

OUTREACH AND SPECIAL SERVICES DIVISION



SAFETY GUIDE FOR LIBRARY EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS MAKING HOME VISITS

2019

Nearly all libraries in Ohio have off-site and home delivery of some sort. The people responsible for delivery may be staff members, volunteers, or a combination of volunteers and staff. The size of the library may dictate this, but in any case, safety of those delivering materials off-site should be a priority.

To help with safety preparedness, the Outreach and Special Services Division of the Ohio Library Council has compiled this document. While no document can ever be 100% comprehensive, the following list of suggestions endeavors to account for a large range of eventualities. Of course, what applies to each library will vary; but hopefully each institution will find sections that are useful and insightful for their situation.

These recommendations have been compiled from a variety of sources and agencies whose employees make home visits and are routinely trained in safety procedures. Following is a brief list of resources shared by or accessed from the following agencies:

Home Visit Safety Tips, shared by the Ottawa County Board of Developmental Disabilities,
<https://www.ocbdd.org/>

Oregon's Home Visitor Safety Guide, Revised: May, 2014, Oregon Health Authority,
<https://www.oregon.gov/OHA/PH/HEALTHYPEOPLEFAMILIES/BABIES/HEALTHSCREENING/BABIESFIRST/Documents/home-visiting-safety-guide.pdf>

Home Visitor Safety, prepared for Illinois MIECHV by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development,
<https://www.oregon.gov/OHA/PH/HEALTHYPEOPLEFAMILIES/BABIES/HEALTHSCREENING/BABIESFIRST/Documents/home-visiting-safety-guide.pdf>

SAFETY TIPS FOR EMPLOYEES & VOLUNTEERS VISITING PATRONS AT HOME

General Tips:

1. Pay attention to intuitive feelings.
2. Be alert to your surroundings.
3. Anticipate potential problems.
4. Keep a list of your credit card numbers in a safe place.
5. Carry only enough money to get through the day.
6. Maintain your car; Make sure you have enough gas.
7. Carry a cell phone. Keep it charged and programmed with emergency numbers for the library, the police, child protection, roadside assistance, etc.)
8. Set your phone to vibrate during visits. If you feel threatened, you can pretend you feel it vibrate and use the call as an excuse to leave the home or send a message to your supervisor.
9. Ask your supervisor if there is any history of patron's unstable behavior of which you should be aware.

Appearance is Everything:

1. Dress practically and wear clothing that allows you to move freely, especially comfortable walking shoes.
2. Avoid wearing expensive jewelry or accessories.
3. Select brightly colored clothing to make yourself more visible, especially at night.
4. Walk with confidence and purpose - head up, eyes forward.
5. Keep your purse or wallet out of sight or lock them in the trunk **before** you arrive at your destination.
6. Consider carrying a whistle or noisemaker of some kind.

Protect Your Health:

1. Learn about any situations that might jeopardize your health; postpone the visit if you learn someone in the house is ill.
2. Carry sanitary wipes or antibacterial lotion, and use after each visit.

Know Where You Are Going:

1. Plan your route and carry maps.
2. Drive by the home and learn about the neighborhood you will be visiting.
3. Locate safe spots in the neighborhood—police or fire stations, restaurants, shopping centers.

4. Go with another volunteer or employee if you're at all concerned.
5. Visit areas of high-risk early in the day and let people know where you are going. Leave the location, name of patron, and time you are expected to be there and done with a supervisor or co-worker at the library.
6. Don't carry any weapons. (In case of emergency, pens, clipboards, keys, etc. could be used for protection.)

Driving & Vehicle Safety

1. Always check your tires and gas gauge before setting out on a visit.
2. Make sure your vehicle is in good running condition and has enough gas.
3. Keep car keys handy at all times. If you have two sets, carry both, concealing one in a notebook or bag.
4. Keep doors and windows locked.
5. Park in a well-lit, easily accessible location. In parking lots, back into parking spaces, if possible.
6. Park in the direction you want to go after the visit.
7. Keep a flashlight and a first aid kit in your vehicle.
8. Be aware of the weather conditions and predictions. During winter, keep an ice scraper and lock de-icer in your car.
9. Do not leave anything on the seat of the car. Put all items in a trunk prior to arriving at your destination.
10. Check your car and the area around it before entering and exiting. Lock your doors immediately after entry.

Before You Get Out of the Car:

1. Check out the neighborhood as you drive in.
2. Drive around the block, try and see what is happening behind the house. If you don't feel safe, don't get out of the car. Leave.
3. Park in a visible area as close to the consumer's residence as possible. Think about an escape route.

Getting to the Door:

1. Lock your car.
2. Be prepared to drop items you are carrying.
3. Walk briskly with purpose; maintain a self-confident, self-assured posture and attitude; and be observant of your surroundings.
4. Do not stop to speak to strangers. If you must respond, keep walking.
5. Before entering a fenced yard, make noise to see if any animals are present.
6. Don't enter the home if an animal threatens your safety (ask to secure the animal).

