

# Public Spaces and Outreach Work

Guidance

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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.

## Assessing the risk

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 assessments 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 within a town that 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 of engaging with members of the public as part of a planned activity. However, organisations should be aware of the potential risks to young people and groups of coming into contact with either anti-social behaviour or more serious criminal activity including gang related activity.

Young people should be briefed in advance of any particular risks identified and reminded of expected standards of behaviour.

If presented with any cause for concern, workers must seek to avoid confrontation wherever possible and seek to take the safest action possible and remove the individual/group from the situation or location if possible and deemed necessary. 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/has taken place.

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

# Staffing & supervision

Youth work organisations must ensure that an assessment is made, specific to the programme in order to ascertain staffing requirements that will help enable effective supervision of young people and manage the associated risks.

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 (of time, geography and behaviour) have been identified and agreed with young people, and that a quick and simple process to re-establish direct supervision in an emergency or changed circumstances is in place.

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.

## 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? I.e. during darkness hours
  - 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
  - Visible physical conditions that may increase vulnerability (pregnancy, disabilities or sensory impairments)
  - Lack of experience, competence or training
  - 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.