

**VIRGINIA STATE  
UNIVERSITY**  
**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL  
WORK**  
**MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK  
PROGRAM**



**FIELD  
INSTRUCTOR  
ORIENTATION  
TRAINING**

Online Module 6  
Training 2022+



# **MODULE 6**

## Safety in the Practicum

# WE ALL NEED TO WORK IN SAFE SITUATIONS

- ❖ Social workers provide services in an increasingly complex, dynamic social environment and have a broadening client base.
- ❖ The profession's primary mission is ***“to enhance human wellbeing and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed and living in poverty”*** (NASW, 2008, p. 1).
- ❖ In the past 40 years, we have experienced severe economic and social disparities that have led to increases in the number of people unable to meet their basic needs without assistance from public and private agencies.



# WHY FOCUS ON SAFETY?

- ❖ Social (Pandemic) and economic (Inflation) changes have created pressures in social work practice settings as more people seek social work services from agencies that have often experienced budget cuts and sometimes lack adequate resources to meet the needs of people desperate for help.
- ❖ The number and variety of people to whom social workers provide services and the variety of settings in which these services are provided have contributed to an increasingly unpredictable, and often unsafe, environment for social work practice.
  - ❖ *NASW Guidelines for Safety in the Workplace, 2013*

# STATISTICS CITING SAFETY FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

- The Bureau of Labor and Statistics reports...
  - 48% of all non-fatal injuries from occupational assaults and violent acts occurred in the field of healthcare & social services
  - Social service workers in the public sector (social workers and caseworkers) are 7 times more likely to be victims of violent assaults than workers in the private sector
- The American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees
  - Found that 70% of front-line child welfare workers have been the victim of violence/threats in the line of duty.
  - Almost 45% of social workers reported that they faced personal safety issues on the job. Social workers in criminal justice were most likely to report personal safety issues at 67%. Social workers in child welfare and family and addictions reported personal safety issues at 52%.
  - The high rate of turnover amongst social workers is influenced by safety concerns. Traumatic events can cause a wide range of responses including typical feelings of numbness, shock, anxiety, fear, anger, acceptance, and PTSD.

(NASW, January 2020)



# STUDENT SAFETY EXPERIENCES IN THE FIELD

- ❖ Criss (2010) conducted a random sample survey of 595 master of social work (MSW) and bachelor of social work (BSW) students to assess for experiences of workplace violence from clients.
- ❖ Over 41% had experienced client violence, although only 3.5% had experienced physical violence.
- ❖ Forty-seven percent reported fearing verbal abuse from their clients, and those who had experienced client violence worried about it happening again



# REALMS OF SAFETY DEFINED

## ➤ **Physical Safety**

- Tangible and concrete factors that can be easily evaluated and measured

## ➤ **Social Safety**

- Describes the sense of feeling safe with other people. Requires the use of emotional intelligence, tolerance of diverse beliefs & opinions

## ➤ **Psychological Safety**

- Refers to the ability to be safe with oneself. To rely on one's ability to self-protect against any destructive impulses coming from within oneself or deriving from other people.

## ➤ **Moral Safety**

- Ongoing considerations of honesty and integrity, personal and professional ethics.

# WHERE TO FIND THESE IMPORTANT SAFETY ISSUES

## ➤ **Physical & Environmental Safety**

- Home & Community
- Environmental – *Wash your hands often, wear a mask, as needed, and use sanitizer-Be COVID aware*
- Orientation
- Insurance

## ➤ **Social Safety**

- Supervision
- Communication Skills
- Boundaries

## ➤ **Psychological Safety**

- Safety Plans
- Phases of Learning
- Agency Dynamics

## ➤ **Moral Safety**

- Code of Ethics
- Confidentiality and HIPPA
- Scope of practice & Identifying as a social work student



# PHYSICAL SAFETY IN THE AGENCY

- **Office Safety**

- Have the student keep their workspace free of impediments & exits clear
- Orient students to agency safety training and provide them access to alarm systems that can alert others
- Access to visually open meeting spaces/presence of another team member
- Explain the restriction of client access to objects that may be used as weapons
- In some settings, secure entry and access to the front door. Secure employee separate entrances. Well-lit hallways
- Agency Safety Protocols – Who, what, where, when, how, debrief plan? Supervision! *Don't assume the student knows this.*

