

Lone Working

Scope

October 2018

Good Apple are committed to achieving the highest standards of health, safety and welfare for all activities within its control.

This document sets out guidance for staff working alone and should be read in conjunction with corporate and departmental policies on violence, aggressive behaviour and harassment towards employees

Where staff are working together with other agencies, including where there are integrated management arrangements, jointly agreed procedures and guidance for staff will be developed, drawing on existing agency specific guidance. However, the employing authority will retain ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the health and safety of their staff is properly attended to. It will therefore be necessary for managers in these settings to be aware of all applicable guidance information and procedures.

Who are lone workers and what jobs do they do?

The Health and Safety Executive defines lone workers as 'those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision'. There are many situations where staff work alone both on site and off site. These include

On site lone working activities

Staff who work separately from others e.g. reception staff, staff who interview service users, staff who work in isolated areas or offices
Staff who work outside of normal hours i.e. out of hours staff, caretakers, security

Off site lone working activities

Staff who undertake home visiting
Staff who travel between workplaces and other off site locations
Home working
Out of hours social work teams

Where possible the need for lone working should be eliminated. However where this is not practicable units/ divisions must assess risk, devise and implement appropriate procedures and protocols to minimise risk. This must be supported by relevant training and monitoring arrangements.

Purpose of this guidance

- D To advise on safe working practices
- D To set out responsibilities for staff and managers
- D To generally raise awareness of risk and the management of risk

A programme of biennial health and safety audits will be undertaken to ensure that this guidance has been effectively implemented.

Assessing and controlling the risks of working alone

Risk assessment is the key to safe working. Managers must undertake a risk assessment of all activities where lone working cannot be eliminated and suitable control measures should be implemented to reduce levels of risk as low as reasonably practicable.

Identify the hazards, assess the risks involved and put measures in place to avoid or control the risks.

Further guidance on risk assessment can be found in the corporate and departmental safety management system.

Safe working arrangements for lone workers

Establishing safe working for lone workers is no different from organising the safety of other employees. Managers must ensure that there are safe systems in place for all lone working activities within their area of responsibility and ensure that staff follow them. Lone workers should be at no more risk than other employees. This may require extra risk control measures. Precautions should take account of both normal work activities and foreseeable emergencies e.g. fire, equipment failure, illness and accidents.

Managers must identify situations where staff work alone and give full consideration to the following.

- D Does the workplace present a special risk to the lone worker?
- D Is there a safe access and egress for one person?
- D Is there a risk of violence?
- D Does the member of staff have a medical condition or disability requiring work adjustment?
- D Is the person medically fit and suitable to work alone?
- D Are there effective communication links? Different methods should be assessed and evaluated as part of a local prevention strategy including panic alarms, two-way communication systems e.g. mobile phones. Use of covert distress messages to summon assistance in a discrete manner.
- D Is there an effective procedure for recording/monitoring staff movement?
- D Have contingency plans been established to provide the back up needed if unforeseen events that could jeopardise staff health and safety arise.
- D How will the worker be supervised?
- D Are women especially at risk if they work alone?
- D Are young or inexperienced staff especially at risk?
- D Can one person safely handle equipment?
- D Is there sound knowledge and understanding of health and safety procedures, incident reporting, and guidance information issued to staff
- D Are staff trained to diffuse aggressive or violent behaviour or to undertake the necessary action to remain safe
- D Lone workers should be capable of responding correctly to emergencies. Emergency procedures should be established and staff trained in them at induction.
- D What monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure that lone workers remain safe?
- D Lone workers must have access to adequate first aid facilities and mobile workers must carry a first aid kit for treating minor injuries.
- D Occasionally risk assessment may indicate that lone workers need training in first aid.

Good practice checklists for managers and staff can be found in appendix 1.

Monitoring Lone Workers

Managers must implement procedures/ systems to ensure that the whereabouts and safety of lone workers are known at all times.

