



Helen Bader
School of Social Welfare

Safety Techniques and Strategies

In Social Work Field



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Safety Techniques and Strategies

Notes, Phone Numbers, etc.

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Safety Techniques and Strategies in Social Work Field

Introduction

Each year hundreds of Helen Bader School of Social Welfare students participate in field placement. In any field placement there may be some degree of uncertainty and potential risk. Therefore, there is concern on the part of faculty and staff regarding student safety. Please take time to read this carefully. If you have any questions, please see your field placement liaison or the Director of Field Programs.

Policy Statement

It is the policy of the Helen Bader School of Social Welfare to encourage attention to safety in field placement situations.

Field instructors are responsible for providing students with safety policies and/or guidelines of the agency in which the student is placed. Students are responsible for understanding and following safety policies and/or guidelines of the agency in which they are placed.

It is the policy of the Helen Bader School of Social Welfare that a student may question a potentially unsafe assignment without repercussion. An obligation rests with the student, the field instructor, the field liaison, and Director of Field Education to reach a common understanding as to what kinds of assignments are appropriate from a safety perspective. If no agreement can be reached, the ultimate decision rests with the Director of Field Programs.

If a student believes that s/he is placed in a situation that may be unsafe, the student must immediately inform the field instructor and contact the field liaison or Field Director before proceeding with the assignment. Likewise, if a student initiates what may be perceived as a potentially unsafe field related activity (on his/her own), the field instructor must direct the student to not proceed with the assignment. If a student proceeds with an unsafe activity after being directed not to, then existing field policies shall apply as regarding continuance in the program.

If threatened or injured while in a field placement, or if the student is involved in a safety incident of any kind, the field placement instructor, field liaison, and/or Field Director must be contacted immediately by the student. The field instructor, field liaison and Field Director must be informed of any safety related issues and should be appropriately responsive.

Community Safety Strategies

- Always walk with confidence giving the impression you know where you are going.
- The importance of dress and personal presentation:
 - **Leave jewelry at home** (if you insist on wearing them, keep chains hidden under shirts or blouses). Do not expose jewelry and valuables.
 - **Dress to blend in with the community:** do not be conspicuous.
 - **Do not wear trendy or brand clothing** which may be desirable to others.
- **Do not travel with large sums of money.** You may want to bring two “stacks” of money—one for the robber and one for yourself.
- Although you may want to avoid carrying around a wallet, **you should have some form of identification** with you.
- **Hold on to your purse securely** and close to your body.
- Check bus routes or driving routes before going into the field. Consult with your supervisor or other staff who are familiar with the area in which your field visits will occur.
- The agency/office should always know where your visits will be made on a daily basis. You may want to consider calling into the office as you complete one field visit and move on to another. If there are any changes in your schedule or if you have been delayed, you should notify the office/field instructor.
- Stay on major routes or streets as you travel to your field destination.
- In most instances, field visits should be planned during morning or early afternoon hours. Visits which may extend to the end of the day when it begins to darken should be avoided.
- It is preferable to travel with a partner when making a field trip. Visits to high-risk areas should always be made with an escort.
- It is important to appear confident and that you know where you are going when you don't.

- Walk with your head up and be aware of surroundings and the individuals who are present.
- When asking directions, always seek out the police or individuals who work in businesses located in the community/area.
- It is advisable to avoid conversations with unknown individuals.
- Be aware that there may be situations which you should not handle. In these instances, call the police.
- If contacted by the police, do what they tell you to do. Remember that the officer needs to assess the situation and in some cases sort out who is the victim and the perpetrator.
- It is advisable to leave the premises when you see drugs, alcohol or any situation which threatening.

Safety Strategies When Driving

- When possible, drive on well-traveled streets.
- **Never** hitchhike!
- If you are being followed, do not go home — drive to the nearest police station, fire station, all night service station, or other public area where people are present.
- Always be aware of where police stations, fire stations, and businesses open all night are located on your route of travel.
- Avoid pulling over if another car attempts to force you to the side of the road. If possible, obtain the license number of the vehicle.
- Do not offer a ride to someone having car trouble. Offer to call for help.
- If you have car trouble, do not accept a ride with strangers. Open the hood and remain in your car.
- Obviously your car should be maintained in good running condition.
- The following items should be basic equipment for your car: spare tire (also have a can of material which will “inflate” a flat tire), first aid materials (advisable to have a complete kit), for winter driving, a shovel, gravel and several blankets, maps of the community you are in and surrounding areas, flares.

