



Safety Techniques And Strategies

Prepared for Service-Learning Students at the
University of Central Florida
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Safety Manual for Service Learning Students

POLICY STATEMENT

Introduction

Each semester students from the University of Central Florida participate in service learning placements. While serving in the community, there may be some degree of uncertainty and potential risk. Therefore, there is concern on the part of the faculty and staff regarding student safety. Please take time to read this carefully. If you have any questions, please see your faculty supervisor.

Policy Statement

It is the policy of the Service Learning Coordinating Committee to encourage attention to safety in service learning experiences. The purpose of this manual is to orient you to safety procedures.

Agency Supervisors are responsible for providing students with safety policies and/or guidelines for the agency in which the students is placed. Students are responsible to ask about safety policies that may be specific to that agency. It is the student's responsibility to understand and follow safety policies and/or guidelines of the agencies in which they are placed. In addition, students, Agency Supervisors, and liaisons are responsible for reading and understanding this document, *Safety Techniques and Strategies*.

It is the policy of the Service Learning Coordinating Committee that a student may question a potentially unsafe assignment without repercussion. An obligation rests with the student, Agency Supervisor or field liaison, and faculty supervisor to reach a common understanding as to what kinds of assignments are appropriate from a safety perspective.

If a student believes that s/he is placed in a situation that may be unsafe, the student must immediately inform both the agency supervisor and the faculty supervisor before proceeding with the assignment. Likewise, if a student initiates what may be perceived as a potentially unsafe field-related activity (on his/her own), the Agency Supervisor must direct the student to not proceed with the assignment.

If threatened or injured while serving in the community, or if the student is involved in a safety incident of any kind, the faculty supervisor must be contacted immediately by the student. The faculty supervisor must be informed of any safety related issues and should be appropriately responsive.

COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGIES

- Always walk with confidence giving the impression that you know where you are going.
- The importance of dress and personal presentation:

Leave jewelry at home (if you insist on wearing them, keep chains hidden under shirts or blouses). Do not expose jewelry and valuables.

Do not travel with large sums of money.

Although you may want to avoid carrying a wallet, **you should have some form of identification** with you.

Dress to blend in with the community; do not be conspicuous.

If working in lower SES areas, avoid conspicuous displays of affluence.

If you carry a purse, hold onto it securely and close to your body.

- Check bus routes or driving routes before going into the field. Consult with your supervisor or other staff who are familiar with the area in which your field visits will occur.
- The agency/office should always know where your visits will be made on a daily basis. You may want to consider calling into the office as you complete one field visit and move on to another. If there are any changes to your schedule or if you have been delayed, you should notify the office/ field instructor.
- Stay on major routes or streets as you travel to your field destination.
- In most instances, field visits should be planned so they are made during morning or early afternoon hours. Visits that may extend to the end of the day when it begins to darken should be avoided, if possible.
- It is preferable to travel with a partner when making a field trip.
- Follow your instincts – do not go in or remain if you feel it is not safe. A field visit can be scheduled at another time.
- Visits to high-risk areas should always be made with an escort.

- It is important that you appear confident and that you know where you are going even when you don't.
- Walk with your head up and be aware of your surroundings and the individuals who are present.
- When asking directions, always seek out the police or individuals who work in businesses located in the community/area.
- It is inadvisable to engage in conversations with unknown individuals.
- Be aware that there may be situations which you should not handle. In these instances, call the police.
- If stopped by the police, do what they tell you to do until the officer can stabilize the situation and find out who is the victim and the perpetrator.
- It is advisable to leave the premises when you see drugs, alcohol or any situation which may lead to violence.
- If you are in immediate danger, yell "FIRE", **not** "help" or "rape". Individuals tend to respond more readily to a "fire" alert.
- If you have the use of a cellular telephone, always have it within easy access. Give your cell phone number to your site supervisor.
- If you do not have a cell phone, it is advisable to carry change (quarters, nickels, dimes) in case you need to use a pay phone.
- Always have enough money for using either a taxi or bus.
- Never fall asleep while using a bus.
- Avoid wearing a Walkman. It can impair your ability to hear what is going on around you.
- Although difficult, it is advisable to remain calm in situations which may be considered potentially threatening.
- The chance of becoming a victim of a violent street crime is **greater** between the hours of 6:00 p.m. and midnight than any other time of day.
- Use ATM machines only when necessary and in well-lit, protected areas that are known to you.

SAFETY STRATEGIES WHEN DRIVING

- When possible, drive on well-traveled streets.
- Always park in parking areas which are well-lighted and designated for parking. Avoid parking in isolated areas.
- Avoid parking next to a van.
- Always have your keys in your hand when you are ready to enter your vehicle.
- Before entering your vehicle, always look inside (front and back seat) before entering. It is also advisable to look under your car as well.
- All car windows, doors and truck should be closed and locked.
- Have your window rolled up far enough so no one can unlock your door from the outside while stopped in traffic.
- Never leave any valuable property within view in the car (even items which are not valuable may appear to be so to others!).
- When approaching a stoplight, it is advisable to keep enough room (in front of you) to move your car if necessary.
- If someone tries to approach (or enter) your stopped vehicle, accelerate and leave the area immediately.
- If another vehicle attempts to stop you or block your exiting, lock your car and sound your horn for help.
- Never pick up a hitchhiker.
- Never hitchhike.
- If you are being followed, do not go home – drive to the nearest police station, fire station, all night service stations, or other public area where people are present.
- Always be aware of where police stations, fire stations and businesses open all night are located on your route of travel.

