3 - working safely in other people's homes

Corporate health and safety procedure

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1. Introduction to working safely in other people's homes

The potential for violence against staff working in other people's homes may depend on the reason they are there or simply that the person being visited may just be having a bad day. Always remember it is their home, the member of staff – ie you - are the visitor and as such have little or no control over the environment, however - you can control the task.

2. Before setting out

Always arrange a firm appointment date and time, either by telephone or letter. Never call on anyone unannounced.

Find out as much background information as possible about the person being visited and also about any family members or other people who might be present in the household, before the visit.

Find out the location of the property and how to get there so you know the route you will be taking. Consider what the location will be like and think about how you time the visit – ie will it be daylight on arrival but dark when you leave? Take telephone numbers, mobile phone, personal alarm etc with you.

3. On arrival at a property

1. Park your car near to, but not directly in front of, the property being visited, and also in the direction of travel you wish to leave in ie park facing out of a cul-de-sac.
2. Introduce yourself, explain the reason for the visit and show your ID card on the doorstep – wait to be invited in.
3. Do not enter the property if the appropriate person is not available – say you will come back when it's more convenient.
4. Do not enter the property if you have any concerns or feel uneasy – make an excuse and leave saying you will return another time.
5. If you go in, take only what you need into the property.
6. As you go in, check out how you would exit the same way and if you can how the door locks.
7. When invited to take a seat – if you can choose a firm upright chair which is easier to get up from than an easy chair or sofa.
8. Sit near the door if possible and be prepared to leave if you feel at risk.
9. If there are dogs or other animals present, ask for them to be secured in another room – you can always claim to be allergic.
10. Ensure the person is safe and their home secured when you leave.

4. Action to take if you are threatened

If you are threatened or prevented from leaving, stay calm and try to control the situation. Try to appear confident, speak slowly and clearly and try not to raise the level of your voice. Don't be drawn into an argument. Try to diffuse the situation by saying you will seek advice from your supervisor or a colleague. Keep your distance, never touch or turn your back on someone who is angry. Leave as soon as you are able.

If you are logged into the voiceconnect system, reach into your pocket where your mobile phone should be, discreetly locate and press your 5 key to summon help.

5. Recording

All information about concerns or incidents must be recorded accurately, in case or other appropriate files, and shared with other staff as necessary. Never keep information to yourself which could lead to a colleague or other agency or health professional being verbally or physically abused in the future.

Ensure any incidents including near misses are reported to your manager and directorate health and safety risk manager at the earliest opportunity.

If a service user or client uses repeated aggressive behaviour – after all other remedial and preventative measures have been taken – it may be appropriate to exclude or refuse service. However this will be as a last resort and must have regard to the Council's statutory responsibilities.

6. Checklists to use

On the next two pages are some checklists to use in your daily working lives.

They can be copied or printed off to display in your office or immediate work station area for ease of reference.

Simply reading through them each time you need to do a home visit is like carrying out your own mini risk assessment and a great way to develop your own best practice.

Home visit checklist

1. Always phone ahead and make an appointment and stick to it
2. Gather as much information as you can before you go – is there any information in the case file which alerts you to possible personal safety risks?
3. Carry out a risk factor checklist – see next page
4. If something makes you uneasy – do not go alone – go with a colleague
5. Know your route before you set off
6. Think about where you are parking the car
7. If something makes you uneasy on the doorstep – do not go in – make an excuse and leave
8. Check you are talking to the right person
9. Do not enter the house at all if the person you are meant to be visiting is not there or not available
10. Show your identity badge, say who you are and why you are there
11. Don't be surprised if someone you are visiting takes your ID card and phones up to check who you are before letting you in – they are only protecting their personal safety!
12. Always remember it is their home and you are going into it
13. You are invading their personal space
14. Wait to be invited in
15. Acknowledge that it is their territory and let them lead the way
16. Listen to your instincts and feelings
17. As you go in, memorise the way out and note how the front door locks
18. Take only what you need into the house – leave additional paperwork and equipment for the next visit in the car
19. Study your surroundings – look for an alternative exit
20. Don't get trapped – try to sit nearest the door
21. Try not to re-act to bad, dirty or smelly surroundings
22. Watch for potential aggressive dogs or other pets – you can always tell a professional lie and say you are allergic and would they mind removing the animal to another room for the duration of the visit
23. All the time you are in the home - remain alert and watch for changes in the person's mood, behaviour, movements or expressions
24. If you feel at risk, make an excuse and leave as soon as possible
25. If you are prevented from leaving or threatened, stay calm and try to control the situation
26. Try to talk your way out of the situation
27. Do what you have to do to protect yourself
28. Report any incident which leaves you uncomfortable or feeling threatened

