

# OFF SITE APPOINTMENT SAFETY POLICY - MENTORING

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## PURPOSE

This policy will provide guidelines to:

- Ensure the safety of Sparkways staff when visiting volunteer mentors, young people and families within their homes, or locations outside of the home
  - Conduct a risk assessment prior to entering a property for the purposes of meeting a volunteer mentor or young person and their family
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## POLICY STATEMENT

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES


Sparkways is committed to:

- Ensuring the safety of Mentoring staff when conducting meetings with volunteer mentors, young people and parents/guardians within the participants home or locations outside of the home
- Providing guidelines on cultural considerations when working with Aboriginal young people and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse young people and their families
- Ensuring that staff are aware and understand the requirements for conducting off site appointments, including preparing for a home visit and managing any potential risks
- Offering young people and parents/guardians the flexibility to meet with Sparkways staff outside of the family home, should that be preferred

### SCOPE

This policy applies to all Sparkways Mentoring Staff, volunteer mentors, young people and parents/guardians

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 <b>RESPONSIBILITIES</b>	Sparkways Mentoring Staff	Volunteer Mentors	Young Person	Parents / Guardians
Understanding that initial contact and home visits with the young person and parent/guardians may be met with reluctance and uncertainty. Approach the family with openness, trust and patience	X			
Taking practical steps to prepare for home visits to maximise the engagement of the young person and parent/guardian in the home environment while considering personal safety. These steps can include but are not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review all available information on the young person referral, such as family history, who lives in the home and any known risks</li> <li>• Contact referrer if young person referral provides limited information, specifically around safety of home visits</li> <li>• Consider the young person and parent/guardian’s cultural background to understand what cultural protocols are followed by the family</li> <li>• Complete the Offsite Safety checklist (<i>refer Attachment 1</i>) to ensure all points have been considered</li> <li>• If the home visit has been assessed as high risk, arrange an alternative location</li> </ul>	X			
Recording all home visit appointments including details such as time, location and name of young person and family, in a shared calendar.	X			
Mitigating potential risks when attending a home visit, by taking the following measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choose appropriate clothing and footwear that maintains safety and movement. Be sensitive to any cultural protocols observed in the home.</li> <li>• Staff must not remove shoes, unless the environment is safe to do so (no environmental hazards, such as, but not limited to: clutter, sharp objects, animal excrement). If shoes are required to be removed in the home, and the environment is deemed unsafe, staff must suggest an alternate location.</li> <li>• Staff to carry a Sparkways ID badge / name tag</li> <li>• Carry a well charged mobile phone at all times</li> <li>• Park vehicle in the street so that an easy exit is available</li> </ul>	X			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observe surroundings when approaching the home, be aware of dogs and listen for angry voices</li> <li>• Stand to one side of the door when knocking and clearly state your name and reason for the visit, when the door is opened.</li> <li>• Only enter if an adult opens the door and invites you in. If opened by a young person, ask if their parent/guardian is home.</li> <li>• Prior to entering ask who is home today. If unknown person/s are in the home, encourage the meeting to occur outside or reschedule to another time</li> <li>• Do not enter the house if you can hear physical fighting, observe or suspect there are risks to your safety from household members' intoxicification, or feel threatened or are uncomfortable about approaching a house for any other reason</li> </ul>				
<p>Taking the following precautions during the meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognise that families may be fearful of judgements about their home and family.</li> <li>• Be aware of house layout and exit routes.</li> <li>• Request that any (obviously aggressive) pets/animals be outside and/or restrained in another room.</li> <li>• Keep keys and mobile phone close and available at all times</li> <li>• Try to position yourself in an area that is easily accessible to the exit.</li> <li>• Be alert to signs of risk. Look for, and be aware of, the location of potentially dangerous objects (such as any weapons or items that could be used to inflict harm etc).</li> <li>• If an adult/ carer/ parent is smoking during the home visit, request to hold the home visit outdoors or ask if they could refrain during your home visit or consider asking if doors/windows can be opened.</li> <li>• Politely decline or limit acceptance of any food and drinks unless staff member feels it will be culturally insensitive or cause a distrust.</li> </ul>	X			
<p>Completing the Offsite Safety checklist (<i>refer Attachment 1</i>) when conducting a home visit for a mentor. (whilst it is less likely to involve the same level of risk as a young person home visit, care must still be taken when entering an unknown property.)</p>	X			
<p>Terminating the visit and leaving immediately if there is any indication that safety may be compromised or there is danger present.</p>	X			
<p>Notifying the Team Leader or nominated staff member, via text message, upon arrival to the property and</p>	X			

when meeting has concluded and staff member has left the premises				
Contacting the staff member attending a home visit, if they have not advised of leaving the meeting, after 30 mins past the scheduled end time of the meeting. Continue contact attempts every 10 minutes.	X			
Contacting the police for assistance if contact with the staff member cannot be made 60 minutes after the scheduled end of the meeting.	X			
Documenting any safety concerns and reasons if the meeting was terminated on safety grounds on the mentor or young person's record.	X			
Where possible, arranging any future meetings in a community space rather than in the home, if the young person is eligible for the program	X			
Advising Sparkways staff if a meeting venue outside the home is preferred.		X	X	X



## PROCEDURES

The young person's home is the primary location for the Young Person Assessment (*refer Screening Policy*). Alternative locations may be preferable, where it is determined that the young person, parent/guardian or staff member would feel more comfortable, such as a school or a community location. However, if the meeting is held outside of the home, staff should be mindful of concerns around confidentiality and this potentially impacting engagement and information sharing.

