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Home Visiting Safety for Early Intervention Specialists, Therapists and Home Visitors

*Texas Health and Human Services
Early Childhood Intervention*

The Importance of Home Visiting Safety



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Early intervention services for children and families, such as home visiting, are provided in a child's natural environment, including the home, daycare, park or library.

In this presentation, you will learn safety tips to prepare for, conduct and leave a home visit.



The Importance of Home Visiting Safety

- As a home visitor, you are an invited guest in a family's home.
- You may be walking into an uncertain environment with unknown obstacles, scenarios and dangers.
- Always be friendly, but aware of your surroundings, under all circumstances.



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“Home Visiting Safety: Staying Safe and Aware on the Job”



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- On the next slide, you'll watch a video about home visitor safety.
- Watch for the strategies the home visitor uses before, during and after her visit to prepare for any situation that may arise.
- Think about how you could use these strategies before you conduct a home visit.



Video: “Home Visiting Safety: Staying Safe and Aware on the Job”



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This video was created by the Oregon Health Authority, Oregon Public Health Division, Maternal and Child Health Section. The intended audience is public health home visitors, although many of the tips and topics discussed are applicable to other fields as well. (Click the image to play the video.)

Before Your Visit

Prepare

- Review the family's case file for any reason to be cautious upon arrival and during the visit.
- Call ahead to make sure the family is home and will be there to answer the door when you arrive.
- Make sure you have the correct address, phone number and driving directions along with the appointment time.
- Make sure you let your supervisor or co-workers know where you are and when you will be back.



Before Your Visit, continued

- Don't wear excessive jewelry.
- Dress appropriately (Refer to your organization's dress code).
- Take your ID badge with you and show it when the door is answered at your destination.
- Carry your cell phone with you but keep it in your pocket on silent during the visit.



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Vehicle Safety: Before You Leave

- Keep your car in good working condition.
- Make sure your gas tank has plenty of fuel.
- Know how to change a tire and have a spare available.
- Have a first aid kit and flashlight in your car.
- Check weather conditions before leaving for your visit.
- Have phone numbers of who to call if you need roadside assistance.



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Vehicle Safety: On the Way

- If you have a purse, leave it in the trunk before arriving at the home.
- Wear your seat belt. It's the law.
- Drive with your car doors locked and windows rolled up.
- If you are unfamiliar with the destination, circle around the block once you arrive to look for signs of danger before exiting the car.
- Have your keys in your hand when walking to and from the home.



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Arriving at the Home

- Avoid groups of people outside the home who appear to be loitering, drinking alcohol or arguing.
- Pay attention to signs like “No Trespassing” or “Beware of Dog.” They may be an indicator of the attitude of the residents toward strangers.
- Be cautious of pets or other animals even if they appear to be restrained. Let homeowners know if animals are loose.
- Even if an animal appears friendly, don’t look it in the eye or approach it.



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Arriving at the Home

- Choose an open and well-lit area to park that offers the safest walking route to the home.
- Park on the street rather than in a driveway or an alley.
- If you have to park in a driveway, back in to park. Don't allow another car to block yours in.
- Park in the direction you want to go when you leave the home visit.
- Beware of dead end streets.



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Leaving and Approaching Your Vehicle

- As you leave your car or the home, look around you in all directions to become aware of any obstacles or dangers you may encounter.
- Have your keys in hand ready to unlock your car.
- Look in the backseat before getting back in your car.
- Lock your car once you've entered or exited.



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Approaching the Home

- Maintain a self-confident, self-assured posture and attitude.
- Whenever possible, keep to the middle of the sidewalk and avoid dark alleyways or groups of loiterers.
- If a group is blocking the doorway to the family's home, look for another entrance. If there isn't another entrance, walk away and reschedule the appointment.



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Approaching the Home

- If you are verbally confronted, stay professional. Repeat your response and don't answer verbal challenges.
- Pause at the door before knocking and listen. If you hear loud quarreling or sounds of fighting, leave.
- Knock on the door, identify yourself and use the family's name.



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Approaching the Home

- Don't enter a home unless there is an adult present. If a child answers the door, tell the child to get their parent or caretaker. If their caretaker isn't in the home, call CPS or the police. Don't leave until help arrives.
- Trust your instincts. Don't enter homes when you suspect an unsafe situation exists. Leave immediately if you ever feel yourself to be in danger.



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During a Home Visit

- Be alert to signs of violence or any sexual advances towards you, however subtle, from anyone in the home.
- Be courteous and professional when introducing yourself. Tell the family your name, the agency you represent and why you are there. Give them your business card and show them your badge.
- Ask permission to hold or handle a child before doing so. Explain what you are doing so that the family member understands.
- Do not assume an animal won't bite.



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During a Home Visit

- When entering a home, stay behind the resident as they guide you through the home. Don't allow someone to follow you.
- Place yourself where you can easily see the front door or somewhere that you can easily observe someone else entering the room.
- Be aware of other people going in and out of the house. If guns or knives are visible, you may leave and conduct the visit at another place or time.
- Before going to another room in the house or using a phone or sink, always ask permission. If it is a dark area of the house, have the family member go first and turn on the lights.