The risk factor checklist

| Before you go | Yes | No |
|--|------------|-----------|
| Is the person I am dealing with facing high levels of stress? | | |
| Is the person likely to be drunk or on drugs? | | |
| Does the person have a history of violence? | | |
| Does the person have a history of criminal convictions? | | |
| Does the person have a history of psychiatric illness? | | |
| Does the person suffer from a medical condition that may result in loss of self-control? | | |
| Has the person verbally abused me or others in the past? | | |
| Has the person threatened me or others with violence in the past? | | |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| Has the person attacked me or others in the past? | | |
| Does the person perceive me or my organisation as a threat? | | |
| Does the person think of me as a threat to his/her liberty? | | |
| Does the person have unrealistic expectations of what I or my organisation can do for them? | | |
| Have I felt anxious for my safety with this person before? | | |
| Do I know of other people ie relatives who could be present at the visit/interview who could be a risk to my safety? | | |
| When you are there | | |
| Is the person showing signs of atypical behaviour? | | |
| Are there weapons or similar cues to violence? | | |
| Is there a breakdown in the normal pattern of non-verbal communication? | | |
| Is the person showing signs of rapid mood swings? | | |
| Is the person showing over-sensitivity to my suggestions or criticisms? | | |
| Am I alone and without back-up? | | |
| Are my colleagues aware of my whereabouts? | | |
| Am I without means of raising the alarm if prevented from leaving or attacked? | | |
| Am I likely to be trapped without an escape route if the person becomes violent towards me? | | |
| Am I aware of how I react in violent or difficult situations? | | |

7. Dangerous dog guidance

Although many people are aware that laws exist relating to dog ownership, few are aware of the details and the responsibilities they place on owners. Here are highlights of the main pieces of legislation and key points out of them.

The Control of Dogs Order 1992

Every dog on a highway or in a public place must wear a collar with the name and address of the owner attached to it. Exceptions are when dogs are being used for sporting purposes, capture of vermin, herding or rescue work. Also, dogs for the registered blind or used by the armed forces, customs and excise or the police are exempt. Dogs not meeting this criteria can be seized and treated as a stray by your local authority under the Environment Protection Act (see below). Note that the police have no powers under this act.

The Environment Protection (Stray Dogs) Regulations 1992

All local authorities must appoint an officer to deal with stray dogs found in the local authorities area. The regulation places certain responsibilities on this officer in terms of recording key information (breed, where it was found etc) and ensuring procedures are followed relating to contact of owners. Contact your local council for details of their dog warden service.

The Dangerous Dog Act 1991

If a dog is dangerously out of control in a public place, the owner or person in charge of the dog is guilty of an offence. This offence can result in a fine or a prison sentence. The dog may also be destroyed and the owner disqualified from owning a dog for a specific period of time. The Police or local Dog Warden may seize a dog if they consider it dangerously out of control. Specific regulations apply to fighting dogs and the use of guard dogs.

The Dangerous Dog Act applies to ALL dogs not just the "official" dangerous dogs. More information and useful leaflets can be found on [Defra's website](#) . If you are visiting premises during the course of your work where potentially dangerous dogs are known to be present:

- Risk assessment in relation to the premises should be undertaken, based on previous knowledge, information sources etc. prior to the visit
- Consider whether the visit requires two officers to attend and whether police assistance is appropriate
- When arranging the visit, request that the dog is put away in a different area of the premises and secured for the period of the visit
- Be careful when getting out of your vehicle – wait for several minutes and check all around your car
- If an aggressive dog is present, and cannot be controlled by the owner, remain in your vehicle, terminate the visit and leave the premises
- If you visit premises during the course of your work and are presented with a dog you did not know would be on the premises:
- Request that the dog is put away in a different area of the premises and secured for the period of the visit.
- Use a "professional lie" if you feel you need to - telling the customer you are allergic to animals.
- If the customer refuses – leave and say you will return to complete the assessment etc on another day.

Tips for avoiding dog attack:

