



## Independent Living Research Utilization

*We create opportunities for independence for people with disabilities through research, education, and consultation*

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**Independent Living Research Utilization**

**[www.ilru.org](http://www.ilru.org)**

# **APRIL Conference 2022**

## **Managing the Changing Needs of Your Center's Consumers and Staff while Navigating Negative Community Attitudes: Keeping Your Consumers and Staff Safe**

### ***Presenters:***

***Alexandra Mikowski***

***Paula McElwee***

***Vicki Smith***

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## Meet the Presenters

- **Alexandra Mikowski**, Executive Director of Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc. in Cortland NY
- **Paula McElwee**, Director of Technical Assistance, IL-NET National Training and Technical Assistance Center for Independent Living
- **Vicki Smith**, Executive Director of Alliance of Disability Advocates in Raleigh NC

## What You Will Learn

- To create a Center environment where staff and consumers can reduce their anxiety.
- To maintain a safe environment for working in homes and the community.
- To anticipate potential risks without judging or acting too soon.
- To apply strategies for hearing and assisting with an angry individual's concerns.
- To respond to those at risk of self-harm or suicide.
- When to seek outside help.

## Is the office a safe place?

- Front desk/reception
- Openness of the rest of the area
- Way to call for help without making things worse?
- Does a panic button call 911?

## An environment of acceptance and listening

- If the entryway seems like a fort, does that impede the ability to have an environment of acceptance?

## You're about to go out into the community

- Think about how to keep this home visit safe for all
- Initial assessment. Check the consumer file for any alerts such as:
  - Any history of violence or threats
  - Current stressors
  - Substance misuse history
  - Mental health history
  - Family violence history

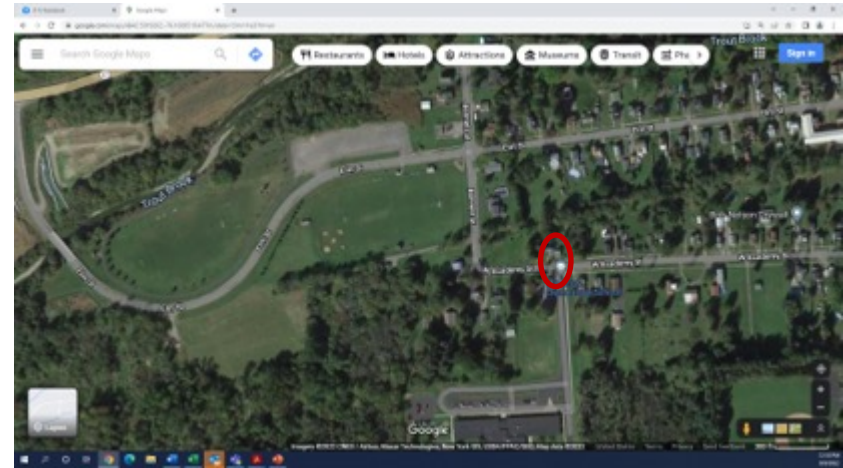
## Before leaving the office

- Look up address
  - Is this a neighborhood you have been to before?
  - Does this area have cell phone service? If not, make a plan to check in with the office if there is any concern.
  - Are there any construction or concerns to get to and from your home visit?
- Look where you may park. In some rural places there is only parking on the side of the road or end of driveway. Try to park in a way that you can't get blocked in.
- Make sure you have the correct shoes for the trip. Is it a farm? Boots with some grip on the bottom may be safer and help them to feel comfortable with you. Also consider, easy on/off shoes or shoe covers.



# Know your surroundings

- Google maps view of small rural village. You can see the soccer field, elementary school and several intersections.
- Zoomed in view of an intersection and house to visit indicated by a red circle. The house is next to the long driveway for an elementary school, as a stop sign at the 3 way stop.
- Where would you park?
- What challenges might you expect?



## Checklist as you are about to leave for visit

- Is your home visit on your shared calendar? Or did you tell someone where you are going? It is best to have the visit address, phone number and client name.
- Communicate how long the visit might be so a plan for a supervisor to check in can be made.
- Is this the best time of day? It is best to avoid after dark visits if possible.
- Bring paperwork but nothing extra such as a fancy bag or other PHI.
- Do you have pockets? Better than a bag for keys and phone – you don't have to set anything down to shake hands or write.

## What to wear

- For confidentiality and personal safety, consider not wearing your badge (Have badge in pocket if needed)
- Consider not having jewelry or things that can be grabbed.
- No shirts with controversial messages unless they are pro-people with disabilities.
- Consider what you are going to be doing at the visit—for example, sitting on the floor with a client.
- Avoid strong smelling smells such as perfume or even scented laundry products.
- Consider how to respect the culture of the house while following agency policy.

## Cultural considerations

- When you are offered food or drink, you can say you can't remove your mask if wearing one, or that you are not allowed by policy to take any food or drink.
- When offered a gift.
- Removing shoes (or covering with shoe covers.)

## As you approach the home

- Check for utility box for power to see how many apartments may be in a building.
- If the neighborhood is known to you, is it different than normal? For example, normally busy and now very quiet or the opposite.
- If possible, park with the driver's side door away from the house.
- Scan the neighborhood for loose animals. Stay in car until dogs or other animals are secure.
- In winter, look at the entrance. Is it icy or snow covered?

