

WORKER BASED RISK REDUCTION PLANNING

Community mental health workers can work toward preventing violence and increasing safety by attending to various aspects of the counselor/client relationship. Although these principles are at the core of mental health training, it is easy to let them go by the wayside in high stress situations. The following ten rules serve as reminders.

RULE NO. 1

Establish a Good Relationship

DO's:

Develop a Good Relationship

- Build rapport
- Develop respect
- Develop cultural competence
- Learn to listen
- Include the client in planning
- Keep an open mind
- Be honest

DON'Ts

Traps Which Diminish Respect

- Don't order people around
- Don't be disrespectful or arrogant
- Don't be rude
- Don't tell people what they mean
- Don't ignore the individual in planning
- Don't judge the individual
- Never lie, including:
 - "white" lies
 - the emergency lie
 - promises you can't keep
 - false advertising
 - false hope
 - half truths
 - reverse psychology

RULE NO. 2

Ask

If you want to know something, ask. Nobody knows more about a person's thoughts, feelings or intentions than that same individual. It never hurts to ask. Respectfully ask the individual what he/she wants you to do.

RULE NO. 3

Trust Your Instincts

If you feel afraid, you probably have a very good reason. Pay attention to and take responsibility for your own feelings.

RULE NO. 4

Respect Threats

Any and all threats should be taken seriously. Even if the threat seems unrealistic, respect the intent.

RULE NO. 5
Try Not To Make Things Worse

Violence is often born of fear or anger. Try not to make it worse. If you become frightened or angry, try to back off. It is not a good time to negotiate anyway.

RULE NO. 6
Set Real Limits

Don't threaten, don't intimidate; set real limits, give negative and positive choices, use respectful directive statements.

RULE NO. 7
Offer Space

STAY OUT OF MY FACE!—Individuals differ in definition of intimate space, personal space and social space. These can change with the situation or circumstances. Remember, both clients and staff need a "buffer zone" of personal safety.

RULE NO. 8
Don't Be Afraid to Ask For Help

Sources: supervisors, colleagues, individual's family, clergy, police, crisis services, mental health system, the person.

RULE NO. 9
Avoid Stereotypes

Try to avoid reliance on stereotypes, particularly of age and gender. Mental health status workers anticipate possible violence from young men, especially if they are large in stature. This type of stereotyping can create blinders, so mental health workers can be taken by surprise when women or older people become violent. In fact, female clients are just as likely as male clients to become violent.

RULE NO. 10
Above All—
Never Do Anything You Think Is Stupid!

Many times staff are injured by actions that went against their own judgment, because they felt obligated or duty-bound to do so. Your employment certainly carries some risk, but it needs to be reasonable.