

Principles for Assuring Personal Safety

- Remain calm.
- Introduce yourself and explain your presence in a supportive, matter-of-fact manner, reassuring the family that your purpose is to help the family and assure the child's protection, and that you are interested in working collaboratively with the family to do this.
- Use "talk down" strategies in your interviewing to defuse hostility and resistance. Acknowledge family members' expressions of anger or fear, and provide reassurance. Do not challenge family members or make accusatory statements.
- Interview the family members in a room that is near an exit. Always be aware of accessible exits to enable you to leave the premises if you must and try to stay between the client and an exit to prevent being blocked inside.
- Disband groups of people. Eight against one are not good odds. Take the primary interviewee to your car, to the yard, to the porch. Ask to speak to people alone to maintain their privacy. While family interviews are an important component of the investigation process, they should not be held if you believe the family to be potentially dangerous as a group.
- Do not behave defensively or be threatening in your tone of voice or actions. Regardless of the threat, always retain a calm, matter-of-fact and supportive demeanor.
- Recognize a person's body language that might indicate that the person is potentially volatile. Recognize signs of escalation. If "talk down" does not help to defuse a person's anger, and hostility appears to escalate, take steps to leave.
- In the event of escalating anger and hostility, temporarily discontinue the interview. Tell the person quietly that you'll come back at another time when he or she is not upset. Then leave. Return as soon as possible with police protection. In most circumstances, don't tell family members you are getting the police. It may be interpreted as a threat and provoke an already volatile person to hurt you or the child.
- Try to establish rapport and a relationship with family members using supportive and open-ended interviewing methods.
- Use strategies to involve family members in a joint process of problem analysis, identification of strengths and resources, and planning for solutions.
- At times, the environment around the client's home may present more dangers than the client family. Be aware of the surroundings at all times and be alert to potentially dangerous situations, including groups "hanging out" and parking areas that could be blocked.

Source: *Field Guide to Child Welfare* by Judith S. Rycus and Ronald C. Hughes