# Examples of individual or apartment power boxes



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## Knocking on the door

- If possible, knock on door then take a few steps back to be less intimidating.
  - Have one hand free, if possible, to knock but also to defend yourself.
  - Turn sideways when waiting for door to open. This makes you less intimidating and less body surface for anyone to hit.
- Ring doorbell and also knock if no response.
- Make sure that this is a good time and confirm what they want to cover.
- Make a shared plan over where to meet. For example, living room vs kitchen, or outside vs. public place.

## Video of home visiting





## In the home

- Be aware of exits, try not to sit with the exit behind you.
- Ask who is in the house?
- Be mindful of health hazards, such as boiling water, or weapons within easy reach.
- If possible, sit on wooden or metal chairs (less bugs or animal fur.)
- Be mindful of your intuition. If your gut says to leave, leave!

## Visit expectation

- Make a shared vision with the individual, family and worker over what the goals are for the visit and what needs to be accomplished. This reduces anxiety and tension.
- Consider who else is home, if there are children or others who won't be in the conversation but may need a distraction. Consider bringing something for them such as a small toy or coloring pages.

## If things go sideways

- Stay calm. If you need to leave, then make an excuse and leave. If you can't leave, call 911 and get to a safe space.
- If you get asked to leave, do so gracefully and ask if you can follow up in a few days.
- Make a plan to debrief after a stressful consumer encounter, with a supervisor or co-worker.
- Have calming exercises ready to go. Consider saving the crisis text line in your phone for either you or for you to call with your individual.
- Use your benefits for staff including Employee Assistance Program or support like "Healthiest You".

## **Policies – plan your work and work your plan**

- Make sure your agency policies cover anticipated concerns, and make sure all staff are trained in them. Review them regularly in staff meetings.
- Save important phone numbers, including crisis line, child abuse hotline, adult protective hotline, domestic violence hotline.
- Sometimes the danger in the home is to both you and the consumer. Have policies for referring consumer to these resources.

# You are your own most important resource

- If you feel uncomfortable, leave!
- TRUST YOUR GUT!
- You can always reschedule.
- You can always move the visit location.
- Bring a second staff with you if possible. It is sometimes helpful to double up if your home visits are in the same area.

## Video: Run Hide Fight



## What if your baseline anxiety is high?

- Trust your gut – is a phrase often used about safety/ risk. For those with anxiety or previous negative experiences this can be very tricky.
- It is helpful to discuss potential situations with a co-worker or supervisor so you can figure out what part is baseline anxiety or worry and what is a potentially unsafe situation.
- Self-disclosure – I am always a little nervous going to a new neighborhood or meeting a new person. I try to use that nervous energy to scan for potential problems.

# We have mostly been looking at staff situations

Let's look at the consumer

- As the person asking/ receiving services, in most cases, you can end any visit or decline to let anyone into your home. We often think the staff have all the power, but in the IL community, we know that the person with the disability comes first and drives the services.
- Use the same skills to scan for potential problems. Come to an understanding with the staff of what should be accomplished during the visit and set any boundaries you wish to be followed.
- If you live in an unsafe environment, meet elsewhere and ask for help in addressing your safety at home.



## Consumers who are Angry or Upset

- Acknowledge their feelings (active listening)
- Wait for the calm (be patient)
- Practice active listening (carefully)
- Find common ground
- Language and cultural barriers – are you able to communicate clearly? Need someone to interpret?
- What is the real focus of the anger? Keep distance between you and the problem.
- Establish control with facts (their facts/not yours – clarify)
- End with a concrete plan for next steps

## Is your anxiety contributing?

- Keep your cool....always
- Slow your breathing
- Speak clearly, deliberately
- Calm tone and volume
- Don't talk down or patronize

# What to do if you think the individual is suicidal

- Ask directly – are you thinking about killing yourself?
- Use the Columbia suicide severity rating scale
- Suicidal thoughts are relatively common, sometimes in response to a new diagnosis of disability.
- Our community crisis team – about one-third of the calls are related to onset of disability. This flows from the ableism in our society.
- Stigma
- Talking to them, bringing people they care about, remove the means.
- No cost gun locks.

# When do you need outside help and what is that?

- Text for help?
- Your supervisor may make this call after attempting to assist you.
- Is there a community crisis team?
- The problem with law enforcement...

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# Audience Q&A

## Additional Resources

- Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS)  
<https://cssrs.columbia.edu/the-columbia-scale-c-ssrs/about-the-scale/>
- Healthiest You by Teledoc <https://www.healthiestyou.com/>
- FEMA Active Shooter Preparedness: Access & Functional Needs - What You Should Know
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m3-\\_z1Q1bFg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m3-_z1Q1bFg)
- Emergency Readiness Series- Active Shooter Pt 1 of 3 The Center for Disability Empowerment
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHXbZZYfA1k&t=0s>
- Run. Hide. Fight.® English Version
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rDdY4EaKVY>
- 6 Ways to Stay Safe As a Social Worker During Home Visits
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMDUAlO5v3Q>
- NAMI – National Alliance on Mental Illness –  
<https://www.nami.org/Home>

# Final Questions and Evaluation Survey

- Any final questions?
- Directly following the webinar, you will see a short evaluation survey to complete on your screen. We appreciate your feedback!

[https://uthtmc.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_2uI139zP6ImpK\\_mO](https://uthtmc.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_2uI139zP6ImpK_mO)

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