- Never, ever approach a dog unless its owner has said it's ok to do so.
- Respect a dog's space. Keep your hands away from a dog's fence. A dog considers its yard personal property and may growl or bite to protect it.
- Be cautious around a mother dog with her puppies. She will be naturally protective.
- Be very wary of dogs near toys. Do not be tempted to pick a toy up to play with a dog.
- Be extra vigilant of dogs who have been woken up suddenly. Let sleeping dogs lie is good advice. That goes for a dog that is eating or drinking as well.
- Be aware of a dog's potential to be defensive or territorial in their own home.
- When approaching a dog, never bear down on them. Dogs are even more attuned to body language than humans. Dogs can react badly to being stared at, leaned in on or if they see a hand coming down from above their head. Think about what life looks like when you are a dog who is constantly looking upwards at the world around them. Try and get down on their level with your body in a side on (non threatening position).
- If a dog wandering loose without an owner approaches you:
- Do not run away from the dog and do not yell or make loud noises.
- Stand very still like a tree. Cross your arms over your chest, as if you are giving yourself a great, big hug. (This shape forms the trunk of your tree.) Look away from the dog. Dogs sometimes think direct eye contact is a challenge for power and control. You do not want to challenge the dog. You want the dog to go away.
- Toss an object away from you and away from the dog. This should attract its attention toward the object - and away from you. The dog should move toward the thrown object to sniff and investigate it. This will give you a chance to slowly turn and walk away.
- A relaxed dog usually holds its head up, its tail down, wagging back and forth. Ears are neither back nor forward, hair will lie smooth along its back, mouth and lips relaxed, which can appear like the dog is "smiling."
- A threatening dog may have a wrinkled nose that draws back to reveal its teeth. The hair along the back of its neck may be raised, its ears laid back, and it appears tense and cocked. The dog may also growl or snarl.

If dogs scare you, copy or print this off and keep it handy.

Symptoms of aggressive dog behaviour:

- Standing tall on the tips of the toes, leaning slightly forward, ears pointed forward and up
- Long stares and refusal to break eye contact first
- Raised hackles (hair in between shoulders)
- Growling from deep within the body as opposed to a throat growl
- Showing teeth
- Guarding food and toys by snarling or chasing family members away
- Excessive marking of territory or leg lifting
- Stiff, slow movements that include a strange wag with tail held high
- Biting of air near people
- Possessiveness towards a certain area or piece of furniture, refusal to leave that spot that includes growling,

barking and showing of teeth

- Shoving 'weaker' family members with shoulders or other forms of bullying

What to do if you meet a dangerous dog:

- There are some important rules to remember if you meet a dangerous dog:
 - don't run - stand still – you can't outrun a dog – no-one can
 - keep your hands firmly by your sides and don't wave them around
 - try telling the dog to sit or stay - in a firm tone – but - only try this once
 - don't kick the dog, or make loud noises or jump around
 - avoid eye contact with the dog - he might think you are challenging him
 - slowly back away from the dog, and when at a safe distance - walk away

If you use these tactics the dog is likely to leave you alone.

First aid if you or a colleague get bitten

- Secure the dog or the victim. Move one away from the other. If the dog's owner is around, instruct him or her to secure the dog. If not, move the victim to a safe location. Dogs may bite because their territory is threatened. Don't start any treatment until there is a reasonable expectation that the dog won't attack again.
- Control any bleeding. Avoid using a tourniquet unless there is severe bleeding that cannot be controlled any other way.
- Once the bleeding is controlled, clean the wound with soap and warm water. Do not be afraid to clean inside the wound. Be sure to rinse all the soap away, or it will cause irritation later.
- Cover the wound with a clean, dry dressing – improvise if necessary.
- Watch for signs of infection:
 - Redness and/or swelling
 - Heat
 - Weeping pus
 - Go to A&E or call an ambulance.

Prosecuting owners following personal injury due to a dog bite/attack

If the attack happens in a public place the police will do this, however, if the attack takes place on private property, the police are powerless and you will have to take out a private prosecution.

If you decide you want to prosecute the County Council will support you in this.

Dog bite personal injury compensation

The number of people treated for dog bites at hospitals in England has risen sharply, according to NHS statistics. The figures show the number attending A&E after being bitten or attacked by a dog has increased by more than 40% in the last four years to nearly 3,800 a year.

It is important that you realise claims are not easy to make and that certain criteria needs to be in place before you proceed with your case.

Generally speaking if a dog has a history of being aggressive and is known to be dangerous then any owner who fails to safeguard the public may be held liable.

The hard part is determining and proving that there is a record of previous incidents or that the dog does have aggressive tendencies. It is sometimes possible to prove that a dog by its very nature or breed could and should warrant extra care on the part of the owner and if an incident occurs then liability may attach.

Each case must be assessed on its own merits.

In order to have a reasonable chance of success in making a claim you must:

- Identify the owner and provide his or her address.
- Consider reporting the attack to the police.

You may or may not be the first victim but most certainly won't be the last.

If possible try to determine if the dog owner has either pet insurance or home and contents insurance. Both types of insurance will generally cover legal liability for the owner. This means that there is a compensator who has the means to pay your claim. Most individuals do not.

Source URL: <http://nyccintranet/node/1004>

Links

- [1] <http://nyccintranet/node/1004>
- [2] <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/welfare/domestic/dogs.htm>
- [3] <http://nyccintranet/tags/health>
- [4] <http://nyccintranet/tags/safety>
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