

# Tips from domestic violence agencies on using hotels for safe alternative emergency shelter

*While this resource covers best practices from domestic violence service agencies, overtime it will include tips from other types of agencies as we learn how different populations benefit from alternative shelter options.*

## Why does your agency use hotels?

- When there is no shelter space
- A survivor has a pet
- When a survivor is a male
- The participant is not safe and is fleeing an abuser. Mostly this happens at night time, and since screenings take time, we need to get them shelter immediately.
- A client may be under the influence
- Sometimes there are instances when a client has a job or childcare and needs to stay within the community they live in. A short term hotel stay allows them to experience minimal disruption until family or other supports kick in.

## How long does a client typically stay in a hotel?

- One night to several nights. Some have experienced as many as 5 nights, but that is the maximum, in that during that time they've developed a plan, or shelter has opened up.
- One to two nights is typical, but we'll continue to house them in a hotel as long as we receive donations via SafeNight. They have an advocate assigned to them on day one to find another option, such as our shelters.
- We've housed clients for up to 5 days. We're open to more than a week, but that need hasn't yet happened.

More from a Safe Shelter Collaborative member agency:

*"We've had great luck with our hotel program and with SafeNight in particular. We always try to divert people away from shelter whenever we can and when it's appropriate in situations where they may have a job in the community or childcare or resources they need to stay connected with during this transition. There may be instances where we have a younger client calling in, someone who's on the cusp of being an adult, and in that instance it may not be helpful to bring them into a shelter environment with families or women experiencing a lot of trauma. Hotels are an option that keeps them out of an environment that may be more traumatizing to them, and closer to family or their job. We want to minimize obstruction in their daily life and not add to the trauma they may already be experiencing."*



## How to develop a good relationship with a hotel

1. Make sure they understand the need for confidentiality.
2. Develop hotel stay agreements. Present them to the hotel so they are aware of expectations.
3. Let them know they have the right to ask someone to leave if they are not following agency or hotel policies.
4. Explain the circumstances for hotel stays, including average length of stay.
5. Have open, on-going communication with the motel/hotel about expectations and concerns.
6. Reassure the motel/hotel about payment.
7. Address any concerns immediately and have a plan on how to prevent any misunderstandings.
8. Find a hotel that is in close proximity to the agency so that services can be provided with ease.
9. Develop a password list to ensure client safety so that only agency staff can retrieve information or contact the client when they are at the hotel.
10. Consider presenting at a hotel staff meeting to discuss privacy and scenarios specific to placing a client at their hotel.

## How does your agency pay for the hotel?

- Purchase orders
- Business credit card
- We provide a letter to the motel stating our agreement of payment, dates client was motelled, and responsibility for any damages.

## Hotel type tip: extended stay

Consider using an extended-stay hotel where you can pay by the week. It will be less expensive overall and will have more amenities (such as an in-room kitchenette) for the client.

## Valuable privacy tip: develop a password list

“We work with the hotel to develop passwords for each agency staff member. The hotel keeps the passwords on record and we use them when we call for a hotel and finalize the reservation. If we needed to call and follow up with the participant and ask to contact their room, we’d provide our agency name and the password. If someone called to talk to that participant, the hotel would say that there’s no one there by that name. We’re in a small community, and while we don’t advertise the hotel we use, it could become common knowledge. The hotel we work with does not confirm anyone’s identity, which has been very helpful.”

## Address potential issues before they happen

- We use hotel stay agreements that we developed to mirror shelter stay agreements. We support the hotel/motel in exiting a client if they feel they are doing something against hotel policy.
- We state to the client that the motel stay is confidential and only for them: no guests, no smoking, and no outside calls besides 911 or our hotline. If they make any calls besides the ones mentioned, they may be responsible for payment of those calls. We let them know if they break any of these rules they may be asked to leave.



- For the motel we issue a letter stating our agreement of payment and take responsibility for any property damage.
- Establish and discuss your agency's guidelines. "Before the client goes into the motel we let them know that this is an emergency stay, and they can't have any guests over, no drinking or drugs, no smoking, and if they break any of those rules, then they will be asked to leave and we unfortunately will be unable to assist them. We give them a notice before the stay. We have had a few situations where they have violated our guidelines and usually motel staff will call us immediately. We do have a relief counselor overnight and we will contact the client and ask her to leave. If it is very disruptive and the police have to be involved, we will ask the client to leave because they have broken one of the guidelines we set up in place beforehand. We try to assess as much as we can whatever support they may need, but in terms of the motel, we will no longer hotel them due to that fact."

More from a Safe Shelter Collaborative member agency:

"The motels are very sensitive to the situations that bring those clients to them and they keep a careful eye on them as well. They are very compassionate about the reasons why someone might be placed in a room that they have available. We would love to get hotel staff trained in DV advocacy—we have trainings two times a year for that purpose—but at this point we're just glad that they accept our clients and are willing to support them if they need to have medical intervention."

