

Group Management and Supervision of young people: Good Practice Guide

Guidance

Introduction

Whether you are facilitating a local activity or leading a national programme, the safety, welfare and positive engagement of young people depend on clear planning, consistent supervision and effective communication. This guide brings together good practice for group management with practical advice on selecting the right type of supervision, setting appropriate staffing levels, and managing specific scenarios. It is designed to help youth workers deliver safer, more empowering experiences while maintaining high standards of care and accountability.

1. Purpose and Core Principles

- **Duty of care:** Workers have a duty of care for young people and for each other during programmes, events and activities.
- **Clarity of roles:** Everyone involved should understand their responsibilities, reporting lines and how decisions are made.
- **Effective communication:** Clear, age-appropriate briefings for young people; concise coordination among workers and third-party providers.
- **Integrated supervision:** When partners (e.g. transport, activity or accommodation providers) are involved, agree supervisory responsibilities throughout delivery and retain overall responsibility for the group's welfare.

2. Preparation and Planning

- **Understand aims:** Be clear on the programme's purpose, objectives and planned activities.
- **Pre-brief:** Brief workers (including third-party providers where relevant) and young people on the code of conduct and expected standards of behaviour.
- **Risk assessment:** Ensure workers are aware of significant risks and control measures. Maintain competence in dynamic risk assessment to respond to unforeseen hazards.
- **Public health guidance:** Be aware of current guidance on epidemics (e.g. Covid-19) and any control measures affecting delivery.
- **Registers and data security:** Maintain an up-to-date list of all group members with essential welfare, health and safety information, in adherence to data security requirements.
- **Supervision levels:** Set supervision levels appropriate to individual needs, activity and location.
- **Roll-calls:** Take headcounts at higher-risk times, such as when getting on or off transport, in crowded areas, or near hazards like cliffs or water.
- **Travel plans:** Ensure everyone knows meeting points and what to do if separated.
- **Emergency planning:** Make incident and emergency plans known, including how to access first aid and contact other workers.
- **Venue knowledge:** Where possible, gain prior knowledge of venues, including emergency procedures, first aid points and how to contact venue staff.
- **Ongoing monitoring:** Continuously monitor activities and adjust plans to suit the group's physical and mental condition, abilities and weather conditions.

3. Roles, Leadership and Welfare Support

- **Lead responsibility:** Identify a person responsible for managing the programme and maintaining the safety and welfare of all participants and workers. Ensure organisational safety policy is adhered to at all times.
- **Supervision:** Maintain an appropriate watch over young people to protect their safety and wellbeing. Anticipate likely behaviour and take reasonable steps to prevent harm.
- **Welfare support (pastoral care):** Provide inclusive support beyond immediate safety needs, including behavioural and emotional support, discipline, privacy and security, first aid, access to medication, emergency care, and communication with parents or guardians when necessary.
- **Multiple workers:** Define and communicate roles and responsibilities clearly to workers and young people. All workers share responsibility for welfare support.
- **Third-party delivery:** External providers may lead specific activities, but youth workers retain overall responsibility and continue to provide welfare support.

4. Types of Supervision

- **Direct supervision:** Young people remain within sight and verbal contact of workers.
- **Indirect supervision:** Workers may not have direct sight or verbal contact, but clear boundaries are in place (e.g. time, geography, behaviour). A simple and rapid process must exist to re-establish direct supervision in an emergency or changed circumstances.
- **Remote supervision:** Workers primarily monitor and respond in an emergency. Contact arrangements must be clear and reliable, with agreed guidelines and actions if a contact point is missed. Only employ remote supervision where risks can be adequately controlled and the group's competence and maturity suit the environment and activities.