Volunteer Mentor home visits will only be conducted if the mentor has expressed an interest in having a match meeting at their home. (*refer Screening Policy*). If the home is deemed unsafe in any way, the mentor will be advised that meetings are to occur outside of the home, e.g. at a Sparkways hub site or a community location.

### Potential Risks

Working with young people and their parents/guardians within the home can present challenges and risks to staff, including but not limited to:

- Violence or threats from family members or other adults within the home at the time of the home visit
- Exposure to hazardous substances or severe domestic squalor in the home
- Presence of animals (unrestrained or potentially aggressive) and pest infestations
- Exposure to infectious diseases
- Working in spaces that may be confined, poorly ventilated, hot, cold, dark or noisy
- Lack of a safe entrances or exits to or from the home
- Presence of multiple or unknown people in the home
- Exposure to experiences that impact a practitioner's emotional and psychological wellbeing

## Cultural Considerations

### **Aboriginal young people and families**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families may have a fear or mistrust of having a new person or service in their home, due to the impacts of historical and ongoing injustices and intergenerational trauma.

When working with Aboriginal young people and their families it is important to understand that cultural safety may need to be established and a relationship formed before home visits can occur.

In the first instance, this may look like:

- A level of trust needing to be established with a family before they feel comfortable to invite a staff member into their home due to prior experiences with 'welfare.' In these cases, a home visit may take place on the front veranda or a different location where the family feel comfortable until this trust has been developed.
- Being respectful and seeking permission to enter a family's home or rooms within the home, allowing family to have control over their space and their privacy

### **Culturally and Linguistically Diverse young people and families**

When working with culturally and linguistically diverse young people and their parents/guardians, it is important that staff members understand how the migration experience and settlement process may impact on their engagement with services.

Consideration should also be given to culturally appropriate practice. This includes understanding religious traditions and practices in determining when and where visits are held.

Staff should also consider respectful engagement for culturally and linguistically diverse families, including gender appropriate discussion, who can participate (such as family decision makers), and where discussions should take place.

Some families may not feel comfortable having staff in their home. This may be due to:

- A fear or suspicion of authorities and government officials based on pre or post migration experiences
- A reluctance to seek support because of the stigma associated with seeking help from outside of the family/community group
- A previous experience of culturally insensitive interventions by professionals
- Cultural differences around gender or perceived power



## **BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION**

### **LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS**

Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

- Privacy Act 1988(Cth)
- Information Privacy Act 2000(Vic)
- Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004
- Victorian Child Safe Standards

- Social Services Regulatory Scheme and Standards
- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005
- Children and Health Legislation Amendment (Statement of Recognition, Aboriginal Self-Determination and Other Matters) Act 2023

**The most current amendments to listed legislation can be found at:**

Victorian Legislation – Victorian Law Today: [www.legislation.vic.gov.au](http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au)  
Commonwealth Legislation – Federal Register of Legislation: [www.legislation.gov.au](http://www.legislation.gov.au)



## SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

### RELATED POLICIES

- Screening Policy
- Occupational Health & Safety Policy



## EVALUATION

In order to assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of the policy, Sparkways will:

- seek feedback from people affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy
- keep the policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy and best practice
- revise the policy and procedures as part of the service's policy review cycle, or as required



## ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: Offsite Safety Checklist



## AUTHORISATION

This policy was endorsed by Sparkways on 14 August 2024

**REVIEW DUE:** August 2025

**ATTACHMENT 1**  
**OFFSITE SAFETY CHECKLIST**  
 (Image only; Access from program resources)



**Offsite Safety Checklist**

<b>Prior to appointment / home visit:</b>	<b>Tick!</b>
Review the client's history to identify potential risk factors or safety issues and seek additional information from the referring agency in regards to worker safety / additional risks	
If you consider there is a significant risk discuss with your Manager and develop an alternative plan.	
Call the client to arrange the visit	
Explain nature of the visit and ask if there are any issues such as illness and persons who may be visiting the home at the time of the appointment	
Make enquiries regarding the client and their environment - check re pets. You may ask for pets to be placed in a separate room	
If the client discloses a health concern, clarify the illness and reschedule the appointment as necessary.	
Update Outlook Calendar with appointment time, address and relevant comments	
Call the client the day prior to reconfirm the appointment and confirm no changes from initial discussion such as illness and visitors	
Only proceed with the off-site visit after you are satisfied that there are no risks and you have discussed any concerns with your Manager (or nominated team member)	
<b>At the property</b>	<b>Tick!</b>
Park vehicle in the street so that an easy exit is available	
Observe surroundings when approaching the home, be aware of dogs and listen for angry voices.	
Listen to your instincts!	
Call off home visit and/or don't enter if you have any doubts.	
Prior to entering ask who is home today. If unknown person/s are in the home, encourage the meeting to occur outside or reschedule to another time	
Make yourself aware of exit points from property. Try to position yourself in an area that is easily accessible to the exit	
Assess behaviour of client such as agitated, pacing, nervous	
Be alert to signs of risk. Look for, and be aware of, the location of potentially dangerous objects (such as any weapons or items that could be used to inflict harm etc).	
If a client or family member appears intoxicated or substance affected, and this risk is not able to be mitigated through control measures agreed with your Manager then leave and reschedule the visit if or as applicable	
Do not consume food or drinks other than your own	
If at any stage you feel concerned for your health or safety leave the premises immediately and contact your Manager (or nominated team member).	
<b>Post appointment / home visit</b>	<b>Tick!</b>
Notify another staff member, when meeting has concluded and you have left the property	
In case of an emergency contact 000, when safe to do so, contact your General Manager (or nominated team member) ASAP	
Document any safety concerns and reasons if the meeting was terminated on safety grounds on the mentor or young person's record	