



Home Visit Guidelines

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1.0 PURPOSE

Legal Aid NSW is committed to maintaining the best possible standard of occupational health and safety for employees.

Home visits are to be conducted in limited circumstances such as:

- client assessment and referral matters;
- to conduct an assessment in Mental Health or Veteran's Advocacy matters;
- to interview children at the home of their foster carer;
- to assess the suitability of accommodation for children in Family Law or Care matters;
- to assess accommodation situation in Civil Law matters relating to tenancy issues; and
- in situations, where due to a disability or the age of the client, a home visit is considered the best course of action.

Employees should be aware of certain practices and approaches that will reduce risks to their personal safety when required to make visits to clients' homes.

These guidelines apply to all employees who conduct home visits.

2.0 ROLE OF HOME VISITS

It is only in exceptional circumstances that employees (particularly from Family Law and Criminal Law Divisions) will conduct a home visit. Client contact should be made at a Legal Aid NSW office, at court, at a corrective service facility, or a juvenile justice centre.

Conducting a home visit is not obligatory for any employee. In deciding whether to provide a home visit, there must be an assessment of the client's situation to ensure there is no risk to employees' safety.

Employees are not to provide home visits if:

- there is a history of aggressive behaviour, violence or sexual harassment;
- domestic violence has been perpetrated and the perpetrator is at the home or likely to return;
- there is a risk of injury occurring to clients or employees; or
- employees feel they may be at risk during the visit.

Home visits should only occur where all other possible means of communicating with the client have been considered and ruled out and where the manager/supervisor has discussed all options with the solicitor, assessed the potential risk and is prepared to approve a home visit.

All home visits must be approved in advance by the relevant Solicitor in Charge or Branch Head.

Potential risk factors include a history of drug and/or alcohol abuse or a history of mental illness when associated with aggressive behaviour.

Managers/supervisors need to ensure that the Home Visit Risk Assessment form is completed and approved before any home visit is undertaken (Appendix 1). It can also be downloaded from the OHS Intranet page, under OHS Forms.

3.0 EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 Prior to home visit

- Preliminary enquiries should be made beforehand in order to make a reliable assessment of a client's mental state and behaviour.
- Employees must complete a Home Visit Risk Assessment Form for approval by the SIC/Branch Head and include the following details:
 - employee car details;
 - mobile phone number;
 - name, address and telephone number of the client;
 - expected time of appointment; and
 - expected completion time.
- Contact the client/family prior to the home visit to confirm correct details on referral form and time of visit.
- Ensure the Office Manager (or other nominated officer) is notified of any changes to the timetable.
- Ensure equipment including street directory, mobile phone and personal alarm are accessible and in working order.

3.2 During home visit

- Employees can only attend a home visit if using a car.
- Mobile phones must be fully charged, have the message bank activated and be switched on for the duration of time away from the workplace.

3.3 After home visit

- Report back to the Office Manager (or other nominated officer) when the visit is complete.
- All documentation regarding home visits is to be placed on file as soon as possible. The files should be reviewed on a regular basis.
- Employees are required to inform their manager/supervisor of any breakdown or shortfall in security arrangements and/or equipment.

4.0 ISSUES TO CONSIDER WHEN UNDERTAKING HOME VISITS

Office interviews, or home visiting in pairs should be considered in preference to home visits by a sole employee.

At all times, employees are to consider their own safety as a priority and should NOT take unnecessary risks. The following issues should be taken into consideration:

- Check that the person you are intending to visit is home before entering.
- If you have concerns about location or access, call the family before visiting and ask that a family member meet you and escort you to the client.
- Check for lighting on stairwells when entering a building.
- Look before entering a lift and do not enter if concerned - be observant of other passengers.
- Do not enter properties where dogs are uncontrolled and unfriendly.
- Be aware of nearest exit once inside the house and where possible, keep the entrance/exit in sight.
- Be aware of locks on door and know how they work (observation in most cases will be sufficient; if necessary you may have to seek information from the occupant).
- Avoid remaining in the car for prolonged periods before or after the visit.
- Ensure the car doors are locked at all times, even when driving.
- Do not leave car keys or personal keys in a place accessible to clients.
- Ensure outside lights are left on for evening home visits.