7. After knocking, stand away from the door and to one side if possible - hinge side is best for providing protection.
8. If concerned about the safety of using an elevator, send it to the basement and wait for it to come back up. This protects you from inadvertently getting on an elevator that is headed down and possibly facing a stranger in a deserted basement.
9. Do not get on an elevator if you feel suspicious of another person already on or waiting. Step aside, pretend you need to return to your car for something, etc.
10. Once in an elevator, stand near the control panel. If you are concerned or encounter a problem, push all the buttons so the elevator stops on all the floors, giving a greater chance of escape.
11. Do not enter any residence if you suspect any unsafe situation exists. If you hear loud quarreling or some other worrisome disturbance, leave immediately.
12. Trust your instincts. If anything makes you feel uneasy, leave the area.

Entering the Home:

1. Introduce yourself, show your ID.
2. Do not reveal too much personal information about yourself or your family; use only your first name.
3. Do not share personal contact information or interact with participants on social media.
4. Follow patrons up the stairs. Do not let them behind you. Scan the inside of the patron's home before entering.
5. Once in the home, look around for signs of dog. Ask if the dog is safe/friendly and if it is locked up.
6. Don't enter the home if you suspect that the consumer is under a chemical influence. Be sure to inquire as to who is currently present in the home.
7. Be aware of any strange noises or smells that may indicate fights or drug use.
8. Methamphetamine labs can be set up anywhere and use typical kitchen glassware items. Be alert to typical glassware items that are in untypical locations.
9. Drug manufacturing can be odorless or smell like stale cat urine. If this odor or other signs indicate a meth lab, do not touch anything at the location but leave immediately; and when safe to do so, call 911.
10. Try to make eye contact with anyone present.
11. Ask for permission to be seated. This gives them control early on and helps with rapport building.
12. Do not accept food or drink during a visit.
13. Do not go into a dark room, basement, or attic first. Have the patron go first and turn on the light. Follow them; never lead, even if you've been there before.

14. If you need to return to your vehicle during the visit, take your belongings with you.
15. Sit near an exit door and be prepared to leave at any sign of danger. Do not allow anyone between you and the door.

Some Suggestions About Dogs

1. What to do when approached by or you approach a **strange** dog: Treat all breeds the same - **all dogs bite**.
2. If you are still in the car and a dog appears and seems unfriendly, call out to the occupant of the home or sound the car horn. If no one responds, don't proceed; contact later to arrange another time for the delivery.
3. **Never** turn your back on a dog or run away (walk backwards slowly).
4. If approached by a threatening or apparently vicious dog after you have exited your car, face the dog and leave immediately by **slowly walking backwards; do not run**.
5. Be aware of your body language and voice tone (do/say nothing threatening). Older dogs are more likely to bite.
6. **Never** look the dog in the eye, but **do remove sunglasses** if you are wearing them.
7. **Never** pat the dog on top of its head. Don't give the dog undue attention.
8. Do nothing that seems threatening to the dog. This **includes** spraying with pepper spray.
9. Throw dog treats and/or tennis balls to distract the dog.
10. Protect your face and neck. Do not play dead.
11. If bitten, contact your supervisor **immediately** and record details about the dog on the patron's information sheet.

Insect Safety:

1. Try to find out about any contamination before scheduling your visit. Sometimes apartment site managers or contacts will share information about contamination, especially bed bugs.
2. Bring only necessary items into a home.
3. Avoid placing any materials on or sitting on upholstered furniture or bedding.
4. Do a self-inspection after a visit.
5. If you find a bug, crush it and wipe the surrounding area; clothing worn should be removed and placed in a closed plastic bag until it can be washed in hot water and dried on highest heat setting possible.
6. Be prepared for bed bugs by creating a bedbug containment kit as follows:
 - a. A roll of clear tape, a flashlight, disposable gloves, and wet wipes.
 - b. A roll of clear 50 gallon capacity plastic garbage bags
 - c. A few plastic grocery bags for storage of smaller miscellaneous items
 - d. A plastic clipboard

- e. A simple stool or folding metal chair
- f. A fanny-pack to contain personal items like wallet, cell phone, etc.
- g. A change of clothes and shoes
- h. Protective booties and disposable coveralls like Tyvek

Weapons Safety:

1. Assume that every home has a weapon and that every client could access a weapon.
2. Watch for signs of escalation; know when to leave or request help.
3. Look for weapons when you are in someone else's space.
4. Guns are often in the bedroom, knives in the kitchen.
5. Never reach for a weapon you might see.

If a Crisis Arises:

1. Talk softly and try to keep calm.
2. Don't challenge but do be assertive.
3. Rehearse ahead of time what you would say and what you might do if an unsafe situation arises.
4. Leave immediately, if possible; tell the individual you are expected elsewhere or a co-worker has been instructed to call for help if you are not back at an agreed time.
5. If appropriate, call 911.
6. Call your supervisor as you are leaving and then return to the library at once to debrief.

After the Visit:

1. If you feel unsafe at all when returning to your car, have a co-worker or supervisor on the phone until you are in the car and on the road..
2. Have your keys in your hand when returning to your car. Check the inside of your car before getting in.
3. Get into your car quickly and lock all doors.
4. Even though your personal safety is important, don't forget to check for small children or animals that maybe present near or under your car before you move from your parking place.
5. Cleanse your hands immediately following every visit. Document any unusual or unsafe conditions.
6. Take precautions while transporting forms that contain consumer information.
7. Discuss concerns with your supervisor.
8. Develop strategies to address concerns for future visits.