

Number: TBD
EFFECTIVE DATE: November 13, 2000

PROCEDURE STATEMENT

Policy Area: Safety

Issue: Safety Procedures for Conducting Work with Offenders off CSOSA Premises

Action/Guidance: Staff Safety – Fieldwork

Context: Community Supervision Officer (CSO) safety centers around minimization of risk, by controlling the physical setting of the office, by the establishment of procedures for dealing with emergencies or disruptions, and by staff training in dealing with offenders and the public. Community Supervision Officer field safety is less manageable than office safety, because the field environment cannot be controlled. Nevertheless, CSO training and the establishment of general guidelines can minimize the risk to the CSO in the field.

Risk cannot be eliminated but it can be minimized. Minimization of risk to all CSO's and CSOSA employees is the goal of the agency's safety policies.

I. Procedures

A. Preparation

1. Discuss home visits and other field contacts with offenders during initial office contacts while reviewing the orientation checklist, initial visits upon receiving a transfer case, and subsequent office visits with the offender. During a general discussion of the purpose and procedures for field contacts with offenders, emphasize the following:
 - a) **Rationale for Fieldwork:** Fieldwork is work-related travel outside CSOSA offices to make contact with an offender, the offender's family, the employer, a treatment facility, a correctional facility, a potential community resource, or a law enforcement, social services agency, community member, or organization.

An important tool of the CSO is his/her planned use of community resources in all phases of his/her work. It is the responsibility of each CSO to know the resources in the community and to maximize their use.

Fieldwork is an integral part of the CSO's responsibilities. All CSO's are expected to regularly perform fieldwork (in accordance with the supervision levels of the CSOs caseload), to follow agency procedures with respect to safety and security, and to properly document fieldwork according to agency procedures, as outlined below.

Fieldwork is conducted for the following reasons:

- (1) To make face-to-face contacts with an offender, as prescribed above.
- (2) To locate a person whose whereabouts are unknown when efforts to do so by phone and mail have failed (see procedure on "Loss of Contact").

- (3) To investigate complaints or allegations regarding an offender's behavior, or to verify suspicious situations or reports related to the offender's home, employment, or program adjustment;
 - (4) To verify an offender's address, employment, and/or participation in treatment or support groups;
 - (5) To meet with an offender's family members or significant others in an attempt to gain their cooperation and understanding;
 - (6) To gather information available only in the field;
 - (7) To initiate contact in split sentence cases when, in the CSO's judgement, a letter or telecommunications interview is considered less desirable or effective;
 - (8) To support, enhance, or promote compliance with probation/parole conditions, and to enhance communication with teachers, counselors, employers, etc., who are involved with the offender; and
 - (9) To ensure that in domestic violence cases in which the couple resides together, the victim and any children residing in the home are safe (victims may withhold information about continued domestic violence).
 - (10) To provide surveillance of high risk offenders (e.g. – sex offenders).
- b) CSO's may conduct field visits alone, with another CSO, or with a law enforcement officer.
 - c) Home visits and field contacts may be scheduled or unannounced.
2. Do some intelligence gathering.
- a) Know the case history of the offender you intend to visit – consult the case file, criminal record, past investigations, and/or speak to other Community Supervision Officers familiar with the case.
 - (1) Watch for long histories of mental disorders and evidence of assaultive or abusive behavior, particularly against “authority.”
 - (2) Be aware of signs of deteriorating behavior or mounting pressure on the offender that could cause a “blow-up.”
 - (3) If danger signals are present, consult with your supervisor, and consider taking another officer on the home visit or schedule an accountability tour with a law enforcement officer.
 - b) Maintain close contact with law enforcement, mental health, and other treatment agencies; they can advise you as to recent activities and possible problem areas.

3. All staff must complete a travel itinerary and, if appropriate, leave your mobile phone number (names, addresses, and phone numbers of offenders or any other individuals you intend to visit) with your supervisor or supervisor's designee by filling out a field contact sheet before the visits and signing out of the office on the field sheet.

B. Parking

1. Selecting your parking spot
 - a) Keep the car moving until you have selected a spot.
 - b) Survey the entire area if you are unfamiliar, even if you have to go around the block.
 - c) If still in doubt about a particular area, consult with police about the area.
 - d) Get as close to your destination as possible.
 - e) If dark or near dark, try to park under a light if possible.
 - f) Leave enough room to easily pull out of the parking spot and to avoid getting blocked in.
 - g) Do not park illegally. Do not linger in the car after parking.
 - h) Lock your car. Be sure to hide or remove any loose items, valuable or invaluable, from plain view.

C. Approaching the Residence

1. Familiarize yourself with the neighborhood. If you are unfamiliar with the neighborhood, pass through the neighborhood once before parking to survey the situation.
2. Get the "big picture" of the area. If you see danger, make arrangements to return for a home visit at a later time with another officer or schedule an accountability tour with a law enforcement officer.
3. If your knock is not answered use your mobile phone to call the offender inside the residence, identify yourself, and indicate that you will be knocking on the door in a matter of minutes.

