

Home Visitor Safety Guide

Updated Summer 2025



Home Visitor Safety Guide

Your safety is a priority, and this guide aims to provide you with information to keep you safe while working as a home visitor.

Most Oregon home visitors feel safe while doing their work, however there are still things to remember and it's important to be prepared to respond if you ever feel unsafe.

At all times

Know and follow your agency's safety policies and remember you are not alone.
Talk with your supervisor or colleagues about safety concerns and best practices.

Consider general safety principles – Trust your instincts

1. It is the Home Visitor's responsibility to be aware of their safety needs and react accordingly, including taking adequate safety precautions.
2. Treat everyone with dignity and respect.
3. Learn to set boundaries effectively. Talk with your supervisor and colleagues about maintaining appropriate boundaries as well how you plan to hold boundaries with your clients.
4. Be aware of your speaking tone, volume cadence and body language.
It's not what you say but how you say it.

Be grounded in equity and critical self-awareness

Home visitors will be asked to enter communities and homes facing deeply rooted systemic inequities. To avoid perpetuating these inequities, it is important to develop a critical self-awareness of personal triggers and unconscious bias. While unconscious bias can be a useful survival mechanism that helps people make quick decisions in dangerous situations, it can also lead to unfair outcomes.

Here are some questions to consider for yourself, during reflective supervision, or when speaking to colleagues about safety issues to help identify and challenge implicit biases:

- What are my biases?
How might they be impacting my assessment of safety?
- How do I make decisions about my personal safety?
- Do I notice patterns in my decision making that might be impacted by my biases?
- What makes me feel unsafe?
What is this situation triggering in my background?
- What are my privileges regarding personal safety?
What privileges do I have that others do not?
- What can I do to disrupt bias and promote safety?

Before You Leave- Plan Ahead

Before You Leave- Plan Ahead

- Contact the client before the scheduled appointment to confirm the appointment and address.
 - Ask if there are any known safety concerns.
 - Ask what other family members or visitors will be present during the visit.
 - Ask about any animals.
- Review the client chart for any noted safety concerns including things that may increase risk such as intimate partner violence or weapons in the home.
- If safety concerns are noted, you may consider scheduling your visit at the office or an alternate location.
- If the location of your visit is unfamiliar to you, find a colleague who may be familiar with the location to brief you regarding any known risks or possible hazards.
- If severe weather is expected, check the latest report to ensure safe driving conditions.
- Schedule appointments during daylight hours, when possible.

- Have precise driving directions to your visit location.
- Ensure your supervisor and coworkers are aware of your location and expected return time.
- Carry a cellphone and ensure it is charged.
- Have a plan for traveling into areas that are known to be outside of cell coverage.

Dress to Protect Yourself

- Wear comfortable clothes shoes and clothes for easy movement.
- Avoid wearing expensive jewelry or any accessory that could be dangerous (dangling scarves, necklaces, neckties, etc.).
- Always wear your employee identification.
- Consider carrying a noise-making device such as a whistle.

Consider Car Safety

- Carry an Emergency Car Kit that contains flares, first aid supplies, water and a thermal blanket.
- Ensure you have sufficient fuel for your travel.

Arriving in the Neighborhood

- Be aware of the surroundings.
- Look for safe places to go in case of emergency: gas stations, businesses, fire department, etc.
- Be cautious of all animals, even if they appear to be restrained in some manner. Be aware of signs that indicate the presence of an animal such as food or water dish or a worn animal path around the yard.

Parking and Approaching the Home

- Choose a parking space that is in the open and near a light source that offers the safest walking route to your visitation site.
- Park on the street rather than in a driveway to avoid potentially blocked exits.
- Park in the direction you want to go when leaving the appointment.

- For multilevel apartment buildings, make a mental note of other exits as soon as you have entered the building. Use caution when using stairways. Notice if people or objects are located on the stairs or landings.
- For building with elevators, if there is a person waiting to get on an elevator with you considering stepping aside and waiting.
- Pause at the door and listen before knocking.
- Knock at the door and identify yourself.
- Once the door is answered, decide if you will enter the home or invite the client outside depending upon what you can see happening inside.

Entering the Home

- Make a warm introduction. Speak your name clearly, the agency you represent, and why you are there. Be prepared to show them your official identification.
- If possible, sit facing into the living space and be aware of other entrances into the space. If possible, sit close to the door.
- Be aware of other people in the home and traffic in and out of the home.
- Evaluate the potential for danger if weapons, such as guns or knives, are visible. You may feel that leaving and rescheduling is your best option.
- Ask permission before going to another part of the home.
- Do not go into a dark room (or basement or attic) first. Have your client go first and turn on the light. Follow them, never lead, even if you have previously been to their home.
- Completing a [Home Environment and Environmental Exposures Assessment](#) with your client may alert you to safety considerations.
- If you return to your vehicle during the visit, take your belongings with you. Knock again or say hello to announce yourself when you return from your car with extra equipment or supplies.

Discussing Sensitive Topics with Clients

- Be cautious about broaching sensitive topics during visits unless you know who else might be listening.
- Topics which may be sensitive include intimate partner violence, substance misuse by any adults who are caring for children in the home, legal issues, reproductive health, child abuse, or unsafe living conditions.

- It is always wise to check with the client prior to the visit indicating whether it is safe to discuss a particular topic.
- You may be able to schedule a visit at another location if the client would like to discuss sensitive issues with you.

Leaving the Home

- Collect all your belongings.
- As you leave, observe activities outside the visit site.
- Have your car keys in hand.

Special Considerations

Threatening Situations

Rehearse ahead of time what you would say and what you might do if an unsafe situation arises. Threatening situations may include:

- Evidence of drug sales or manufacture
- Weapons present
- An individual is intoxicated or under the influence of drugs
- Any individual is exhibiting signs of aggression
- There is evidence of a violent dispute in or near the home

Notify your supervisor when there has been concern for safety in a situation.

Canine Situations

- Any dog may bite.
- Before visiting the site, ask if there are any animals you need to be aware of. Upon arrival, look for signs of a dog before entering the yard or house.
- Do not surprise a dog – call out or tap on a gate if present.
- If a dog is unleashed within a fenced yard, do not attempt to enter the yard. Call the client to notify them that you are at the site; ask them to confine the dog in a safe place.
- If taken by surprise by a potentially hostile dog, use the following techniques:
 - Take off sunglasses, if you are wearing them.
 - Do not run or turn your back to the animal.

- Stand still, let the dog approach.
- Speak softly but use firm commands.
- Do not stare at the dog's eyes.
- Give the dog something, other than your hand, to bite.
- Shield your neck and face, if the dog lunges at you.

Resources

Self-Paced Home Visiting Safety Training Modules

1. Practicing Personal Safety While Partnering with Families
(45-60 min, also available in Spanish)
2. Personal Safety for Supervisors (30 min)

Additional Online Resources

3. Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse
4. What is a Meth Lab?

You can get this document in other languages, large print, braille or a format you prefer free of charge. Contact the Family and Child Health Section at fchsection.mailbox@odhsoha.oregon.gov or 971-673-0252. We accept all relay calls.



Public Health Division
Family and Child Health
971-673-0252
FCHsection.mailbox@odhsoha.oregon.gov
www.healthoregon.gov/homevisiting



Home Visitor Safety Guide Checklist

At all times

- ☐ Know and follow your agencies safety policies.
- ☐ Consider general safety principles – trust your instinct.
- ☐ Be grounded in equity and critical self-awareness.

Before you leave

- ☐ Plan ahead - Tell your supervisor details about your visit and call the family ahead to confirm address and ask where to park, ask about any safety concerns and who will be in the home during the visit.
- ☐ Dress to protect yourself - Wear good, comfortable shoes and clothes for easy movement.
- ☐ Consider Car safety – check for an emergency kit and fuel level.

Arriving in the neighborhood

- ☐ Drive around to orient yourself to the location.
- ☐ Look for no trespassing signs or beware of dog signs or any other indication of animals.
- ☐ Look for safe places to go in case of emergency, such as a gas station or fire department.

Parking and approaching the home

- ☐ Park on the street with the car facing away from the house in case you need to leave quickly.
- ☐ Lock the doors being sure to leave any valuables in the car and out of sight.
- ☐ Put the phone away to stay vigilant to surroundings, walking tall and confidently
- ☐ Be cautious of entryways and stairwells.
- ☐ Once the door is answered, decide if you will enter the home or invite the client outside.

Entering the home

- ☐ Make a warm introduction.
- ☐ Ask for permission to sit. Try to have a good view of the room around you.
- ☐ When possible, try to sit close to an exit.
- ☐ Be aware of other people in the home.
- ☐ Do not go into a dark room first. Have your client go first and turn on the light.
- ☐ If you need something from your car, take all your belongings with you as well.

Leaving the home

- ☐ Be aware of surroundings, noticing any people, activity or animals.
 - ☐ Have your car keys in hand.
 - ☐ Collect all your belongings.
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