

Residential Venues

Guidance

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Contents

Fire safety	2
Safety and security	2
Safeguarding: sleeping accommodation Safeguarding: access to toilets and washing facilities	3
Overseas standards	4

Youth work organisations use a range of different venues for delivering their services. The venue itself is a key part of the overall safety management system so advance planning is required.

When using residential venues that are not owned or managed by the youth work organisation, workers should ensure that procedures are in place to manage the safety and wellbeing of young people and workers at the venue. The need for this is even greater in settings that are not specifically designed for young people or are open to the public such as hotels or hostels. An induction should be arranged to familiarise the activity leader with the venue and share relevant safety information, for example where the fire exits and fire extinguishers are located.

Where the venue is owned or managed directly by the youth work organisation, effective policies and procedures should be upheld. If the site is shared with other activities that are not directly related to youth work delivery, additional policies, procedures and risk assessments should be applied.

Before booking venues with any external provider, organisations should undertake a check and assessment of the provider or venue to help assess that appropriate safety standards are in place. A request of the venues own health and safety/safeguarding policy should be requested where possible. It may also be appropriate to share a copy of the organisations own safeguarding policy and request the venue comply with it (any such agreement should be made in writing). The *Third-party providers* resource provides further information on how to carry out such checks and assessments.

A preliminary visit to new venues (or ones that have undergone changes since they were last used) will normally help identify the more significant health and safety considerations and inform the risk assessment process. Checks could also be made to confirm that the venue or provider holds any external accreditations relevant to their provision. See the *Accreditation schemes* resource for further details.

On arrival at any venue, workers should carry out a basic visual inspection of the facilities to observe the general state of the site, bedroom rooms and/or building fabric, any equipment provided; and to ensure emergency exits are clearly marked and accessible. Workers should try to meet with venue staff upon arrival to check whether there has been any changes or health and safety matters they need to know during the stay. If necessary, workers should implement additional control measures to help ensure group safety. If workers are concerned and are not confident that all risks can be managed effectively on the day, plans for the stay should be changed.

It is always good practice to ensure that all young people and workers are aware of pertinent safety information in relation to the venue and their accommodation. A basic safety briefing (See *Safety briefings* for further information) should be provided on arrival and should cover key aspects such as:

- A tour of the site
- Fire safety and evacuation procedures
- First aid points
- Security and other site users
- Key hazards
- Expected standards of behaviour including overnight routine and timings
- Where to find and how to raise staff, including overnight
- Washing and toilet facilities and an explanation of any safeguarding measures in place

Fire safety

The Fire safety resource provides more information and some good practice that can be applied to residential venues. A key aspect to include when occupying residential venues is to conduct a fire drill in order to familiarise young people and staff with escape routes and the emergency meeting location.

Safety and security

Where possible, the following considerations should be taken into account and form part of the risk assessment:

- How secure are the buildings and individual rooms?
 - Are window restrictors in place to prevent accidental falls whilst still allowing ventilation?
 - Are there other users of the site and can the group's accommodation area be accessed by other users?
 - If applicable, is there 24 hour staffing of reception?
 - Can bedroom doors be locked from the inside and, if required, would workers have access to a master key?
- What environmental hazards are present? Examples include the following but others must be identified by the youth work organisation as part of their risk assessment, informed by a preliminary visit to the accommodation in advance.
 - Balconies: Does the structure appear solid?; is the behaviour of young people likely to pose a risk?; what is the height of the railings? (UK building regulations require 1.1m, however when overseas workers should be aware that local standards may differ and a judgement must be made about suitability); do they allow or encourage people to climb on them and lean over?; Are there large gaps between railings?
 - Swimming pools: a risk-benefit assessment should be undertaken before any use of any pool facilities is considered, and use of the pool should be clearly planned and never a spontaneous decision. Pools should be secured by the venue and be made out of bounds to young people unless supervised by workers.
 - Inland water on site – bodies of water such as ponds/lakes and canals require specific risk assessment to ensure all possible measures as is reasonably practical have been taken to prevent accidental drowning. Such areas should be secured by the venue and made out of bounds, unless supervised by workers.