5.0 VIOLENT OR POTENTIALLY VIOLENT SITUATIONS

5.1 Physical or verbal threats/incidents

If you are either physically or verbally threatened by a client, carer or any other member of the household, take measures necessary to protect yourself and leave the scene as soon as possible.

If you have to physically defend yourself, you are entitled to use such force as is reasonable. 'Reasonable' means that amount of force which is sufficient to stop the attacker or to prevent the employee being injured. It should not be greater than necessary.

Summon the police if the situation warrants it, such as a domestic violence situation, firearms are seen at the premises or if you are threatened.

The following action should be taken if in the car:

- Ensure windows are closed and the doors are locked.
- If it is considered unsafe to drive away, sound the horn long and loud, and if appropriate, ring the police (Dial 000 on your mobile phone).
- If it is considered safe to drive away, proceed to the nearest Police Station.
- Do not leave the car until it appears safe.

5.1 Reporting threats/incidents

All incidents, however trivial, should be:

- Reported to your manager/supervisor;
- Entered on an [Incident Report Form](#);
- Documented in the client's file; and
- Notified to the referring section.

Also refer to the Incident Reporting and Investigation Policy for additional information.

Legal Aid NSW will support the decision of employees not to proceed with the provision of legal aid service at any location that does not comply with Legal Aid NSW OH&S policies.

Legal Aid NSW employees that are threatened outside office hours or out of the office as a result of their employment will receive the full support of Legal Aid NSW.

APPENDIX 1 - Home Visit Risk Assessment Form

- Listed below are safety and risk factors you need to consider prior to conducting a home visit.
- You will need to need to complete all sections and have the form approved by your SIC/Branch Head prior to conducting a visit.
- Submit the form to the Office Manager (or other nominated officer) prior to leaving the office.

You must complete all details for a home visit to be approved

Section 1– Safety and risk factors

	Question	Response
1	What will the home visit achieve that an interview at the office will not?	
2	Does the client have a history of aggression and/or violence?	
3	In what circumstances does the client become aggressive and/or violent?	
4	Will you be raising issues and asking questions that may lead to aggression?	
5	Have you considered how you may ask 'controversial' questions? (Run them by a colleague)	
6	Who else is likely to be present?	
7	Is there mobile phone coverage at the client's home address? Check with Telstra regarding network coverage.	
8	Is it preferable to interview the client at the office?	

Section B - Home visit details

DATE	
CLIENT NAME	
CLIENT ADDRESS	
CLIENT PHONE NUMBER	
TIME OF INTERVIEW	
ESTIMATED LENGTH OF TIME FOR INTERVIEW	
ESTIMATED RETURN TO OFFICE	
OFFICE MOBILE #	
CAR MODEL AND REGISTRATION	
OTHER DETAILS	

1. You must contact the Office Manager (or nominated officer) at your office to advise when you have completed the interview.
2. If you have not made contact within half an hour of the nominated time to complete the interview, the Office Manager (or nominated officer) will make contact with you.
3. The Office Manager (or nominated officer) will ask you closed ended (yes/no) questions to ascertain your safety.
4. If you intend to go home straight from a home visit, you must contact your office and advise them that you have finished for the day.
5. If you are running late due to traffic or other reason for the delay, please contact the Office Manager (or nominated officer).
6. If you do not have your mobile switched on and do not make contact with the office, the Office Manager (or nominated officer) must consult with the manager/supervisor for advice.
7. It should be noted that under such circumstances, all attempts will be made to make contact with you via the mobile or by contacting the client directly. If these two options fail, contact will be made with the police.

Please ensure the mobile phone is switched on.

Print Name _____

Signed _____

Date _____

Approved _____

Date _____

SIC/Branch Head

Once approved, hand this form to the Office Manager or Nominated Officer.

Section 3 – Safety Questions

If you have not made contact within half an hour of the nominated time to complete the interview, the Office Manager (or nominated officer) will make contact with you.

The closed ended (yes/no) questions listed below will be asked to ascertain your safety. The questions and the order in which they are asked will vary depending on your response.

- Do you need more time to complete the interview?
- Are you safe?
- Are you hurt?
- Are you still at the client's home?
- Are you alone with the client?
- Is there a weapon involved?
- Are you in your car?
- Is the client also in the car?
- Are you in your client's car?

The following flowchart will demonstrate the order in which the questions will be asked to ascertain your location and safety:

