



Home Visits: Advocate Safety Protocol

Home visits can be an effective way to facilitate survivors' access to services, establish trust and familiarity, and provide a view into the household's needs. Home Free's approach includes provision of home-based services with program participants where appropriate.

Before home visiting occurs, it is important to have open and honest conversation with the participant regarding your concerns about safety and for both you and her and her children. If her abuser knows where she lives, it may not be safe to do visits in her home, and meeting at the office or somewhere in the community (a coffee shop, the library, etc.) may be a better option.

In order to ensure advocate safety when providing home visits, the following safety measures should be followed.

- ▶ **Determine the appropriateness of a home visit – every time you visit.**

Home visiting should only be used when we have every reason to believe that the participant's batterer is not part of her home life. Because circumstances can change as you work with her, check in periodically about this, and be aware of indicators that the abuser may be back on the scene in a way that could include his presence in the home while you are there.

- ▶ **Make arrangements with an advocate "buddy."**

Each time you leave for a visit, make arrangements with a co-worker who will know where you are going and how long you expect to be gone. Designate a time at which they should call to check on you if they don't hear from or see you by that time.

- ▶ **Leave relevant info about the visit where it can easily be found by co-workers.**

Leave the participant file or a note with the address and contact info of the person you are going to see on your desk so it will be easy to find if there are concerns.

- ▶ **Call your participant before you leave the office, and again when you arrive at her building.**

This will give your participant an opportunity to let you know in advance if it might not be a safe time for you to visit.

- ▶ **Your cell phone is vital equipment.**

Be sure your cell phone is sufficiently charged, and keep it accessible at all times. You may want to place it in front of you on a table, or hold it in your lap so that you have it at your fingertips if needed.

▶ **Leave items you won't need locked in your vehicle.**

Limit what you bring into the apartment with you – just what you need to accomplish the tasks of the visit. If you need to leave in a hurry, there will be less for you to gather up.

▶ **Be aware of where you position yourself in the participant's home.**

Try to meet in the front room of the house, or somewhere with a sightline and clear path to the door. This will leave a clear exit path in case of emergency.

▶ **When your visit is complete, make sure that your advocate "buddy" and/or co-workers know that you are safe.**

If your plans do not include returning to the office after your visit, be sure to call and let folks know your visit went smoothly.

▶ **TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS.**

If at any point before or during a visit you feel that your safety may be compromised, **listen to this feeling and do what you need to do.** This could mean rescheduling the visit for another time, leaving in the middle of a visit with promises to call later, or moving the visit from the participant's home to a safer venue. **This is the most important guideline of all!**