

SAFETY AWARENESS FOR THE CHILD WELFARE PROFESSIONAL



Established in 2007, the New Jersey Child Welfare Training Partnership is a collaborative effort between the NJ Department of Children and Families (DCF) Office of Training and Professional Development (OTPD) and a DCF-funded University Partnership headed by Rutgers School of Social Work, Institute for Families, Office of Child Welfare Workforce Advancement. The Partnership provides ongoing professional development to the state's child welfare workforce, most often Division of Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P) caseworkers.

In 2015, the Partnership answered the call of the State's frontline workers when it developed and launched *Safety Awareness for the Child Welfare Professional*, a course intended to address safety concerns faced by CP&P caseworkers in their daily interactions. Studies indicate 58% of child welfare workers report having experienced incidents of violence during the course of their work.¹ While violence cannot be totally prevented, the risk and negative impacts on individuals can be reduced with careful planning and use of strategies that increase safety and decrease threat.

Course Design



This two-day training allows participants to engage in activities that increase retention of the material and apply what they have learned in work settings. A combination of brief lectures, audio clips, video footage, role playing, policy review, and group exercises are designed to practice concepts introduced in the training. A course evaluation is administered at the end of the training and is used by the trainer to further enhance the curriculum.

Course Goal



Safety Awareness for the Child Welfare Professional presents information about worker safety awareness, assessment, and actions workers can take if/when they encounter unsafe situations. The training also provides participants with ways in which they can apply preparation strategies that promote safety in child welfare practice. At the end of this training, participants are able to describe the signs that a person's behavior is escalating, recognize indicators that signal an interaction is becoming unsafe, and use techniques that promote safety during interaction with others at different stages of escalation.

Course Objectives

- Explain the importance of awareness, assessment, anticipation, and action as they relate to worker safety.
- Define the common stages of threat/violence escalation.
- Describe potentially dangerous situations workers may encounter in the field as they relate to substance abuse, domestic violence, and mental illness.
- Utilize verbal de-escalation techniques that remediate/reduce vulnerability during tense interactions with families.
- Demonstrate nonverbal de-escalation techniques that promote worker safety during interactions with families.
- Practice preventive strategies to preserve safety, reduce threats/risks, and promote well-being and self-care.



In an effort to measure participant satisfaction and knowledge gained from attending trainings, surveys and pre/posttests for all course offerings are routinely administered. The average overall satisfaction score for *Safety Awareness for the Child Welfare Professional* is 3.72 on a scale of up to 4.0—one of the highest-scoring courses offered by the University Partnership.

¹Newhill, C. E. (2004). *Client violence in social work practice: Prevention, intervention, and research*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

SAFETY AWARENESS FOR THE CHILD WELFARE PROFESSIONAL MAY - DECEMBER 2015 HIGHLIGHTS

Course Offerings

- The University Partnership offered and conducted 68 two-day sessions throughout the state

Attendance

- 1,386 child welfare professionals attended trainings

Training Areas

- Northern: 18 courses
- Central: 29 courses
- Southern: 21 courses

Satisfaction Surveys

- 1,265 participants completed satisfaction surveys
- Average overall score was 3.7 on a scale of up to 4.0
- Most agree training was useful and children/families benefit from knowledge and skills gained

Pre/Posttests

- Average pretest score: 67% for 1,331 participants
- Average posttest score: 86% for 1,307 participants

Course Feedback

- "This training was very informative [...] Safety awareness serves staff as well as families, and the ability to de-escalate a potentially violent situation was helpful."
- "Positive and informative training, educational, much needed."
- "Helpful, real, and direct. I cannot ask for anything more."

Training classes are offered year-round at locations throughout the state, largely in CP&P local offices and at the Professional Center at DCF in New Brunswick, NJ. More information on the Institute for Families at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey can be found at <http://socialwork.rutgers.edu/InstituteForFamilies>