

Public Spaces and Outreach Work

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When using public spaces to deliver organised and scheduled youth programmes or services, or whilst providing outreach work within the community, youth work organisations will need to consider a number of factors to manage risk effectively.

Risk assessments should be conducted or contributed to by an individual(s) with specific local knowledge who is able to identify specific risks or locations that may cause concern and how they may be managed effectively. Risk assessment should aim to identify hazards relating to health and safety and interaction with other members of the public.

Health and safety hazards. Young people are often familiar with their own local public areas and will be more confident in these than other towns or areas, which they do not normally visit for school, college or other reasons. A key day to day hazard in public areas will be roads and traffic and activity should be planned where this is assessed and then managed proportionately to the age and needs of young people.

Interaction with the public. Youth work organisations must ensure that any interaction with the public has been considered and included as part of a risk assessment. When managed correctly, there may be significant benefits for young people engaging with members of the public as part of a planned activity. However, organisations should be aware of the potential risks to young people, for example coming into contact with either anti-social behaviour or more serious criminal activity....

Young people should be briefed (as per the *Safety Briefings* resource) in advance of any risks identified and reminded of expected standards of behaviour.

If presented with any cause for concern, workers must seek to avoid confrontation and seek to take the safest action possible and remove the group from the situation or location. Workers should look to defuse and de-escalate where possible and avoid the use of any language or action which may aggravate the situation. Workers should not hesitate in calling the police on 999 if they deem anyone to be at immediate risk or if a crime is taking place.

In the event of an incident, immediate action should be taken to safeguard the welfare and safety of young people and colleagues. It is also important to ensure incidents are reported in accordance with the organisation's protocols to inform future delivery and risk management measures. Further information can be found in the *Incident reporting* resource.

Staffing & supervision

Youth work organisations must ensure that an assessment is made, specific to the programme to ascertain staffing requirements that will help enable effective supervision of young people and manage the associated risks. See the *Supervision* resource for further detailed information.

When providing **direct supervision**, workers should remain alert and attentive to the actions of other people in the vicinity and should position themselves appropriately in order to be able to maintain an effective overwatch of the group.

If **indirect supervision** is deemed appropriate, workers should ensure that clear boundaries (time, geography and behaviour) have been identified, agreed and confirmed with young people. A quick and simple process is agreed and communicated to young people and staff to re-establish direct supervision in an emergency or changed circumstances.

If **remote supervision** is employed, workers must ensure that contact arrangements are clear, that clear guidelines have been agreed with young people, and that identified emergency procedures are in place. This should include actions to be undertaken if a pre-arranged contact point is missed. Remote supervision should not be employed if any risk assessment has identified risks that cannot be adequately controlled or if any concerns exist regarding the competence or maturity of the group or individuals in the context of the environment and proposed activity.

One-to-one home visits

During certain youth programmes or youth services, home visits by a youth worker or workers may be necessary. Youth work organisations should ensure they have policies and procedures in place to assess the associated risks and enable steps to be taken to reduce risks for both workers, young people and other residents of the property such as family members.

Before undertaking a home visit, youth work organisations should consider the most appropriate person to undertake the visit, clarify what the outcomes and subsequent actions are likely to be and take these into account within risk assessments and visit planning.

- Home visit risk assessments may need to consider the following factors: Factors associated with the young person's household or placement
 - Reports from previous visits by colleagues
 - Are there any concerns about the young person's household or placement with regards to domestic abuse, sexual abuse, violence or coercive control, substance misuse, mental health, vulnerability to online grooming and sexual or criminal exploitation or radicalisation, or history of the young person absconding? How are these factors influenced by the confinement of the young person and/or their family in their current home or placement?
 - Does accessing the space require the use of a lift or stairs?
 - Are common spaces well-lit and clean?
 - Are exits easily accessible?
 - Who is likely to be in the young person's home or placement during the visit (children, parents, siblings, other relatives or friends, pets, including guard dogs)? Are these persons aware of the visit and agreeable with it taking place?
 - Is there an increased risk of infection in the home environment?
- Factors associated with the proposed youth work activities
 - Will the youth worker engage in any activities during the visit which may increase the risk (e.g. delivering potentially unwelcome information)?
- Factors associated with the young person's health and/or support needs
 - Does the young person have any known issues with drugs, alcohol or other psychoactive substances?
 - Does the young person have any known mental health conditions?
 - Does the young person have any additional educational, emotional or behavioural support needs?
 - Does the young person have a known history of violence or anti-social behaviour?
 - Does any of the above apply to others known to live at the same property?

