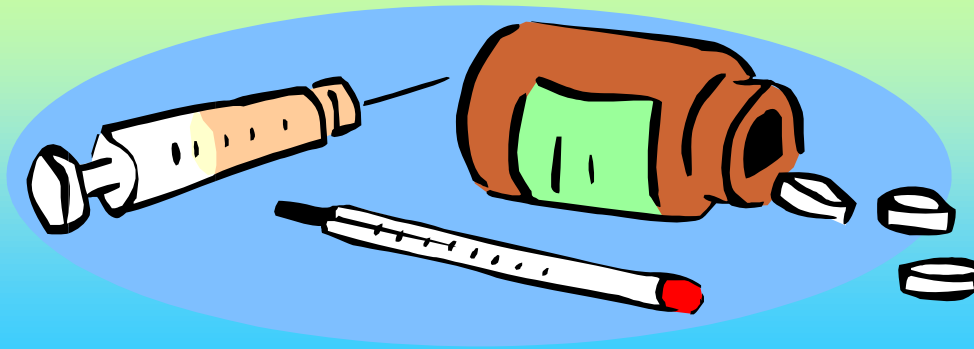




Safety Awareness

Tips for working with DHS families.

Developed by Judy Murphy
and Sue Clark



SAFETY AWARENESS

- Most of the families we see will respond to being treated with dignity and respect.
- Remain alert and observant both outside and inside the family's home.
- Safety assessments and action plans are useful because they promote our awareness and reduce our fear so we can focus on helping families.
- Safety assessments and action plans are not magic bullets
- Knowledge of the dynamics of Meth use is valuable information.



- Discuss potential concerns with your supervisor
- Formulate plan to reduce risk as appropriate (take provider, law enforcement or request a partner from your office if available)
- Keep your agency informed of your schedule-who you are seeing, family name/address, when you will return, etc.



Times of greatest concern



- First Home Visit
- Removal of Children
- Client under Influence of Alcohol/Drugs
- Clients with a History of Violence/Domestic Abuse
- When you are far away from a source of help.

Things to Consider When Planning for Home Visits



- Examine case history whenever possible
 - A) Does client have history of mental illness?
 - B) Have they had violent interactions with police, school, etc.
 - C) Have they had negative interactions with other agencies?

Reduce your risk



- When knocking at the door, stand to the side, not the front of it
- Introduce yourself clearly, letting the family know who you are and why you are there
- Give options and choices, offer to reschedule if you have suspicions that the client is under the influence or suspect meth lab on site.

- Be alert for signals/listen outside the door of the home for screaming, yelling, etc.
- If client is letting off steam try to determine if he/she is just angry and trying to vent or is becoming aggressive



- **Be calm and confident-think about visits in the past, what worked, what didn't? If you have limited experience, consult with co-workers, supervisors, etc.**
- **Consider taking a cellular phone if one is available**
- **Watch for weapons, drug paraphernalia, etc.**
- **Possible meth paraphernalia may include: straws, mirrors w/razor blades on/around them, burnt aluminum foil, spoons that are misshapen (bent in the middle), glass pipes/tubing, cotton swabs smelling of alcohol (for IV users), cigarettes with the filter torn off, etc.**
- **Plan your escape route when entering the home**
- **Trust your instincts. If something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't. Try to figure out why and what to do.**



Personal safety during home visit



Be observant of your environment

- A) Does client appear to be under the influence of meth e.g.- uncontrolled, jerky movements, repetitive behaviors, increased/excited speech, shifting mood swings, easily agitated, skin sores/spots, etc.
- B) Is client wearing long sleeved shirts in warm weather, excessively sweating when temperatures are normal
- C) Does the client appear to have experienced extreme weight loss
- D) Are there many unfinished projects around the home which may be symptomatic of periodic high energy levels and inability to sleep (e.g. torn up electrical equipment, TV's, VCRs, etc.)
- E) Does the client exhibit a pronounced lack of energy or inability to stay awake or alert (withdrawal from meth)

DO:

- **Treat Client With Dignity and Respect.**
- **Appear Confident and In Control**
- **Leave the Home if Your Instincts Tell you to do so.**

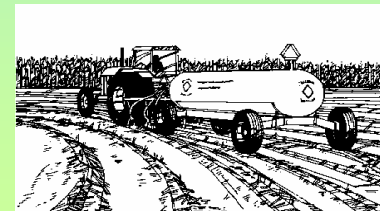
DON'T:

- **Appear Fearful**
- **Turn your Back**
- **Complete a Home Visit with Someone obviously under the Influence of Alcohol/Drugs**
- **Complete a Home Visit with Someone Who Is Inappropriately Dressed**



Safety Plan For DHS employees

- 1) For your own safety, case managers or CPWs should leave the home immediately or as soon as possible if he/she suspects an operational or non-operational meth lab is being housed in or out of the residence.