Procedures need to be put in place to monitor lone workers these may include:

- Supervisors periodically visiting and observing people working alone
- Regular contact between lone worker and supervisor by phone or radio
- Automatic warning devices which operate if specific signals are not received from lone worker
- Regular checks of reception areas, interview room etc to ensure worker is okay
- Other devices which are designed to raise the alarm
- Checks that the lone worker has returned to base /home on completion of a task

There are particular tasks where staff working alone may be more vulnerable to risk. These include

- D Out of hours working
- D Assessments of compulsory hospital admissions under the Mental Health Act
- D Investigations of child abuse
- D Removal of children from their care providers under an emergency protection order
- D New contacts with members of the public where there is no previous background information
- D Undertaking home visits to service users
- D Providing services to service users who have a known record of violent or aggressive behaviour
- D Escorting students who are potentially violent, or who may attempt to abscond – see separate missing child policy

Information gathering

In planning visits to, or meetings with, service users, students and family, full consideration must always be given to any potential health and safety implications. This will include the gathering of as much relevant information as possible. The absence of any such information should be regarded as a risk factor in itself.

Information should be obtained from a variety of sources including

- D GP
- D Quality alerts
- D Hospital records
- D Information from referrer
- D Children's and adult services databases
- D Police
- D Partner organisations

Additional information to be considered can be found in appendix 2.

Making home visits

Home visits can present particular risks. Interviews are taking place in unfamiliar territory. Travel is involved, sometimes in areas regarded as high risk. If you are visiting estates or areas where there is concern about street crime consider your personal safety and how you may present yourself to others. You should avoid carrying valuables, if you have a mobile telephone conceal it. A brief case or diary may attract attention. Check out where you are going beforehand so that you are not wandering about looking obviously lost. When planning a home visit consider the following

- D Is a home visit really necessary? Could the person be interviewed at the office/health base/day centre?
- D Can someone else be present such as a co-worker etc.? Can you make a joint visit with a colleague including partner agencies such as health?
- D Is there a possibility of a service user relative or friend being present which may add to the risk -

try to check this out beforehand.

- D Check out what you know about the person. Any history of aggressive behaviour should entail a discussion with the line manager as to the best way of approaching a visit. With such situations preference will always be to interview them from a work base.
- D Where possible plan your visit during daylight preferably in the morning this gives time to sort out a difficult situation if you find one.
- D Every workplace must establish effective contact/tracking arrangements and procedures in place if an emergency arises. You have a legal responsibility to comply with local arrangements established to protect your personal safety
- D If you are not returning to the office, you must phone in to say you have finished.
- D Always take a mobile phone or other means of communication e.g. tracker phone
- D Take a personal alarm, however be aware of its limitations
- D Do not go into a person's home if they appear to be drunk or ill etc. unless you have another colleague with you and you both deem it safe to enter.
- D When you are in someone's home check out the exit, try to sit near it. Be aware of potential weapons.
- D Ask that dogs and other potentially dangerous pets are kept out of the room.
- D Think about where you sit, avoid sitting on peoples' beds.
- D If the user starts to get abusive/aggressive then leave immediately.
- D In the case of mental health assessments or removal of children always plan who needs to attend the assessment, whether the police are necessary. The senior manager should always be informed if a member of staff is completing a home visit or a visit where a staff member is working in an isolating environment.

Remember the three Vs of visiting:

**Vet
Verify
Vigilance**

Managers have a responsibility to ascertain the whereabouts of someone on a home/off site visit who has not reported in either at the estimated time for the visit to end or at the end of the day. The work base should not close operations for the night until it has been ascertained that all staff have finished their visits and are safe. The staff on the visit should be contacted to confirm this or be given the opportunity to activate an agreed word or phrase to alert base that they are feeling under threat.

Driving alone

In the course of work staff may have to make journeys in their car alone. There have been a number of incidents nationally in the recent past, which have highlighted the potential dangers and have raised awareness of how vulnerable each of us could be despite the care we take. However, the risk of such an incident is extremely low.

