



## **Home Visit Safety Policy and Procedures For Volunteers**

### **Home Visit Safety**

The safety of the volunteers who do home visits is very much a priority for SMAA. It is expected that volunteers exercise reasonable caution and good judgment to minimize the potential for injury to themselves and others.

During home visits, being aware of hazards in the environment is one way to avoid such injuries. Physical hazards such as broken steps, cluttered hallways and entryways, exposed wiring, frayed electrical cords, torn carpets or multiple area rugs, broken furniture or other unsafe items might be present in the client's home. Be aware of where you walk and sit until you become familiar with the surroundings.

### **Medical Emergencies**

In addition to the physical environment, volunteers might find that the client they are visiting is in the midst of some type of emergency. If you encounter any type of emergency, whether it is medical, fire or personnel related, call 9-1-1 immediately. Be sure you know the address of the person you are visiting, especially if you are using a cell phone to make the call.

According to the American College of Emergency Physicians, the following signs and symptoms constitute a medical emergency that requires a 9-1-1 call:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Choking
- Confusion or change in mental status, unusual behavior, difficulty waking
- Coughing or vomiting blood
- Difficulty speaking
- Fainting or loss of consciousness
- Head or spine injury
- Severe or persistent vomiting or diarrhea
- Sudden injury due to a motor vehicle accident, burns or smoke inhalation, near drowning, deep or large wound
- Sudden or severe pain anywhere in the body
- Sudden dizziness, weakness or change in vision
- Swallowing a poisonous substance
- Severe or unusual abdominal pain or pressure
- Suicidal or homicidal feelings
- Uncontrolled bleeding

Wait with the client until emergency help arrives, but do not attempt to provide medical assistance unless you are trained to do so. If you know the client's emergency contact person, call that person and explain the nature of the emergency. Once the client is under the care of the emergency responder, leave the client's home and notify the supervisor of the program for which you volunteer about the nature of the emergency. As soon as possible, document all details of the emergency while they are still fresh in your memory and submit the documentation to SMAA.

For all incidents that occur while you are volunteering for SMAA, emergency and non-emergency, an Incident Report should be completed and submitted on the next business day to the supervisor of the program for which you volunteer. (A copy of SMAA's Incident Report is attached to this policy.)

**Any threat of suicide shared with SMAA volunteers should be taken seriously. It is not the volunteer's responsibility to determine whether or not the person making the threat is serious about it. The volunteer should summon assistance, as soon as possible, by calling 9-1-1 or the Maine Crisis Hotline:**

**Cumberland County 774-4357            or            York County 282-6136**

### **Other Health Issues**

Although not emergency in nature, the following occurrences have the potential for becoming medical emergencies and should be treated seriously and appropriately:

- **Animal bites**  
Any injury to a volunteer that is caused by any animal on the client's premises should be treated immediately by trained medical personnel – the volunteer should either call 9-1-1 or go to an urgent care facility or the emergency department of a local hospital. Notify the supervisor of the program for which you volunteer as soon as possible after the injury and treatment.
- **Shoveling**  
Volunteers are advised not to shovel snow or ice on the client's premises.
- **Body fluids and transmission of infectious diseases**  
Volunteers should follow the SMAA Infectious Disease Protocol (IDP) if any situations arise in which the volunteer comes in contact with any body fluids.  
It is the policy of the Southern Maine Agency on Aging to protect its clients, employees and volunteers from the transmission of communicable infections and contagious and opportunistic diseases, also known as infectious diseases. **Volunteers are asked to use good judgment in providing services to clients who may be sick. Home visits that can easily be rescheduled, should be, if the client or the volunteer has an infectious disease.**
- **Insect Infestation**  
Volunteers are advised to observe the following precautions during home visits:
  - sit on hard chairs rather than upholstered furniture;
  - wear simple clothing;
  - carry only essential items – use a clipboard rather than a briefcase or bag; and
  - avoid placing anything on carpeted or upholstered furniture or bedding.

If an issue is suspected, contact the supervisor of your program as soon as possible.

- **Heating/Air Conditioning/Wellness Check**

If you notice, when visiting your client, that there is no heat (winter) or it seems dangerously hot (summer), call the local police department, fire department or rescue department. If you have arranged a home visit, but the client does not come to the door and you are concerned for her/his safety, you can call the local police to request a wellness check. Explain the circumstances and give your name. If someone can come right away to do the wellness check, wait for them to come, if possible. If it is not possible for you to wait, provide your contact information when making the call and ask that you be called once the visit has taken place. The county Sheriff's Department is also a good resource to call.

- **Client deceased**

Many of SMAA's programs prohibit volunteers from entering a client's home unless the client comes to the door to let them in. However, if a volunteer should find the client deceased outside the house or apartment, 9-1-1 should be called immediately. Do not touch or move anything, especially the client.

- **Encountering aggression within the home**

If you are faced with an aggression incident during a home visit, remain calm and ***leave the home as soon as possible***. Once you are in your car, lock the doors, drive away and find a safe place to stop and call 9-1-1, even if it was only the threat of assault. Your safety is the most important consideration.