- Environmental factors
 - Are there any known risks associated with the neighbourhood?
 - What risks may be present in the areas surrounding the home that need to be accessed when approaching and leaving the property? What will be the routes in and out and is safe car parking available?
 - Have any events occurred in the neighbourhood within the last 48 hours that might increase risk (e.g. crimes or police activity)?
 - Are there times of day that would increase risk? For example, during the hours of darkness
 - Does the area have reduced reception for mobile devices?
 - Does the worker have a complete and exact address of the visit?
- Factors that may increase worker vulnerability
 - Working alone (see the *Lone working on programme* resource)
 - Visible physical conditions that may increase vulnerability (pregnancy, disabilities or sensory impairments)
 - Lack of experience, competence or training (Further information can be found in both the *Worker competency - training, qualifications, experience and personal attributes* and *Workforce information, instruction, training and supervision* resources)
 - Provocative or controversial attire or accessories which may trigger reactions
 - Lack of a safety/emergency plan or poor understanding of the risks and associated protocols

Youth workers should be well trained in policies and procedures related to home visits and should be briefed on and understand the risk assessment for each specific visit. Youth work organisations should ensure effective procedures are in place to both identify and mitigate risks.

Emergency procedures should be in place which ensure workers have ready access to mobile communications and are able to raise the alarm and access support should it be required, with a telephone 'check in and check out' procedure with a colleague or manager.

When identified risks are determined to be too great or are unable to be mitigated by the implementation of reasonable control measures, an alternative plan should be implemented until the risk can be mitigated by changed conditions or the availability of further support. Appropriate support may include the worker being accompanied by a colleague or supervisor, the use of PPE, changing the day or time of the visit, changing the site of the visit to a safer venue, or postponing the visit.

Use of private settings

To keep young people safe and to safeguard the relationships they have with key adults, it is prohibited for private settings such as workers, volunteers or young people's homes and gardens to be used for youth work/sector group activities. The following outlines some (not exhaustive) of the reasons this directive is adhered to:

It is vital to maintain professional boundaries between practitioner (workers and volunteers) and young people. This is to safeguard both young people and practitioners from risks of allegations on inappropriate behaviour. There are many very public incidences where the boundaries have been blurred and this creates an unacceptable reputational risk for youth sector organisations and practitioners.

There are safeguarding concerns and implications associated with young people attending the private homes of workers. A practitioner's home or garden is a private domain that must remain separate from any interaction with a young person they work with in a professional or voluntary capacity. Maintaining professional boundaries is not only important for individual professionals and service users, it also protects organisations and the integrity of the services they provide. Furthermore, safeguarding principles, supervision ratios and code of conduct are called into question when using private homes, putting workers and young people in an unnecessary vulnerable position.

Health and safety is harder to assess and manage effectively in a domestic setting (where normal health and safety at work rules don't apply). Furthermore, standard domestic home insurance will not cover 'commercial activity from the home' unless specified, and public liability insurance would be required to cover the activity. Use of private land granted by a landowner for trekking, camping or similar activities could be considered but the youth work organisation would need to conduct due diligence in a similar way to other third-party providers.

If the regular venue you use is not available and you would like to continue to provide services or activities for young people, if appropriate, consider using public spaces following the guidance summarised in this document. If using a public space is not appropriate consider using a third-party venue, review the day venues guidance to help you consider and manage potential risks.