**AgrAbility Safety Considerations for On-Site Visits with Farm and Ranch Families**

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Safety is for everyone who may be on the farm or ranch. The comfort level of being in a ranch or farm environment is important not only for the service provider but also for the AgrAbility client and their family. If the service provider is uncomfortable, this may contribute to an AgrAbility client’s feeling uncomfortable as well. First impressions are important, and feelings of discomfort can signal a negative start. Below are considerations to keep in mind as you prepare for your visit to a client’s farm or ranch.

**Before Making Your Visit.**

* **Multiple People.** Including two people on a site visit is ideal—it is just not always practical financially. Inviting other appropriate service providers to attend a site visit, such as County Extension agent, DVR counselor, Occupational Therapist or others who may be engaged in the client’s service delivery may be of value for safety and for overall service delivery. If you cannot include two people on a site visit, inform one of your AgrAbility colleagues ahead of time the name of your client with their physical address, telephone number, contact information, date and time you expect to be with them. You might make arrangements such that your colleague calls, texts, or checks in with you at a specific time to make sure that things are going well. Also, give your colleague an idea of how long you are comfortable with them not hearing from you before, during, and after your on-site visit. Everyone has different levels of comfort in farming and ranching, so minutes, hours, and days should be spelled out in advance. Especially in very remote areas that have no cell phone service, a check-in system may be helpful to ensure that the AgrAbility team member is not running into travel issues.
* **Emergency Situations.** It can be helpful as a team to set up an emergency exit process with an agreed upon “SOS” Code. This can take the form of a neutral message that can be texted even if someone is viewing it such as, “Please email form 66.” If a team member receives such a text, they would know immediately to call the sender and “inform” them that there is an emergency, and we need the rural health specialist to return to the office immediately.
* **Client Stakeholders.** Identify with the client who else will be available on site to assist in the visit (often a spouse). This helps establish whether other people will be on the farm at the time of your visit. It is recommended that all major stakeholders aged twelve and older be invited to join at least the first on-site visit. Inclusion of all family members with their goals, objectives, and modifications is essential to the success of the client. Listen to their feedback and assure them that you hear both what they say and how they feel.
* **Photography and Videos.** Let clients know that you will be taking photos or videos. If possible, advise clients of this prior to meeting in person and again while they are signing the Release of Information documentation so a Media Release can be signed as well. Be clear on what you want to photograph, why, and how you will use the photographs. All photos of places, person(s), etc. should be saved in a safe and confidential location. If you feel unsafe, one option is to use video to aid in consultation with another team member. It is a way to have additional input into the process and to get more eyes on the farm and on the client. Be sure that electronic communication with a teammate does not take away from your full attention on assisting the client.
* **Farm Dogs.** One of the first things often encountered during an on-site visit is farm or ranch dogs. During pre-visit telephone conversations, inquire about dogs—large or small. Know your comfort level with dogs and/or other animals and request that they be contained during the visit if you are uncomfortable or if you think it will detract from your interaction with the farmer/rancher. Avoid getting between a dog and home.
* **Firearms.** Like with dogs, you might request that firearms be contained prior to your on-site farm or ranch visit. It is recommended that each provider consider exploring personal safety around firearms being present during a site visit. For example, do you want to request that firearms be locked away or simply be put out of sight? Everyone has a unique perspective, and how this topic is approached with clients can affect the relationship you have with them. If possible, you might position yourself so you can see the firearm at all times and so you are between it and the client. Be aware of any mental/behavioral health issues regarding high stress, anxiety, fear, paranoia, depression, anger, or suicidal thinking. You might say, “Can we move over here to talk further?”
* **Restroom.** Use the restroom at the office or a local public facility on the way to your client’s ranch or farm. Entering a person’s bathroom inside their home is very personal and may not be appropriate.
* **Outerwear.** Wear appropriate footwear while on site visits. It is best to bring a second set of boots or shoes, and even a change of clothes in case you get wet or dirty. Also bring hats and sunscreen.
* **Biosecurity.** Do not see clients if you are sick. This could expose the client and their livestock to potential risks. Muck boots or disposable boot covers provide a sterile plastic barrier so that you neither spread disease to other farms nor bring organisms home from somewhere else. A client or family member may ask you to wear a respirator or other Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Often the client will provide the covers if necessary.
* **Behavioral Health.** Consider participating in medical aspects training regarding aggressive or agitated clients to acquire a broad understanding of disabilities and medications along with de-escalation techniques. During on-site visits, if you see signs of high stress, anger, anxiety, depression, or suicidal thinking, or if the client indicates elevated levels of depression, nervousness, worry, or sadness on their Quality-of-Life pretest, refer them to local behavioral health providers immediately and do not leave the client until you feel they are no longer suicidal or in the care of an appropriate medical provider. Provide each client with a list of local physical and psychological resources at time of visit.
* **Duty to Report.** If you see or suspect abuse or neglect of people or animals, ask your AgrAbility team what is your duty to report and to whom? When? Find out what your duty is to report suspected abuse, neglect, methamphetamine production, etc.
* **Unwanted Sexual Advances.** Ahead of time take a basic safety or self-defense course to defend yourself if necessary. Role play with AgrAbility team members how to deflect sexual advances. Practice being assertive. When entering a building, always make sure the rancher or farmer enters the doorway before you. Don’t hesitate to react strongly with a forceful, “No!” Make sure you position yourself between the client and the doorway. Back away. Move closer to the doorway so you can escape if necessary. Some things you might say are: “I am uncomfortable with what you are saying and doing. If you continue, I will not be able to provide you with what you want and need to continue farming or ranching.” Call your supervisor or AgrAbility team member immediately. Document what happened. Work with your program administrators on how to proceed with service delivery with this client to assure your safety and comfort level.