The advice given below is intended to give practical guidance on how to reduce the possible dangers that may occur whilst driving alone

- D Always keep windows closed and doors locked when driving alone, particularly at night and in isolated areas.
- D Do not give lifts to strangers e.g. a hitchhiker, or accept lifts from a stranger if you breakdown or have an accident.
- D If you see an incident or someone tries to flag you down, think first. Is it genuine? How would you best help? It might be safer and also more helpful and practicable to report what you have seen at the next telephone box or garage.
- D If you believe you are being followed keep calm and continue driving to a busy place e.g. garage, police station etc. where help could be available. If necessary draw attention to yourself by sounding your horn.
- D If other drivers or vehicle occupants try to attract attention e.g. indicating a fault with your vehicle, ignore them and avoid eye contact.
- D If a car pulls in front of you and causes you to stop NEVER turn off the engine. If the driver or passenger approaches: reverse as far as is safely possible and ensure doors and windows are locked. If necessary draw attention to yourself e.g. by sounding the horn.

▷ When parking in daylight always try to imagine what the place would be like at night.

- D When parking at night, park near a streetlight and as close to the service user's home as possible.
- D Always lock away any valuables out of sight in the boot. Women drivers should not leave spare shoes visible which might indicate the driver's gender.
- D Never leave the car unlocked or the ignition key in it when it is unattended.
- D When returning to the car, always have the door key ready. It is better not to stand by the car searching for the key.

Travel on foot or public transport

- D Think ahead, be alert and be aware of your surroundings
- D Keep to busy, well-lit roads and avoid poorly lit or quiet underpass
- D Avoid carrying valuables (i.e. excessive amounts of cash or expensive jewellery)
- D Always sit near the bus driver on a driver-only bus or stay downstairs
- D If possible, wait for the bus at a busy stop that is well lit, or a bus stop close to area of activity - for example, a garage or a late shop
- D Have the fare ready, separate from other money or valuables
- D Try to avoid having hands full with heavy bags

Working alone in the workplace

Although lone workers often work out in the community, there are many who interact with service users or members of the public in their place of work without colleagues nearby. It is imperative that consideration is given to measures that will eliminate or reduce personal safety risks when designing the workplace and systems of work.

- D Ensure that hedges and shrubs are cut back, especially around entrances and exits. Provide good lighting in public areas and walkways.
- D Consider physical barriers. Remember however that barriers can increase aggression and hinder interaction
- D The layout of receptions should not place staff in isolated position. There should be a clear route of escape available.
- D Consider use of CCTV and panic alarms and communication systems.
- D Panic alarms should be tested weekly, response procedures should be established and practice alarm drills held at least every 6 months
- D The environment can influence an individual's behaviour. Colours of walls and furniture can affect mood and perception. Choose pastel colours for a calming effect.
- D Temperature should be controlled to maintain a comfortable environment.
- D Careful positioning of furniture is essential, rooms should be checked at least daily for any items that could be used as potential weapons.
- D Access to the building should be controlled and monitored.
- D Systems of work should be reviewed to ensure that they do not increase the potential for the risk of violence e.g. keeping waiting times to a minimum.
- D Reception staff should be trained in customer care and de-escalation techniques.
- D Staff should be instructed in safe interviewing and teaching practices.
- D The policy on violence and aggression should be displayed in reception areas.

Working in other bases i.e. hospital wards, other health bases, day centres/residential homes

Some Children's and Adults staff may have contact with students in a variety of settings within the community. Where a lone worker is working at another employer's workplace, that employer should inform the lone worker of any risks and the control measures that should be taken. In these settings it is as important to establish likely risks and control measures, as it would be if you were seeing the person in their own home.

In any unfamiliar setting staff should familiarise themselves with the security features such as panic alarms, exit routes. Should there be concerns about their safety, consideration should be given to asking another staff member to sit in or having the interview somewhere that is observed by other staff, or by delaying the interview.

For any interview members of staff should ensure another staff member, ward staff, residential care worker etc. knows where they are, with whom and what time the interview should conclude. An interview should not take place unless there are other members of staff around.

When interviewing on hospital sites familiarise yourself with the local arrangements for dealing with emergencies.

Interviews in police stations

Whilst it is normal to wish to give service users the right to speak to us alone, consideration must be given to personal safety within custody areas. You should request police presence if the person's behaviour indicates this to be necessary.