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Personal Information

Don't reveal too much personal information about yourself or your family.

Use only business or public phones to prevent identification of personal phones with caller ID.



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Leaving the Home

- Be aware of what is going on around you outside and if things have changed.
- Have your keys in your hand.
- Check inside and around your car.
- If someone is leaning on your car, return to the home and call for help.

- Watch for small children and animals around your car.
- Watch for cars following when you leave. Never stop if someone tries to stop you or asks you to pull over. Proceed to nearest business, police or fire station for help.



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Uncomfortable Situations

Emotions and Body Language

- Don't show fear.
 - Try not to show any facial expression.
 - Control your breathing.
 - Check your watch. Say you need to call your office because they are expecting you to check in.
- Speak slowly and lower the pitch of your voice.
 - Maintain eye contact but not directly in their eyes. Look toward the cheek area.
 - Don't challenge, but be assertive.



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Uncomfortable Situations

Actions and Responses

- Stand up and leave if you experience aggressiveness, foul language, unexpected behavior, rudeness or name-calling.
- Repeat why you are there.
- If you are in trouble, attract help any way you can. Scream or set off your car alarm with your key lock.
- Talk to your supervisor as soon as you can.



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Drug Awareness

- If in imminent danger, leave the home.
- If no imminent danger: Discuss dangers of exposing children to drug paraphernalia and activities in home.
- Discuss effect of drug use on parenting.
- Encourage parents to seek help for substance abuse issues.



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Drug Awareness

Provide resources and referral information

- How to Get Help for Substance Abuse:
<https://hhs.texas.gov/services/mental-health-substance-use>
- <https://mentalhealthtx.org/>
- Texas Addiction Recovery Centers:
<https://www.recovery.org/browse/texas/>
- Low-Budget or Free Rehabs for Drug & Alcohol Abuse in Texas: <https://www.addicted.org/texas-free-or-low-budget-programs.html>



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Drug Awareness

Drug Paraphernalia

- Straws and mirrors with razors
- Many empty alcohol bottles
- Hemp rope
- Roach clips
- Rolling papers
- Burnt spoons
- Glass vials
- Syringes
- Needles
- Pipes, water pipes



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Drug Awareness

Red Flags for Methamphetamine:

- Strong odor resembling urine or unusual chemicals such as ether, ammonia or acetone.
- Little or no traffic around home during day, but significant activity during very late hours.
- Large numbers of items (i.e.: cooking dishes, coffee filters, bottles) that don't appear to be for regular household use.
- Large quantities of chemicals.
- Vehicles loaded with laboratory materials or chemicals.
- Windows that are excessively covered.
- Excessive amounts of trash.



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Methamphetamine

Do not enter a home with evidence of meth lab materials or chemicals on the property.

- If you enter and suspect a meth lab is inside the house, discreetly but immediately leave.
- Drive to a safe location and contact the police.
- Go to a safe location to change clothes. Place dirty clothes in a plastic trash bag. Clean all exposed skin surfaces with soap and water.
- Wash any items carried into the home with soap and water.
- Don't touch any surface until skin and items are clean.



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Watch for Red Flags

Physical Aspects (Note: some may be symptoms of other issues)

- Lack of motor coordination or slowed reflexes
- Slurred speech, disorientation, confused behavior
- Risky behavior (jumping from heights, self-mutilation)
- Dilated or constricted pupils
- Clammy skin
- Drowsiness, hyperactivity or euphoria
- Increased or decreased appetite
- Drugs, alcohol or paraphernalia



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Watch for Red Flags (continued)

- Loss of consciousness
- Paranoia, suspicion or altered perceptions
- Easily angered or enraged
- Needle marks
- Glassy or discoloration of the eyes
- Rapid or decreased eye movement
- Substance odor on clothing, breath
- Insensitivity to pain
- Rapid weight loss
- Decaying of teeth



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Conclusion



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- Remember, you are there to provide services to the child and family.
- Be respectful and sincere.
- Make sure the family understands your role and intentions.
- You have the right to protect yourself from harm, whatever the circumstances.
- If you have concerns, talk with your supervisor.



Other Home Visiting Safety Resources



- Idaho Department of Health and Welfare Family and Community Services, Social Worker Academy: "Home Visitor Safety":
<http://healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/Portals/0/Children/HomeVisiting/Home%20Visitor%20Safety%20Training.pdf>
- Iowa Heartland Area Education Agency: "Home Visit Safety Guide":
https://www.heartlandaea.org/media/cms/Home_Visit_Safety_Guide_40D7CE03F5AC9.pdf
- Oregon's Home Visitor Safety Guide:
https://ncwwi.org/files/Incentives_Work_Conditions/home-visiting-safety-guide.pdf
- National Association of Social Workers (NASW): "Guidelines for Social Worker Safety in the Workplace":
<https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=6OEdoMjcNC0%3D&portalid=0>



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Thank you

Content provided with permission by:

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