- Access to alcohol: If there is a bar where alcohol is served either at the accommodation facility or in the nearby vicinity, access to the venue may not be suitable for young people. Some community or sporting venues however do have such facilities so workers should brief young people and employ control measures to ensure adherence to any code of conduct. Consideration should also be given to other users of the bar and the safeguarding of all young people. Opportunities for young people to leave the site without supervision or permission should be managed with young people briefed regarding expectations and code of conduct.
 - COSHH. Workers should be mindful of potentially hazardous substances that may be present at the venue, within buildings or being used on site such as cleaning chemicals. Workers should liaise with venue/site staff to identify substances, evaluate any associated risk and employ appropriate controls, such as locking these away so they cannot be accessed by young people. More information can be found in the Control of substances hazardous to health regulations (COSHH) resource.
- Young people should be briefed regarding expected standards of behaviour at all times and should be familiar with emergency procedures and how to raise the alarm or get help.

Safeguarding: sleeping accommodation

Where possible, sleeping accommodation should be exclusively for the group's use. Where this is not possible, group rooms should be located next to each other, ideally on the same floor. Workers should have separate sleeping accommodation in close proximity to their group and young people should be briefed on where staff will be sleeping in case of an emergency.

When allocating room lists, consideration should be given to the age, gender and anticipated behaviour of the young people. Where possible and practicable, rooms should be single gender and those over and under 18 should always be separate.

Consideration should be given to the numbers of young people in each room. Where possible, a minimum of three young people to a room is advised to discourage exclusive relationships, depending on the age of the young people. However, it is recognised that many residential facilities are set up in twin rooms so where pairs may be unavoidable they should be single gender and either over or under 18. It is also recognised that single occupancy rooms may be appropriate to meet medical or accessibility needs.

Depending on the age of the young people, workers should be aware that close relationships can develop during a residential programme and young people should be reminded of any agreed codes of conduct and expected behaviours. Briefings regarding the importance of maintaining appropriate relationships should be provided.

Staff should keep a room list and ensure they know who should be in each room and check this during the evening, at 'lights out' and for an appropriate period of time beyond this. Young people should also be aware of how to safely access the toilet during the night.

Safeguarding: access to toilets and washing facilities

Where shower and toilet facilities are not ensuite, arrangements for managing the use of shared facilities should be considered. Where possible, single gender facilities should be used, and staff should use separate facilities to young people. Facilities should be lockable and secure and provide a private space. Cubicles must be secure enough that children feel safe but care must be taken not to inadvertently provide a locked room that could be used for sexual activity, (whether consensual or abusive), bullying, substance abuse, misuse or distribution or any other illegal or anti-social activity.

Where possible, facilities should not be accessible by other users. Where this is not possible, staff should consider appropriate, reasonable and practicable control measures to safeguard all group members, e.g. allocate specific washing/showering times for separate groups/genders, young people and staff. Consideration of inclusivity and diversity of the group access to facilities should be considered, i.e. trans children, young people with disabilities or muslim children who need access to running water to pray.

Overseas standards

Youth work organisations and their workers should be aware that overseas standards of residential accommodation may differ, and in some cases be lower, than those in the UK. Organisations should gather as much information as possible regarding standards and conditions that are likely to be experienced on an overseas residential trip in advance. Where possible, a preliminary visit is advised so that accommodation providers can be seen, acceptable provision selected and risk assessments informed by first hand experience. Where such a visit is not possible or feasible, further information should be sought either directly with the provider or perhaps via a trusted local agent.

Information gathered either via a preliminary visit or remotely should inform a thorough risk assessment and measures should be implemented to manage risk. Carrying spare padlocks and/or smoke and carbon monoxide alarms are simple measures that can help to reduce risk.