Working at Home

Good Apple recognises that people work best when they have a satisfactory balance between their paid work and the remainder of their lives as individuals, carers and members of the community. Staff are increasingly working at home both on a permanent and temporary basis. Home working arrangements for a team or individual should not be approved until a competent person has carried out a risk assessment of the individuals concerned, the type and nature of the expected duties and all associated hazards.

Potential hazards that may arise include

- D Handling of loads
- D Use of work equipment
- D Use of electrical equipment
- D Use of substances or materials
- D Working with display Screen equipment
- D Violence and Aggression. The potential exists for a home worker to be the victim of violence in their own home as a consequence of their work activities. The risk assessment should identify those staff that may have a higher risk of exposure. Service users with a potential for violent and aggressive behaviour should not be allocated to staff working from home. Procedures must be put in place to prevent service users from discovering the private addresses of home workers and briefings should be given to all home workers on personal safety issues. Effective arrangements for communicating with home workers must be established.
- D Stress/mental health

Further guidance on working at home can be found in Drop Box.

Alerts

Good Apple stores information on a database which allows staff to add a warning alert on a service user's data entry. Risk assessments are completed and updated regularly. It is then possible to add an explanatory note. People using this facility to add a warning alert must make sure any note is factual and bear in mind that service users have a right to access this information (Data Protection Act 1998).

Defusing potentially dangerous situations

Guidelines will never cover every eventuality. Members of staff whatever their level of responsibility or role must use their experience, skills and common sense when faced with aggressive service users. Staff identified in the risk assessment must be provided with relevant training in personal safety, de-escalation and breakaway techniques

Where physical violence is likely staff should

- D First choice remove yourself from the vicinity.
- D Try to put some sizeable object e.g. table, between you and the potential assailant.

- D Keep yourself between the service user and the door and/or escape route.
- D Stay calm, speak firmly, quietly and more slowly since obvious anxiety or aggressiveness can provoke a violent reaction.
- D Disperse any onlookers.
- D Remove any potential weapons e.g. ashtray, tools. If threatened with a weapon the service user should be asked quietly but firmly to put it down.
- D Avoid sudden moves.
- D Maintain eye contact, but do not stare.
- D Raise an alarm and call for assistance, where possible.

Physical restraint is a last option and should be used only by staff at risk as a defence against potential or escalating violence and in circumstances where there is a reasonable chance of success. For example, staff should not normally attempt physical restraint if physically inferior, outnumbered or when the service user has ready access to weapons. Where an incident escalates and the service user cannot be controlled, staff members must be prepared to vacate the room even if extensive damage results. Police assistance should be summoned immediately. **Personal safety is of paramount importance.**

Reporting incidents and near misses:

There are established procedures for dealing with assaults or threats of violence. All managers and staff must familiarise themselves with these procedures. Key points are:

- D All accidents or incidents including verbal abuse, racial abuse, threats, and aggressive behaviour or violence should be reported immediately to the line manager and reported on HS1/HS2.
- D Actual violence should be reported to the police and a prosecution considered. This may entail consultation with the legal consultants.
- D An immediate de-briefing should be made available to the staff member. If no senior is on the premises the duty senior should be contacted and they should arrange a debriefing session.
- D An investigation of the event should take place as soon as possible to see if protective action should be taken. This should be done jointly with other partnership agencies if it is appropriate.
- D The manager and staff member should discuss any need for continued support/counselling.
- D A factual record of the event should be made on the service user staff file. Consideration should be given to putting a warning message on the Service users' database.
- D Risk assessments must be reviewed after an incident or near miss.
- D Incidents/near misses should be monitored at a local level to identify trends.

Support to staff

Good Apple is committed to supporting any member of staff who is abused, threatened or assaulted whilst acting on behalf of the council. Managers should assess what support can reasonably be offered, including counselling where necessary, as soon as possible after the incident. Staff will be supported to access to a confidential counselling service this can be arranged through their manager. All incidents will be taken seriously and the fullest support offered to the member of staff concerned. You have a legal responsibility to report all incidents, it will not be seen as an adverse reflection on your ability to do your job. These incidents will be monitored so that the effectiveness of the policy can be evaluated.

