

# TEN RULES FOR STAYING SAFE

This training program will discuss a full range of safety practices for mental health workers in the community. Embedded in this training program are the following ten rules.

## RULE NO. 1 - RESPECT

Offer and communicate respect;  
at the same time, expect respect.

### RESPECT BUILDERS

Say please and thank you  
Develop cultural competence  
Learn to listen with your inner ear  
Include the person in planning  
Keep an open mind  
Be honest

### TRAPS WHICH DIMINISH RESPECT

Ordering people around  
Being arrogant, judgmental or rude  
Telling people what they mean  
Ignoring the individual in planning  
Lies:  

- "white" lies
- the emergency lie
- false hope
- half truths
- false advertising
- reverse psychology
- promises you can't keep

## RULE NO. 2 - OFFER SPACE

Keep safe by not getting too close.

**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 recipients and staff need a "buffer zone" of personal safety.

### **RULE NO. 3 - BE AWARE**

Assess each person / each day / each situation.

Be careful to avoid stereotypes, particularly of age and gender. Remember that a person's responses are often relative to his or her own interpretation of the current situation.

### **RULE NO. 4 - TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS**

Fear is a signal of danger.

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

### **RULE NO. 5 - TRY NOT TO MAKE THINGS WORSE**

Manage your own emotions.

Ignore challenge questions.

Be aware of your own nonverbal cues.

Be aware of nonverbal communications.

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 - COMMUNICATE A DESIRE TO HELP**

Offer help.

Clarify messages.

Be empathic.

Keep it simple.

Get to yes.

Violence often stems from fear and a sense of lost control. An empathic offer of help can interrupt fear and restore a sense of control.

**RULE NO. 7 - DEFUSE - USE VERBAL SKILLS**

Allow venting when possible.  
Set reasonable limits.  
Offer choices and consequences.

Create boundaries and structure. Communicate concern and respect. Don't threaten, don't intimidate.

**RULE NO. 8 - USE THE SAFETY PLAN**

Call for help.  
Remove bystanders.

Plan for managing a crisis create a structure and direct action when stress levels are high.

**RULE NO. 9 - EVALUATE & PROCESS ALL INCIDENTS**

Write it up accurately.  
Emotionally process.  
Correct for errors.

Learn from both successes and mistakes. Attend to all emotions and concerns. Reestablish therapeutic rapport.

**RULE NO. 10 - USE YOUR OWN GOOD JUDGEMENT**

Many times staff are injured by actions that went against their own judgment, because they felt obligated or duty-bound to act in some way.

# **AWARE Model**

<b>A</b>	<p><b>Assess from a Safe Space</b>          Assess each person, each day, each situation.          Make first observations from a safe distance.          Observe from the doorway to a room; from the street to a house; from the hall into the apartment.          When face to face - maintain appropriate social space until you know it is safe.</p>
<b>W</b>	<p><b>Where? What? Who? When?</b>          Assess the situation. Consider where, what, who, and when.          Where are the exits? Don't allow yourself or the agitated person to get trapped or feel trapped.          Where is help - Always know where and how to contact help. Always use your supervisor to solve difficult problems. Know the agency protocols on what to do in a crisis and obtaining emergency assistance.          What are potential weapons?          What is my relationship with this person? Build and rebuild positive, respectful relationships with the client and significant others.          What is the level of intensity of physical and verbal behaviors?          Who else is there? Who needs to leave?          • On home or community visits, plan ahead with family members who may be disruptive. If tension escalates when there is an audience (you), let them know that it is better to visit at a different time. Or offer this time as a respite for them and invite them to go for a walk or off to the store, etc. Try to be supportive of everyone. Avoid being drawn into family issues.          Who needs to leave?          • It may be necessary to remove the person or persons engaged in escalating behavior.          • When this is not possible, remove the bystanders. See Responding to Fights.          • To protect others and to diminish stimulation.          When ...          • Do I ask for help? Call for back-up? To leave?          • Plan ahead - When you know that a particular person behaves in a problematic way, discuss with your supervisor ahead of time, when and if you should leave.          What is the plan?</p>
<b>A</b>	<p><b>Ask /Approach</b>          Ask others for help if you need it.          • Plan ahead for sources of help. Have a partner, a supervisor or some other designated person available for help.          Ask yourself:          • Do I feel afraid? Trust your instincts. If you feel afraid, you probably have a good reason.          • Do I feel angry? Is it time to back off?          • Try not to make things worse! If frightened/angry, try to back off; maintain/ regain control emotions.          Approach:          • The assessment informs the approach.          • Do I enter?          • Rate - how fast do I enter?          • How close do I get?          • Posture and body language.</p>
<b>R</b>	<p><b>Respond using your skills.</b>          Use knowledge and skills; spatial, verbal, release.          Use agency and team plans in a crisis.          Use your relationship and respectful demeanor.</p>
<b>E</b>	<p><b>Evaluate the outcome</b>          Has there been any damage - to property, to persons?          What went well?          What could I have done differently?          Do any team plans need to be reevaluated?          What is necessary to restore safety, health, therapeutic relationships?</p>