

# SOCIAL WORKER PERSONAL SAFETY TIPS

## In Your Car

- ◆ If your vehicle becomes disabled know the identity of anyone trying to help you and provide that information to someone else via telephone.
- ◆ If you have a flat tire at night call for assistance and try to keep going to very well-lit and public space.
- ◆ Use extra caution in parking garages. Be vigilant and scan the garage as you enter and when walking to elevators.
- ◆ Have your car keys in your hand when you approach your vehicle. If your state permits it, carry personal safety devices like pepper spray or electronic control devices ([www.social-work-safety.com/Catalog.html](http://www.social-work-safety.com/Catalog.html) )
- ◆ If someone gains access to your car and attempts to force you to drive away, scream, kick, bite, hit, punch and fight until you get free of the car.
- ◆ If someone approaches your car and attempts to force their way in, sound the horn and drive away and call the police as soon as you are safe.
- ◆ Keep your gas tank full, keep some potable water in your trunk, be certain that you have a spare tire with a working jack and that you know how to use them, a working flashlight, maps, jumper cables, and a first-aid-kit.
  - ❖ First-aid-kits should include feminine napkins, gauze, and tape.
- ◆ Lock your doors!
- ◆ Scan the area around your car as you approach it and check the interior of the car next to you as well as your own before getting in.
- ◆ If someone attempts to force you into your car, throw your keys as far as you can to distract your attacker and run.

## Your Client's Homes

- ◆ You are on their turf and the client has the advantage.
- ◆ Be vigilant and make detailed observations of the house and potential exits.
- ◆ Use your more distal senses first, Observe with your eyes and Listen with your ears before exposing yourself with more proximal senses. At their door stand to the side and listen for a moment or two
- ◆ Light and fast is the way to travel, leave bags, purses and bulky items locked in your car.
- ◆ Mentally rehearse worse-case scenarios with winning outcomes to prepare yourself for potential attacks.
- ◆ Make a mental note of objects in the room that could be used as weapons against you.
- ◆ If anything looks unsafe in or around the home, or if your intuition tells you something is wrong, leave and find another way to complete your tasks in a way that will ensure your safety.
- ◆ Keep your cellular telephone close by but know that **it may not** work.
- ◆ Take a colleague or law enforcement officer with you on potentially dangerous home visits.

- ◆ Most importantly, know your client. Be aware of what they may be capable of based on their physical size, experience, sex, mental health, medication, legal status, history, etc.

## **At Work**

- ◆ Be mindful of your surroundings and be aware of potential threats to your safety.
- ◆ Walk with confidence and purpose.
- ◆ Dress more like the proverbial schoolmarm, covered up, comfortable and ready to run.
- ◆ Attend training on personal safety ([www.social-work-safety.com](http://www.social-work-safety.com)), conflict resolution, and personal resiliency.
- ◆ Establish an agency safety committee. Contact an expert on workplace safety and personal safety for social workers to help set up safety committees ([Mark@social-work-safety.com](mailto:Mark@social-work-safety.com))
- ◆ Establish and maintain proper personal and physical boundaries with clients.
- ◆ Avoid discussing personal information with your clients or where they can hear you.
- ◆ Rehearse safety scenarios using potential weapons found naturally within your office (e.g., books, scissors, clip board, keys, and chairs). Remember that your brain is the most powerful weapon you have and the only one that can't be taken away and used against you!

## **Personal Safety Fundamentals**

- ◆ Trust your instincts.
- ◆ Be assertive when protecting yourself.
- ◆ Sometimes the only thing you can control in a crisis is your breathing and by doing so, you will be better able to regain control of yourself and the situation.
- ◆ Assess the situation moment-by-moment, keep your thinking as dynamic as the situation. For more information on Situation Awareness and Analysis Training contact [Mark@social-work-safety.com](mailto:Mark@social-work-safety.com).
- ◆ Act, Bluff, and Fake compliance are three good ways to quickly buy a little time to allow you to plan an assertive course of action.