Home or Building Safety Techniques

- Always trust your instincts and don't enter if the situation looks unsafe. Be aware of the people entering/exiting.
- Once you enter a home be aware of surroundings. Know various "exit" routes other than the door which you entered. Know where the telephone is situated. If you have a portable phone for your use, always have it readily available.
- Do not remain in the home if you see drugs, alcohol, firearms, violence, etc. (It is imperative to be aware of situations which you are unable to control.)
- In buildings, be careful when using elevators and stairwells. It is advisable to always carry a small flashlight and to proceed in well lit areas. Don't walk in hallways which are not lighted. Again, be aware of people who are entering and exiting buildings.
- When in a home or apartment, always be aware of other people on the premises. Have a plan in mind if you need to exit quickly.
- If you are uncertain about your safety once you have entered a home/apartment, remain near an exit (door). Do not allow anyone to get between you and the exit door.
- It is important to have a non-verbal communication system worked out with the partner who is accompanying you on home visits.
- Threats which are made should be taken seriously.
- While using the elevator, stand next to control panel to give yourself access to the alarm or emergency buttons.
- Avoid construction sites or entering vacant buildings.

Safety Strategies in the Office

- When working after normal business hours, always keep your office door closed and locked. (Students are not encouraged to be at office premises after hours unless approval is received from their field supervisor.)
- The office door should be locked even when you are leaving the office for any length of time.
- Keep emergency telephone numbers available at all times (building, security, police, etc.)
- Never prop a door open to provide access to work area for someone who may not have a key.
- All purses, wallets and valuables should be locked in a desk/file drawer. A wallet or purse should never be left on top of a desk or in view.
- Keys to the office should never be unnecessarily duplicated or loaned to others.
- Any suspicious person present in the building should be reported to the police.
- Always require identification from maintenance men who are asking for access to an office area or are attempting to remove equipment.
- Close and lock all doors when leaving the office.
- Record serial numbers of valuables for future reference.
- Always check to insure that outside or entrance doors are secured.

Safety Strategies While Walking

- Wear clothing which is not restrictive in the event you may need to run. High heels and tight fitting clothing limit movements to escape.
- Try to keep hands free. It is best not to be overburdened with items.
- Have a whistle or some other alarm device with you. Do not wear it or anything else around your neck which can be used to choke you.
- If you sense you may be in danger, run to a well-lighted place nearest you. Shout or yell while you are running.
- If you feel you are in imminent danger, break a window in whatever place is closest in order to draw attention to you.
- Look behind you to make sure no one is following you. Changing your walking pattern or crossing the street may cause anyone following you to hesitate.
- It is inadvisable to walk alone if you are intoxicated, anxious, high, tired, depressed or physically ill.
- When possible, it is advisable to walk with others as the majority of violent incidents are committed on a lone victim.
- Avoid walking near shrubbery, alleys, dark or unlit areas, doorways, back of buildings, unlit parking lots, or other places of concealment.
- When possible, watch your reflection in windows as you pass. You may be able to see if anyone is following you.
- Some hand items which can be used as weapons are keys, pepper spray, umbrellas, a lighted cigarette. Always have these items within reach. If they are in the bottom of your purse, they may not be easily accessible.
- Always be aware that any item which may be used as a weapon potentially can be taken away from you and used against you.

- If you decide to carry pepper spray, practice with an “inert” unit that can be purchased at any local police supply store.
- If you do become a victim of crime, give up your property. It is recommended that some money be carried at all times. Robbers tend to become angry if there is nothing to steal. However, do not carry extra credit cards or money.
- If someone is following you, try to recall points of identification about the person: height, weight, build, hair color, type of clothing, age, etc. If possible, write down the person’s license number.
- Contact the UW-Milwaukee Police Department (229-4627) for upcoming “Street Smarts” or “Self Defense” training sessions.

Elevator Safety Strategies

- Always remain alert as to who is also using the elevator.
- Check out the control panel when first entering an elevator. Be aware as to the location of the alarm button and stop button.
- If possible, always stand next to the control panel.
- If you sense impending trouble with a person on an elevator, push the button for the next floor and get off.
- If you are attacked on any elevator, push as many buttons as you can. This provides you with more chances to get off the elevator.
- Do not push the stop button as this may be what your assailant wants. If the assailant pushes the stop button, do whatever you can to pull it back and hit as many floor buttons as possible.
- Hit the alarm button, **only** if it is separate from the stop button.
- If the elevator is equipped with a telephone, know how to use it.



Helen Bader School of Social Welfare
Social Work Field Programs
PO Box 786
Milwaukee, WI 53201

Phone: 414-229-6501
Field Director: Jeanne Wagner
E-mail: jeanne@uwm.edu