- Avoid pulling over if another car attempts to force you to the side of the road. If possible, obtain the license number of the vehicle.
- Do not offer a ride to someone having car trouble. Offer to call for help.
- If you have car trouble, do not accept a ride with strangers. Open the hood and remain in your car.
- Maintain your car in good running condition.
- Start out with an adequate supply of gas so you can avoid stopping in strange locations.
- The following items should be basic equipment for your car:
 - Spare tire (also have a can of material which will “inflate” a flat tire)
 - First aid materials (advisable to have a complete kit)
 - Maps of the city and surrounding areas
 - Flares

HOME OR BUILDING SAFETY TECHNIQUES

- Trust your instincts and don't enter if the situation looks unsafe. Be aware of the people entering/exiting.
- Once you enter a home be aware of the surroundings. Know various "exit" routes other than the door that you entered. Know where the telephone is situated. If you have a cellular phone for your use, always have it readily available.
- Do not remain in the home if you see drugs, firearms, excessive alcohol use, violence, etc. (It is imperative to be aware of situations which you are unable to control).
- In buildings, be careful where using elevators and stairwells. It is advisable to always carry a small flashlight and to proceed in well lit areas. Don't walk in hallways that are not lighted. Again, be aware of people who are entering and exiting buildings.
- When in a home or apartment, always be aware of other people on the premises. Have a plan in mind if you need to exit quickly.
- It is important to have a non-verbal communication system worked out with the partner who is accompanying you on the home visits.
- Threats which are made should be taken seriously.
- While using an elevator, stand next to control panel to give you access to the alarm or emergency button.
- Avoid construction sites or entering vacant buildings.

SAFETY STRATEGIES IN THE OFFICE

- When working after normal business hours, always keep your office door closed and locked. (Students are not encouraged to be on the office premises after hours unless approval is received from their field supervisor).
- The office door should be locked even when you are leaving the office for any length of time.
- Keep emergency telephone numbers available at all times (building security, police, etc.).
- Never prop a door open to provide access to a work area for someone who may not have a key.
- All purses, wallets and valuables should be locked in a desk/file drawer. A wallet or purse should never be left on top of a desk or in view.
- Keys to the office should never be unnecessarily duplicated or loaned to others.
- Any suspicious person present in the building should be reported to site supervisor or police.
- Always require identification from maintenance men who are asking for access to an office area or are attempting to remove equipment.
- Close and lock all doors when leaving the office.
- Record serial numbers of valuables or property that has been assigned to you for future reference.
- Always check to insure that outside or entrance doors are secured.

SAFETY STRATEGIES WHILE WALKING

- Wear clothing which is not restrictive in the event you may need to run. High heels and tight fitting clothing limit movements to escape.
- Try to keep your hands free. It is best not to be overburdened with items.
- Have a whistle or some other alarm device with you. Do not wear it or anything else around your neck which can be used to choke you.
- If you sense you may be in danger, run to a well-lighted place nearest to you. Shout or yell while you are running.
- If you feel you are in imminent danger, break a window in whatever place is closest in order to draw attention to you.
- Look behind you to make sure no one is following you. Changing your walk pattern or crossing the street may cause anyone following you to hesitate.
- It is inadvisable to walk alone if you are drunk, anxious, high, tired, depressed or physically ill. When possible, it is advisable to walk with others as the majority of violent incidents are committed by a lone offender against a lone victim.
- Avoid walking near shrubbery, alleys, dark or unlit areas, doorways, back of buildings, unlit parking lots, or other places of concealment.
- When possible, watch your reflection in windows as you pass. You may be able to see if anyone is following you.
- Some hand items which can be used as weapons are keys, chemical mace, hat pins, umbrellas, a lighted cigarette. Always have these items within reach. If they are in the bottom of your purse, they may not be easily accessible.
- Always be aware that any item which may be used as a weapon potentially can be taken away from you and used against you.
- If you do become the victim of a crime, give up your property. It is recommended that some money be carried at all times. Robbers tend to become angry if there is nothing to “rob”. However, do not carry extra credit cards or money.
- If someone is following you, try to recall points of identification about the person: Height, weight, build, hair color, type of clothing, age, etc. If possible write down the person’s license number.
- Whether walking or driving, it is important to vary your daily route and routine.

ELEVATOR SAFETY STRATEGIES

- Always remain alert as to who is also using the elevator.
- Check out the control panel when first entering an elevator. Be aware as to the location of the alarm button and stop button.
- If possible, always stand next to the control panel.
- If you sense impending trouble with a person on an elevator, push the button for the next floor and get off.
- If you are attacked on any elevator, push as many buttons as you can. This provides you with more chances to get off the elevator.
- Do not push the stop button as this may be what your assailant wants. If the assailant pushes the stop button, do whatever you can to pull it back out and hit as many floor buttons as possible.
- Hit the alarm button, **only** if it is separate from the stop button.
- If the elevator is equipped with a telephone, note how to use it.

The outlined strategies in this section were taken from:

Crimeproofing Your Life, a personal safety column in **Open File, University Police letter, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee**, July 1993, by Police Officer Art Koch, Crime Prevention Coordinator, University Police Department and from students in the Fall, 2004, Crime Prevention Class (CJE 3444.0001) at the University of Central Florida.