



*My View*

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## SAFETY

At least once a year, I like to remind all TIP members about the importance of volunteer safety. We need to keep safety in the front of our minds at all times. Staying safe is one of those things that we can forget about over time. There is a tendency for volunteers and their leaders to think *"We've gone on many calls and nothing bad has ever happened."* While it's true that we as an organization have a sterling volunteer safety record, it would take just one incident to be disastrous for the volunteer affected and for the TIP organization as a whole.

Everyone in TIP is responsible for doing what we can to ensure volunteer safety. However the "bottom line" responsibility for volunteer safety on a particular call is the individual volunteer(s) himself who is "on the ground" and has the best understanding of the situation. And after all, it's the individual volunteer who will pay the price if something goes wrong. So I would like to remind volunteers of a few things they need to keep in mind as they are working a TIP Call. I will not repeat all the detailed suggestions we review in the Training Academy (I suggest volunteers review their training manuals for safety tips). Rather I offer **5 safety "principles"** which are key to volunteer safety and which I'd like to address directly to TIP Volunteers...

1. **Be Aware** of your surroundings and don't get "moth light syndrome". Examples of types of things to be aware of include who is at the scene?; are those at the scene drinking alcohol?; are those at the scene getting increasingly agitated?; who is coming to the scene?; where are you, and is there potential danger around you (cars speeding by, for example)?; where are emergency responders?; what is your escape route?;.....
2. **Anticipate trouble**. Dangerous situations usually develop over time. Pay attention to escalating emotions and increasingly angry and threatening talk. Don't wait until violence erupts to take action. Take preventive action and either leave the scene or alert emergency responders about your concerns.
3. **Be Assertive**. Emergency responders have called you to the scene. They are your partners and your protectors. But they can't protect you unless you communicate with them. Don't assume because they are at the scene they see what you see and know what you know.

The two most important things to communicate to responders are your concerns about the potential for violence and your desire for them to stay at the scene or to come into a room where you are located.

Also, be assertive with TIP dispatchers and staff. If you arrive at the scene and believe

it's not safe, communicate that to the TIP dispatcher. She will respect your decision to pull back from the scene, and an effort will be made to assist the client(s) in other ways.

4. **Don't Assume.** There are many assumptions that can get you into trouble. A few of these assumptions are... " *I was called here, it must be safe;*" " *this is a great neighborhood, it must be safe;*" " *this 80 year old woman couldn't hurt anyone;*" " *I have a TIP badge on and I have good intentions. No one will hurt me.*" and " *I'm in a hospital. No one acts out in a hospital.*" When we think about these assumptions in the light of day it's clear that they are assumptions and not reality. But when we are knee deep on a TIP call, it's easy to let these assumptions guide us. Don't let them!

5. **Be Humble.** Realize you don't really know anything about the people you have been called to help nor the surroundings you are in. Realize that although you may be an experienced TIP Volunteer who has been on many calls and returned safely, every situation is different and requires a humble and watchful attitude. And finally, don't be afraid to ask for help. Even though you might be the only volunteer on the call, you are not alone. When in doubt about what you should do, talk to your dispatcher or a responder on the scene.

In short, while the scenes we are called to are not dangerous generally (police/fire do a good screening job and our calls for the most part involve death and not violence), there is always the potential for a particular call to "go bad". We need to be able to see the call going bad in the early stages and to act accordingly.

Be safe out there!

Wayne would like to hear your thoughts.  
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