D. At the Doorway

1. Use the "off-the-side" approach (do not stand directly in front of the door as you knock/ring the bell).
2. Allow about 20 seconds for your eyes to adjust to possible changes in light; extreme changes can be blinding.
3. Stop, look, and listen.

- a) Stop outside.
 - b) Look inside. (Are lights on? Can you see anyone? How many people? Can you see their locations? Do you recall the general layout of the dwelling from your past visits? Do you spot any unusual activities?)
 - c) Listen. (Any conversations? What tone? Any factors such as dogs, music, etc.?)
 - d) Be wary of any indications of alcohol or drug abuse – these can lead to problems.
 - e) Develop a mental picture of what’s going on inside.
4. Knock in a normal fashion. Remember the “off-the-side” approach.
 5. When your knock is answered:
 - a) Identify yourself by name, title, and organization.
 - b) Do not enter if any invitation is called out. Wait for the door to be opened to you.
 6. As the door is opened, look through the opening for the number of occupants, their location, and any signs of danger.
 7. Be courteous and thank the person for letting you into their home.

E. Once You Have Made Entry

1. Continue to stay off to the side of the door.
2. Quickly survey the entire area for other residents, any signs of trouble, dogs (or other loose pets), and potential weapons.
3. Be aware of alternate escape routes.
4. Be wary of hidden weapons (e.g., in sofa or bed), particularly if a crisis is developing.
5. Position yourself so that exits are readily accessible. Do not stand in open doorways.
6. If there are any animals loose in the home, ask the resident to have them restrained.
7. If a physical confrontation between residents is in progress, leave the residence and use your mobile phone immediately to contact police.

F. General Safety Tips for Fieldwork

1. Walk briskly, with an air of self-confidence and purpose. Stand up to your full measure, keeping your center of gravity low and your head level.
2. Look as if you know where you are heading even if you are a bit lost. If you must venture into an unfamiliar neighborhood, get detailed directions beforehand. If you

are lost and need directions, seek help from a police officer or someone familiar with the area.

3. When necessary, travel with another officer(s) or law enforcement officer(s). Surveys indicate that you can reduce your chances of being attacked by nearly 70 percent if you are with another person and by 90 percent if you are with two others.
4. Walk purposefully. Look as if you have somewhere to go and are determined to get there soon. This is particularly important in a neighborhood with numbers of people loitering on the street. You may not escape notice, but you should look like you mean business.
5. At night, walk in open places that are well lighted. If you are making field visits at night, do so with another CSO and/or a law enforcement officer.
6. Carry a good flashlight in your car. This will be helpful if you are ever stranded on a darkened street at night.
7. Avoid shortcuts through parks, tunnels, parking lots, and alleys. In fact, it's best to stick to main thoroughfares whenever possible. It might take you a bit longer to get to your destination, but it is worth the effort.
8. Always carry your mobile phone with you and be sure the batteries are charged.
9. Avoid carrying a purse, shoulder bag, or briefcase. If you must carry a bag or package, hold the object closely to your body.
10. Be extra alert in boundary zones. For our purposes, a boundary zone is the area you must traverse between any two places – between, say, your house and your car, the elevator of your office building and the street, or your neighborhood and the one next to it. Many crimes occur in these zones, so be especially alert when you are in them. Always have your keys in your hand when you approach your house or car and be alert for strangers. At the same time, don't be in such a hurry that you fail to check whether it is safe to enter. Make sure that the door has not already been forced and that no one is hiding under or in your car.
11. Consider carrying a shriek alarm or a police whistle. If somebody bothers you on the street, the noise you make will attract attention and frighten your attacker. A shriek alarm is preferable to a whistle, because it creates a piercing sound and does not require you to take deep breaths. Attach either of these objects to your key ring and have it at hand when needed. It is important to understand the shock value of a loud sound at close range. A sudden burst of official-sounding shrieks will turn just about anybody around in their tracks.
12. Keep in mind that your voice is a tool of self-protection. If attacked, let out the most piercing, glass shattering scream you can muster, aiming it right between your attacker's eyes. Don't stop until he has fled or help has arrived. If your assailant flees, change your scream from sheer sound to specific words: "Help! Police! Murder!" or "Stop, thief!" This alerts people to the specific nature of the crime and may prompt reports to the police. Even if you think your cries may not be heard, scream anyway – and speak loudly to your assailant. The volume communicates personal strength and the seriousness of your intention. Avoid questions such as

“What do you think you’re doing?” or “Who do you think you are?” They are weaker than direct orders: “Stop!” “Get out of here!” or “Leave me alone!” In this way you reinforce your authority.

II. Statutory Authority: Section 11233(b)(2)(B) of the National Capital Revitalization and Self-Government Improvement Act of 1997 (“Revitalization Act”), Pub. Law 105-33, 111 Stat. 712, D.C. Code § 24-1233(b)(2)(B) (1996 Repl., 1999 Supp.) (Director’s authority); D.C. Code § 24-103 (1996 Repl.) (Probation’s authority).

III. Procedural References/Supercedes:

▪ **References:**

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Thorton, Robert L. and Shireman, John H. (1993). *New Approaches to Staff Safety*. Washington, DC: United States Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections.

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▪ **Supercedes:** N/A