- 2) The case manager/CPW should not use smell or touch to attempt to identify chemicals or unknown substances. Never handle materials you suspect were used for making meth, such as contaminated glassware and needles. Skin contact can result in burns and poisoning.
- 3) The case manager/CPW should not walk through any area where chemicals have been spilled. If worker believes that a meth lab may be in operation during visit, conclude visit quickly, without causing concern or suspicion. This is extremely important because of meth induced paranoia, mood swings and aggressive behaviors.

- Signs of a possible meth lab may include:
 - Chemical odors such as: ether, ammonia, acetone, or urine
 - Reported activity during all hours of the day, people and cars stay short length of time
 - Residences with windows covered with black plastic or cardboard for complete privacy
 - Rubber or plastic tubing/chemical containers in trash/coffee filters with red stains/coffee grinders, blenders with white residue
 - Iodine or chemical stained bathroom or kitchen fixtures

- Dogs used to guard a house
- Propane tanks with fittings that have turned blue
- Several types of containers such as a large number of cold medication containers, cans of camping fuel, paint thinner, acetone, lye or drain cleaners, and other containers with sulfuric or muriatic acid
- These products and equipment do have legitimate uses and separately would not be cause for concern; when several of those items are found in close proximity take notice and use caution.



- Maintain a safe distance upwind from the suspected laboratory
- If you believe you have been exposed to Meth residue take care to avoid spreading it to other areas. Change and wash clothes as soon as practical
- You may want to consult your supervisor concerning next steps.
- If at all possible use appropriate means to prevent the possible direct transfer of meth residue to areas such as your car and your clothes.



Suspected Meth Laboratories



- A) Request Law Enforcement Assistance
- B) DHS case workers and CPWs should not enter a residence where the manufacturing of meth is suspected or has been confirmed without the permission of Law Enforcement.

Health Effects caused by exposure depend on:



- Process and chemicals used
- Amount of chemical and length of exposure
- Health & Size of the person being exposed

Greatest dangers during cooking are from:

- Fire
- Explosion
- Accidental creation of lethal chemical by-products



Signs of exposure

- Shortness of breath
- Cough, chest pain
- Dizziness; lack of coordination
- Burning to the eyes, nose, mouth



If you are exposed



- **Decontamination procedures must be followed:**
 - **Contaminated clothes should not be worn into your home or office if avoidable.**
 - **Shower as soon as possible using soap and water.**
 - **Wash clothing with mixture of water and bleach/run empty cycle through washer with bleach and water**
 - **Soles of shoes should be carefully cleaned with water**
 - **You may want to consult with your physician especially if you suffer physical effects.**

- Chronic exposure to meth lab chemicals or byproducts has the potential to cause both short and long-term health effects.
- Long-term exposure to Volatile Organic Compounds (VOL) may result in liver and kidney damage, neurological problems, and increased risk of cancer.
- Even at low levels, the presence of many chemicals found in illegal labs can be hazardous for human health.



LESS SEVERE SYMPTOMS

INCLUDE:

- Headache
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Fatigue or lethargy
- These symptoms have been known to occur in people who have entered a drug lab after discovery but before the property has been cleaned or ventilated.
- Less severe symptoms usually go away after several hours of exposure to fresh air. However, if these symptoms are occurring; seek medical assistance



When Children are in a Meth Lab



If a child is currently in the home with a meth lab, case manager/CPW must leave the home and proceed with the following:



- Contact law enforcement
- Immediately contact supervisor and legal staff to seek legal remedy to protect child
- Case manager/CPW **MUST NOT** enter any building where a meth lab was or is present until clearance is given from law enforcement.



DON'T PANIC !

Even though there may be potential hazards, they can be managed if you **Remember**.....



- To treat client with dignity & respect
- That most of the families we see pose no danger
- To remain alert and observant
- To trust your instincts
- To observe your surroundings
- To always keep office and staff informed of where you are going, address and name of family you are seeing & when you expect to return

REVIEW



- Use a calm, relaxed tone
- State your purpose and reassure throughout what your purpose is
- Never stand above the client
- Sit close to the door, have an exit plan
- If someone is paranoid, it is best to limit what you say, and listen but keep the conversation going and avoid periods of silence.
- Finally....leave if person continues to exhibit paranoid behavior as there will be nothing to gain from further communication.