- **Assess Risks**

- Universal Precautions.
- 2020: Covid Precautions
- History is the best predictor of violence. Prior to initial assessment, document past violence, current report of current violence, and client's treatment or interventions.
- Consult with a multidisciplinary team to assess the history of threats/violence.
- If you feel there is a risk for the student, ask that client be seen in the office or that you pair the student with an agency employee
- In supervision, address Behavior, Eye Contact, Tone/Volume/, Mood/Affect, Motor activity, Thought Process/Content, Active Substance Use Physical Safety in the Agency Ideas

# PHYSICAL SAFETY IN THE PRACTICUM

## Violence at the moment

- Get out If possible!!!! Say you have a call/text, etc. u Call 911 immediately in the community; panic # in the office, panic button
- ***Use de-escalation techniques and non-violent self-defense when possible. Does the agency have training the student should receive?***
- Never reach out for a threatening weapon. Back up and tell the client your moves before you make them so that nothing is unexpected or threatens a client who may be violent.
- Protect your head; block with cushion, pillow, arms, clipboard.

## After an Incident

- Help the student get medical attention immediately.
- As soon as appropriate after the violent incident: Consult your supervisor and any available agency director. Please notify the field team at VSU.
- Have students complete an incident report with the supervisor and inform them that there is a University incident that must also be completed.
- If the student is sexually assaulted, report immediately to the Field team who will report to the University Title IX office. Call police. Advise them to not change or alter their condition in any manner and seek medical examination

# BASIC SAFETY TIPS TO SHARE WITH THE STUDENT

## Community Concerns

- ❖ Be aware of your surroundings around the agency and in the community
- ❖ Know how to get to your destination, know the area & amenities
- ❖ Have a daily schedule available, so that your location and your estimated time of return are known. Share with Supervisor/Co-Workers
- ❖ Have a cell phone available to call for directions or help
- ❖ If risk is a concern, make a plan with the supervisor and department team
- ❖ Prepare for the unexpected and have backup safety plans
- ❖ Clothing, Weather, Phone Reception. Keep keys & phone within easy access
- ❖ Vehicle upkeep/Keys (Spare?)
- ❖ After dark, if there is a threat, walk out with a partner or group to the car.
- ❖ Observe on-comers. If approached use the direct, confident language of your intentions, "Sorry, I cannot help you"

# SAFETY DURING HOME VISITS

## Home Visits

- ❖ Drive with plenty of gas; keep doors locked
- ❖ Don't stop your car if "bumped"; drive to the nearest, well-staffed business and call the police for a report
- ❖ Park in a driveway facing outward, try to park where you cannot be blocked in
- ❖ Call the client to let him/her know you have arrived. If possible, have the client meet you at the door. Note the location of exits. Leave the door unlocked if possible -state that this is part of your home visit protocol
- ❖ Scan for weapons, and signs of previous, current, or potential violence. If weapons are present, leave and reschedule the location
- ❖ Assess the client's/family's demeanor, possible substance use, the threat of violence to self or others
- ❖ Be cautious of animals; you are a stranger. You always have the right to ask for animals to be held in another room or yard
- ❖ Keep your phone available. If needed, state that your office is expecting you back at (time) /expecting your call
- ❖ Do not hesitate to leave and reschedule to time or location for any reason (gut feeling, threat, other concerns)



Video link - [https://youtu.be/kL3r\\_3N\\_Qek](https://youtu.be/kL3r_3N_Qek)



# REFERENCES

- CDC Publication Coronavirus
- Moylan, C. , Wood, L. (2016). Sexual Harassment in Social Work Field Placements: Prevalence and Characteristics. *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work* 2016, Vol. 31 (4) 405-417.
- National Association of Social Workers - NASW Guidelines for Safety in the Workplace, 2013
- National Association of Social Workers - Massachusetts Chapter. Copyright 2001, NASW/MA

<https://umaine.edu/socialwork/field/fieldforms-and-policies/>





**THANK YOU FOR KEEPING OUR  
STUDENTS SAFE**

**THIS ENDS MODULE 6**  
YOU CAN PRINT THIS INFORMATION  
TO REFER TO, AS NEEDED