

# Observing Caseworkers during Home Visits

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As you strive to balance the multi-faceted demands of supervision in a constantly changing work environment, one dimension of supervision that could be lost in this hectic environment is the **direct observation of worker's skills during home visits**.

While observing worker's interactions with clients during meetings and court are important and provide an opportunity for you to observe various caseworker skills, different skill sets are required of workers during home visits. As a supervisor, you need to be able to assess these skills for new workers, workers having performance issues, and veteran staff.



Some of the reasons for integrating observation of workers during home visits into your day-to-day supervisory practice include:

- It is your responsibility as an administrative task to know how workers actually practice and not to rely solely on their verbal and written self-reports. This is crucial to thoroughly conduct an effective, honest, and accurate evaluation of the worker's actual on-the-job performance.
- You are held accountable for the work performed by employees, thus should be able to clearly identify specific worker skills and know exactly how well the workers perform in given situations.
- It provides an opportunity for you to model the desired behaviors for engagement and interacting with clients.
- It provides you with real insight into the worker's actual skills and abilities along with an opportunity to offer strength-based, specific, developmental feedback based on direct observations of these skills and abilities.
- It provides focus for the discussion of individual training needs and ongoing professional development.
- It provides an opportunity for a 'teachable moment' and on the spot 'coaching' to further enhance the worker's skills, as well as provide opportunities for discussion of alternative methods and strategies.
- It provides the worker with an additional opportunity to ask emergent questions following the shared experience of the client contact with you.
- It demonstrates emotional support to workers. Most workers welcome the opportunity to talk with you about a shared experience with a client, and believe you have a better feel for their clients with this personal face-to-face experience.

Fully recognizing the difficulty of observing workers during home visits, it is still best practice to do it occasionally, especially with relatively new caseworkers and caseworkers needing support performing this very difficult job. While there may be issues of 'discomfort' with this if you have not done this in the past the advantages of field observation far outweigh the disadvantages and can be overcome with open, honest communication about the 'intent' of the observation.