**During Your On-Site Visit.**

* **Vehicle Placement.** Any time you drive to a farm or ranch, park your vehicle to make a direct exit (not in a position where you must back up), leave it unlocked, and keep your car keys and phone in your possession and readily accessible.
* **Check-Ins.** When you arrive at the farm or ranch, check-in with your co-workers so everyone on the team is aware of where you are should an emergency arise.
* **Viewing Points.** Position yourself so you always have a direct exit (usually accomplished by which chair you choose to sit in), and if you and the client are in movement around the farm or ranch and through buildings, always position yourself so the client is not between you and the exit.
* **Inside the Home.** Unless there is a home modification assessment planned, it is preferable to stay outside on your first visit. Once you have established a relationship with your client, then consider entering the home if invited to do so.
* **Alcohol and Other Drug Paraphernalia.** If you encounter drug paraphernalia visible in the client’s home, respectfully request, “Could we move outside?” Advise the client that such items must be removed before a second visit will be scheduled. If someone is intoxicated or otherwise visibly impaired, consider rescheduling the appointment. You might say, “Because of the importance of what we need to discuss today, I respectfully request that any bongs or substances be put away and that we go outside to talk further.”
* **Aggressive or Agitated Clients.** If at any time during your on-site visit, the hair on the back of your neck rises and you feel unsafe, do not challenge your client. Do not argue. You might say: “I respect you and your values. I will not engage in political or health care discussion. I am here to assist you in continuing to farm or ranch.” You might consider carrying a cooler of ice cold water bottles. You might offer your agitated client a bottle of cool water to defuse the situation and to re-direct their attention. It gives them something else to manipulate. But if you still feel unsafe, get in your car, leave immediately, and drive to a safe place. Call your AgrAbility team member or supervisor. Document your experience. Decide together whether or not you will continue with the client.
* **Chairs.** While bugs are simply a part of farm or ranch life, it is best to sit on hard back chairs. That way there is no risk of transferring bugs from the client’s house to the vehicle, office, or back to your own home. Consider staying outside the entire time if possible.
* **Odors.** Do not be surprised or taken aback by the smells of a farm or ranch. To alleviate noxious odors, learn the art of “mouth breathing.” One trick of the trade is to use Vicks VapoRub. One small dab in each nostril masks many odors. Do not be offended by smells or things you may see, like dead or decaying animals, manure, rotting fruit, vegetables, eggs, spoiled milk, etc.
* **Equipment.** Do not be an extra rider on any equipment unless there is designated seating.
* **Information.** Do not pretend you know something that you do not. Be honest and open about your knowledge and your comfort level. Most folks want to teach or help you build on your knowledge.
* **Questions.** If a question arises related to why something is done a certain way, especially if it is related to a modification of a task to accommodate a disability, illness, or condition, ask in a polite and respectful way. However, do not question a person on how they maintain property, equipment, animals, kids, parents, etc. Do point out potential workplace hazards.
* **Recommendations/Affirmations.** Do not recommend or affirm that hazardous techniques or devices be used. Do not let your recommendations exceed the scope of your expertise.

**Additional Resources.**

* National AgrAbility Project. (2021). Conducting agricultural worksite assessment workbook. Cf. Chapter 2 on “Preparing for and Conducting a Worksite Assessment” and especially “Additional On-Site Visit Tips and Cautions” on pp. 14-15. Retrieved October 31, 2022, from <http://www.agrability.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/WorksiteAssessment2021.pdf>.
* National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. (2012, February). Fast Facts: How to prevent violence on the job. Retrieved October 31, 2022, from <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2012-118/pdfs/2012-118.pdf>.
* U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety & Health. (2012, February). Healthcare: Workplace Violence. Retrieved October 31, 2022, from https://www.osha.gov/healthcare/workplace-violence.
* University of New Hampshire Extension. (n.d.). Safety consideration for UNH Extension site/home visits.

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