

HSGXX Lone Working and Personal Safety Guidance – Aide Memoire for Branch Community Support

When undertaking a volunteering role as part of the Branch Community Support programme there is a risk to the volunteer which needs to be managed.

Risks

There are a number of risks associated with lone working and these include:

1. Physical assault, verbal abuse, or threatening behaviour
2. Robbery, theft, or criminal damage
3. Road traffic accidents or breakdowns
4. Slips/trips/falls
5. Manual handling
6. Fire and other emergencies

Control Measures/Considerations

There are a number of control measure that can be considered as part of the planning the BCS activity:

Does someone know where you are going, timings and contact numbers? Do they know who you are meeting and what activity you are undertaking?

Would be useful to have a buddy who you call just before the activity starts and once it has finished?

Do you have a mobile phone that is well charged and has appropriate contact numbers programmed?

Do you know your route and are you aware of any risks associated with this? Could you travel in a different way or route to reduce any risk?

Does your health give you any concern or reason why you should not take part in the activity today?

Is the person you are visiting have any known concerns regarding their mental wellbeing, animals or similar? If so consider being in a public place with others around when meeting with them.

Are there any concerns with the location or area that you are going to, for example known gangs, drug dealing? If so can you arrange to carry out the activity in a different location?

Where do you keep your mobile phone? Could you access it easily in an emergency? For example if you fell over and needed to call for help can you reach it easily?

When out and about do not attract attention to yourself by being overly ostentatious, carrying valuable items in the open, walking while talking on your phone.

Do you need to be taking everything with you? Could you lighten your load to reduce stress on your body carrying it, making it easier to move, particularly in an emergency, and be less obvious to others.



Top Tips

Defusing aggression

Many factors could affect the way you behave if threatened, from your own confidence and experience to how you are feeling on the day. Thinking through the options ahead of time, however, will help you to take positive action.

Threatening behaviour can take many forms. It may take place face-to-face, by email, on the phone or in writing. Always aim to defuse aggression early on, and never respond to aggression with aggression. Placate rather than provoke.

The earlier you spot a potential problem arising, the more choices you have to avoid it.

Be aware of changes in the behaviour of the person you are with, especially if they seem to be becoming more angry or irritated. It is very rare for aggression or violence to come from nowhere.

Try to use your own communication skills to defuse a difficult situation early on. Think about not only what you say but how you say it. The majority of communication is through body language, a lot through tone of voice and only a little through words.

If the person you are with is getting angry, try to remain calm. Do not be drawn into their anger. Avoid entering the aggressor's personal space or touching them, as this will make the aggressor feel threatened and can escalate the situation.

Beware of your own body language. For example, standing with your feet apart and your arms folded or your finger pointing can be seen as aggressive or patronising.

Try to distance yourself both physically and emotionally. Be aware that enforcing your authority or status and using jargon may actually increase their aggression.

Avoid high-risk strategies such as using humour or shouting the other person down.

If you have used a particular phrase or word effectively to defuse aggression, keep it handy for future use. Aggression can sometimes limit your ability to think clearly and such information can help you to stay focused. If all else fails...your aim is to get away!

Be assertive but avoid meeting aggression with aggression.

Use exit strategies — have a pre-planned way to excuse yourself from a difficult situation. For example, you can't help them so you are going to get someone who can sort the problem out for them.

Apply diversionary techniques to distract them whilst you make your exit.

Keep your eye on possible escape routes. Move away from dangerous locations such as



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staircases, restricted spaces or places where equipment could be used as a weapon. Keep yourself between the aggressor and the door. Use your voice — shout a specific instruction such as “Call the police!”

Remember:

- Trust your instincts
- Never underestimate a threat
- If you feel uneasy or ‘alarm bells start ringing’ — act right away

Walking

It takes three things for a violent or aggressive incident to happen – a victim, a perpetrator and an opportunity. By taking some suitable safety precautions, you can reduce the opportunities and therefore the risk of becoming a victim.

- Plan ahead. Before you go out, think about how you are going to get home.
- Know your route. Be alert and aware of your surroundings.
- Radiate non-vulnerability. A confident appearance (walking tall, normal pace, arms relaxed) will make you less vulnerable. Try to avoid danger rather than confront it.
- Reduce the amount of bags, equipment and paperwork that you carry.
- Tell someone where you are going.
- Avoid danger spots like quiet or badly-lit alleyways, subways or isolated car parks.
- Consider heading for a public place; somewhere you know there will be other people, for example a garage or shop.
- If you are at all worried, try and stay near a group of people.
- Avoid passing stationary cars with their engines running and people sitting in them.
- If you think you are being followed, trust your instincts and take action. As confidently as you can, cross the road, turning to see who is behind you. If you are still being followed, keep moving.
- Make for a busy area and tell people what is happening. If necessary, call the police.

Driving

Driving is normally a very safe activity. However, violent and aggressive incidents can happen, so avoid any unnecessary risks when out driving by being prepared.

- Keep your car in good working order.
- Remember FLOWERS - check Fuel, Lights, Oil, Water, Electrics, (Rubber) Tyres and have the car regularly Serviced. In the winter it is especially important to keep the lights clean and the battery fully charged.
- Make sure you have a charged phone, with credit, with you in case of emergency.
- Put together an emergency kit for your car. This might include an extra coat, high visibility jacket, warning triangle, walking boots, bottled water, spare change, a torch and an emergency mobile phone charger.
- Never leave your keys in the ignition whilst you are out of the car for any reason.
- Keep the doors locked and the windows closed in built-up areas or in stop-start traffic.



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- Plan your journey carefully. Know what route you are taking and let other people know where you are going and when you plan to arrive.
- Road rage incidents are rare, and by not responding to aggression from other drivers, can often be avoided.
- When parking in a car park, consider where the entrances and exits are. Try to avoid having to walk across a lonely car park to get to your car. Park away from pillars and barriers, and close to lights and CCTV cameras if possible. If you can, reverse into the space so you can drive away easily.
- If you think someone is following you, keep driving until you come to a busy location, such as a garage or motorway services. If you are really worried, drive straight to the nearest police station.

Public transport

- Obtain timetable and fare information before travelling and plan your journey in advance to prevent you waiting around for long periods at bus stops or stations.
- Familiarise yourself with the route and the surroundings to the station / bus stop.
- Make sure you have a mobile to make a call if your train or bus is delayed or cancelled.
- Avoid carrying several bags where possible. Try to keep both hands free. Look after your valuables. Do not look vulnerable.
- Avoid travelling in compartments with no access corridor.
- Sit in a compartment with lots of people.