The following are signs of agitation and possible escalation:

- raised voices
- persistent stare
- loss of eye contact
- extreme agitation
- pounding of fist into hand
- pacing
- rocking

### **Driving Safety**

Volunteers who drive in the course of providing services for SMAA are asked to be attentive while driving and to avoid distractions.

The most common distractions that contribute to motor vehicle accidents include:

- Texting or making a cell phone call
- Changing a CD or radio station
- Eating or drinking
- Reaching for something on the floor of the front seat
- Reaching for something in the back seat
- Reaching for and/or reading a map or GPS
- Taking your eyes off the road to talk to a passenger in your car
- Looking in the mirror to fix hair, shave or perform other personal grooming activities.

SMAA has adopted the following standards:

- Texting while driving is against the law in the State of Maine. If SMAA becomes aware that any volunteer violates this policy, the volunteer's placement will be terminated.
- Volunteers must pull over, out of the driving lane, if placing a call while on SMAA business, unless they are using a hands-free device.
- Money Minders volunteers are expressly prohibited from transporting clients.
- If you are involved in a motor vehicle accident while you are in your volunteer role, 9-1-1 should be called immediately. Remain at the location until the police arrive, and then provide them with the details of the accident. An Incident Report should then be completed and sent, as soon as possible, to the supervisor of the program for which you volunteer.

### **Parking Safety**

- Keep your car in good running condition, make sure it has enough gas, and keep it locked while you are inside the client's home.
- Park near the client's home, within direct sight of the home's entrance. Park in a well-lit, unobstructed area and avoid parking near bushes or other foliage.
- As you arrive and prepare to exit your car, and again when you leave the client's home, be attentive to people in the area and any unsecured dogs.
- Always park on the street or in a way that will allow you to leave quickly, if that should become necessary for your safety. If you need to park in the driveway, back in, so that you can simply drive out.
- Do not park your car in someone's assigned parking space or block anyone's access to his/her car.

### **After Hours Incident Reporting**

- Many volunteers visit clients outside the normal SMAA office hours of 8 AM to 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday. Therefore, emergencies that occur after SMAA's normal business hours should be referred to 9-1-1 services.
- **For all incidents that occur while you are volunteering for SMAA, emergency and non-emergency, an Incident Report should be completed and submitted on the next business day to the supervisor of the program for which you volunteer.**

### **General Safety Tips to Keep in Mind During Home Visits to Clients**

- Schedule home visits during daylight hours whenever possible.
- If it is necessary to meet in a place other than the client's home, meet in a public location, not someplace isolated.
- Prior to the home visit, provide a friend or family member with information about the visit, including the date and time of your visit and when you expect to return, and the client's name, address and telephone number.
- Dress appropriately. Wear clothes and shoes that make a quick escape possible; do not wear clothes and shoes that can impede your movement – pants are best. Leave jewelry and any valuable possessions at home. Leave your purse at your office or in the trunk of your car.
- Carry only your volunteer ID, driver's license, a cell phone and car keys, along with any folders or paperwork that is necessary for the visit. It is best to keep your car keys and cell phone on your person.
- Wear a name badge if you have one, but don't wear one around your neck; a clip-on is best.
- When you arrive, and again when you leave, don't walk through a group of people standing together on the sidewalk/street.

- When you get to the client's front door, listen before you knock. If you hear something concerning, use your judgment about whether or not to knock. One option is to leave and call the client to see whether you should return and proceed with your home visit.
- Stay alert and trust your instincts. Use your common sense to keep yourself and others safe.
- Act confident and sure of yourself; do not acknowledge or respond to provocative comments or behaviors.
- Once inside, be alert to all people in the home.
- Be aware of the exits and, when possible, sit near one.
- Keep your hands free. Do not be distracted by talking on a cell phone.
- Always prepare an excuse to leave, just in case you need it. Leave the home immediately if you sense danger. If you leave because you feel unsafe, do not call 9-1-1 from the driveway; lock the doors, drive away and find a safe place to call.

### **Tobacco-Free Environment**

SMAA encourages positive health practices by its employees, volunteers and visitors and acknowledges that health hazards are caused, to both smokers and non-smokers, by smoking. Therefore, the Southern Maine Agency on Aging is a smoke-free environment.

Employees, volunteers and visitors are prohibited from smoking and the use of tobacco products in all SMAA office and facilities and within 50 feet of all exits. (Tobacco products include cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco, pipes and e-cigarettes.) In addition, volunteers are prohibited from smoking while performing any volunteer services.

Volunteers are entitled to be informed if a potential client is a smoker and to then decide whether they want to be placed with that client.

### **Volunteer Well-Being**

The safety and well-being of our volunteers is of the utmost importance to SMAA. If any of our volunteers should encounter a situation that is troubling or difficult for them, please talk to the supervisor of the program for which you volunteer. Having someone listen to your concerns might be all that is needed; however, if further assistance is needed, your supervisor will find someone who can address your concerns.