Supervision Ratios and Staffing

- There should always be at least two trained people present when working with young people. Ideally one of these would be a professionally qualified Level 6 Youth Worker, or at least someone qualified to Level 3 or above as these levels of training confer safeguarding knowledge and the ability to make autonomous decisions. However, where this is not possible, organisations should ensure that all staff have training in Safeguarding, emergency First Aid and Risk Assessment to ensure safety. If there are exceptions (for example, such as one-to-one mentoring or case-work for those working in justice or social care) then there should be appropriate and safe mitigations in place. These should include meeting where there are other people present, checking in and out of all sessions with a manager, and applying the principle of legitimate contact ([see resource](#)). The NYA endorses NSPCC guidance on staffing ratios for groups of young people, which can be found on its website. For groups of more than one young person there should always be two adults present. For every additional 8-10 young people you should have another adult present. You should always have at least two adults present. When planning resourcing of staff and volunteers you should take into account the needs and abilities of the young people you are working with. For example, when working with young people with special educational needs or disabilities, you may require additional adults present to ensure equity of experience and to protect rights.
- When determining staffing requirements, organisations and workers should take account of a range of influencing factors, including the competence, experience and training of workers; the nature of the activity and its duration; the characteristics of the environment and any associated risks; and the size and composition of the group. This includes consideration of young people's age, gender, maturity, abilities, behaviour, medical needs, emotional wellbeing and any additional support requirements. Planning should also consider contingencies, including the impact of a worker becoming unavailable at short notice and the feasibility of alternative supervision arrangements.
- For some activities, particularly adventurous or specialist activities, minimum staffing ratios are set by National Governing Bodies or licensing frameworks. These requirements must always be met and should be regarded as minimum standards only. They may not be sufficient for all groups, especially where young people have more complex needs or where environmental risks are higher. In some cases, where workers are inexperienced in a particular activity, they may need to be included within participant numbers when calculating ratios.
- Legal minimum staffing ratios apply for children under five, as set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework. These ratios are designed for early years and childcare settings and may need to be increased for off site visits, trips or activities that present additional risks.
- There is no requirement for workers to be of the same gender as young people. However, organisations should plan in advance for safeguarding, privacy and welfare needs, particularly for mixed gender groups, residential programmes or situations involving personal care. For younger groups and residential provision, it is considered good practice to have workers of more than one gender present where possible.

- For programmes taking place in remote locations or abroad, organisations must have robust contingency plans in place to ensure effective supervision can be maintained if a worker becomes ill, injured or needs to leave the group. This may require changes to activities, locations or itineraries in order to maintain safe supervision levels.
- Where a single worker is responsible for supervising a group, this should be exceptional and subject to a clear and documented risk assessment. Lone supervision must only be considered where the young people involved are assessed as sufficiently competent to manage themselves safely, know how to access support, and where appropriate organisational safeguards are in place. Wherever reasonably practicable, at least two adults should be present to reduce risk and support effective safeguarding practice.

6. Specific Scenarios

Lone Working

- If a worker is to be away from the group for a significant time, put safeguards in place to protect their health and wellbeing and to ensure a suitable response to any incident. Apprentices, trainees, new workers and young people should not work alone.
- Managing Unstructured Time Safely
- Maintain appropriate supervision throughout the programme and until young people are collected or formally depart. For residential programmes, this includes overnight.
- Avoid using terms such as “free time” or “downtime” in ways that imply reduced supervision. Reinforce that the code of conduct applies at all times. Ensure a clear staffing system so that individuals and groups remain supervised.

Public Interaction

- Include expected or potential interaction with the public in risk assessments for travel and structured activities, such as social action projects. Use local knowledge to identify specific risks and effective controls.
- Brief young people on identified risks and behaviour standards. During direct supervision, remain alert, position workers to maintain effective oversight, and avoid confrontation. De-escalate where possible. Remove the group from risky situations if necessary and contact the police if there is immediate or latent risk or suspected criminal activity.
- Report incidents according to organisational policy and take action to protect safety and welfare.

Workers and Their Own Children

- If a worker's child is present, to ensure professional boundaries and equity parent/guardians should not directly supervise their own child. Where possible a parent/guardian and child should be placed in separate groups, if this is not possible then staffing should be increased or the programme adjusted to manage risk. An agreement should be put in place between the parent/guardian, child and organisation.

Leaving Early

- Establish clear protocols for early departure that reflect the programme's nature and the young person's age and vulnerability. Clarify when duty of care ends, coordinate handover with parents or guardians, and arrange safe transport home.

7. Responsibilities of Young People

Ensure each young person:

- Knows who the leaders and workers are and how to contact them.
- Understands instructions and briefings, the main risks involved, and how their behaviour affects safety.
- Can alert staff if someone is missing or in difficulty.
- Understands boundaries and restrictions, including geographical limits, curfews and activities requiring staff permission.
- Knows designated meeting places and what to do if lost or separated.
- Understands and accepts the code of conduct.

8. Emergency and Incident Management

- Be familiar with incident and emergency plans, including how to access first aid and contact additional support.
- If concerns arise, prioritise safety: remove the group from risk, de-escalate and avoid provocative language or actions.
- Notify police where criminal concerns exist or if anyone is at immediate or potential risk.
- Report all incidents in line with organisational policy and implement protective actions without delay.