

**Australian Catholic University – Human Research Ethics Committee**  
**In Home Visit Safety Plan**

This advice is for researchers who intend to collect data for a research project in a participant's home or in other remote locations. As part of any research to be conducted in homes, a full risk assessment – to identify and minimise health and safety risks associated with conducting homes visits - needs to be undertaken and should be included with your ethics application.

These procedures would inform any safety plan that you implement.

**1. Preparation for the Visit**

- Ensure you are familiar and comfortable with your transport options.
- Before the visit, you should ask the interviewee questions about pets, children, who else lives in the house and whether they will be home when you arrive and any other potential visitors etc.
- In this pre-arrival conversation, try to assess possible risk factors in the home (e.g. weapons/domestic violence/criminal involvement/mental illness).
- If visiting outside business hours, ensure you make prior arrangement with your supervisor and notify them of your safe return.
- You should record your whereabouts on your University's public calendar on Outlook. This includes recording the time of the visit and the address.
- Prior to arrival, plan to park in a location that permits a quick and safe exit.
- You should notify, for example, your partner or other reliable person of your arrival at the property via text message. You should also provide them the address and phone numbers and approximate length of visit. Ensure you keep your mobile phone with you at all times and have emergency contact numbers available.
- Where possible, visit the site of the interview prior to the meeting and ensure that you are familiar with the area and to check if they are in a mobile black spot area. If they are, a second person should attend, either to assist or to observe.
- Depending on a risk assessment of the research, participants and other relevant factors a second person should attend the home visit.

Your supervisor, partner or other reliable person should ensure the following:

- That they are available to take calls for the time you are out on the road.
- Log your calls.
- To act appropriately, if you call in with a problem or if you miss a scheduled call.
- Holding a copy of your itinerary with instructions to call for help in the event that you do not check in by a prearranged time.

**2. DURING the visit:**

- Park in a spot where you can not be blocked in or obstructed from leaving.
- You should carry a fully charged mobile phone and keep it turned on.
- When carrying bags, keep your car keys and mobile phone on you (in case of emergency, you can barricade yourself in a room / toilet and use the phone to call triple zero.)
- Introduce yourself and show your ID, remember to check that they still consent to the home visit before entering the premises.
- You should not enter a home unless invited by the participant.

- If the person you are visiting locks the front door (particularly deadlocks), you should ask them to please leave the key in the lock.
- Upon entering the home, you should survey the premises for exits and ways out in an emergency.
- You should also be wary of trip hazards that are both external and internal such as steps or lifted floor coverings, electrical wires.
- If there are dogs or other pets which concern you, you should ask that they be put away in a locked kennel or room.
- Make sure you keep all your personal documents, mobile phone, wallet etc. secure at all times.
- Where possible, choose a seat where you do not have your back to a doorway and where you can clearly see all doorways into the room.
- At any time you feel unsafe, you should terminate the meeting, leave and contact your supervisor.
- Depending on the nature of the interview, consider whether it would be beneficial to develop strategies to terminate the interview unexpectedly and what calming language might be suitable in such situations.
- Try to keep to your appointment times and do not linger at any premises longer than you need to.
- If interviewing minors ensure you have your working with children clearance with you, that is current and show it to the parent or guardian present during the visit.

### 3. **POST-Visit:**

- If you are visiting outside business hours, you **MUST** notify your manager of your safe return.
- Ensure you adhere to whatever call-in schedule you have organized with your contact person. If you encounter any problem or issue when out, ring and let your contact person know so it can be duly noted.
- If illegal activity is disclosed during the home visit, subject to the nature of the illegal activity appropriate action should be taken.

### 4. **Emergency Procedures**

While the vast majority of face-to-face interviews / interactions will proceed without incident, it is a necessary part of the risk assessment process to consider what to do in the event of an incident/ accident occurring.

Details of the relevant emergency responses should be detailed in the risk assessment and all researchers / interviewers should be made aware of these emergency responses. All fieldworkers should prepare an emergency plan for all reasonably foreseeable emergencies in advance of undertaking fieldwork. This may include the following:

- A list of emergency services and other supports available locally.
- A means for summoning help in the event of an emergency.
- Responses to incidents, accidents, severe weather, violence and aggression, etc. as deemed appropriate.
- Method for contacting the University and next of kin.
- Itinerary details in the event that the fieldwork group needs to be contacted.