

Several Basic Principles to Assure 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 assure the child's protection and help the family, and that you are interested in working collaboratively with the family to do this;
- Use "talk down" strategies and Interactional Skills to defuse hostility and resistance. Acknowledge the client's expressions of anger or fear, and provide reassurance. Do not challenge the family 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;
- Disband groups of people. Eight against one are not good odds. Take the primary interviewee" to your car, to the yard, or to the porch. Ask to speak to people alone to "maintain their privacy";
- Do not behave defensively or threaten the client. Always retain a calm, matter-of-fact and supportive demeanor, regardless of the threat. "I understand how angry you are, Mr. Jones. Most people are. I would be too, at first. Even so, I would like to try to work with you. You're an important part of this family, and I need your help. Let's sit down, shall we?";
- Recognize a client's body language that might indicate that a client is potentially volatile. Recognize signs of escalation;
- Use law enforcement as back up;
- Use the buddy system with another caseworker;
- Always tell someone where you are going and approximately when you will be back;
- **IMPORTANT:** If "talk down" does not help to defuse the client'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 client quietly that you'll come back at another time when they aren't so upset. Then leave. Return as soon as possible with police protection. In most circumstances, don't tell the client you're getting the police. It may be interpreted as a threat and provoke an already volatile client to hurt you or the child.