Appendix 1

1. Good Practice Checklists

Checklist for Teams & Local Managers	Please Tick
Lone working avoided where possible	
Risk assessments in their area have been carried out and staff comply with the procedures determined by the risk assessment	

Regular meetings are held with staff to discuss and evaluate working practices.	
All members of the team have had appropriate training in personal safety and managing aggression	
All staff understand that their own safety must be a priority	
Appropriate information on safety, or on histories of violent or potentially violent service users is gathered and shared	
Systems have been implemented to ensure that the whereabouts and safety of staff can be demonstrated at all times	
Suitable means of two way communication provided for all staff that undertake home visiting	
Safety procedures have been explained at local induction, and through induction checklists, and agency staff have been alerted to safety issues and problems	
Panic alarm systems have been installed where appropriate, particularly where service users are seen alone. Systems should be checked regularly. Systems should be in place in order to ensure that staff know what to do in the event that a panic alarms is activated	
Coded signals for requesting help have been agreed	
Emergency procedures ensure that telephone calls for help do not get lost on the switchboard	
Procedures are in place for tracing staff who have not phoned in on time	
All emergency procedures are rehearsed and tested	
Staff are not working alone in isolated rooms and checking procedures are introduced for staff who work alone with service users	
Where an actual risk is identified staff should look at alternative arrangements such as working in pairs	
Staff will be supported if they request a colleague to accompany them in certain circumstances or refuse to visit certain areas where there is an identified risk. If only one person is sent on a visit this person should always be experienced and trained	
Managers need to pay particular attention to any special circumstances of part time staff and staff with split posts, to make sure they are provided with support and training	
Where high risk has been identified provide service at a suitable work base	

Checklist for Staff	Please Tick
(No member of staff is expected to put themselves at risk in a violent /aggressive situation)	
Ensure that you are familiar with team procedures that relate to employee safety and ensure that you attend any training provided for you	
Be aware of safety at all times, follow all local procedures and always act in order to minimise risk	
Read appropriate files/ gather information	
Treat service users/visitors courteously, allowing them to retain optimum control and dignity	
Any procedure, which may annoy or antagonise service users and visitors should, if possible, be reviewed to make it less likely to cause annoyance	
Be aware of the importance of your behaviour and attitude towards all service users and visitors, but particularly to people who might be showing signs of being highly excited or who fall within high-risk categories	
As a general rule, relaxed, sympathetic listening will help to prevent problems turning into a violent incident. These skills may be developed by attending appropriate training courses or by learning from experienced colleagues	
Where there is evidence of poor interpersonal relationships (which may lead to aggression or violence), either between a service user and a member of staff, or	

between service users, or visitors, this should be noted by the staff involved. This should be reported to the line manager as appropriate, and attempts made if possible, to alter care arrangements and avoid conflict	
You should report to your manager about any areas or physical features you believe may expose you to potential risks	
Where panic/emergency buttons are available you should ensure that they are accessible and functioning correctly, and that there are clearly understood support systems in place	
If you feel that a particular individual or family are a high risk you should ask them to meet at a work base if you feel this appropriate	
If you are on your own and anxious or unsure about a service user (or their family) you should leave/call for support prior to a problem developing.	
If you are on your own and become anxious or unsure about a service user (or their family) during, for example, a home visit you should seek to remove yourself straight away	
After dark visits should be avoided where possible, however where required, special precautions should be taken in line with local procedures on home visiting after dark.	
Provide a list of intended visits (with address and telephone numbers) and appointments to your manager and leave it in a prominent position in their office where people know where it will be e.g. on a 'white board'	
Don't make visits without prior notification to your team	
Carry a mobile phone and/or personal alarm	
Ensure that any equipment issued for personal safety is fully operational and used at all times	
Do not enter a home if you feel at risk. Remain aware of escape routes	
Report in at least on completion of your day or shift and more frequently if appropriate, to your manager or an agreed other appropriate person	
Where possible, ensure that any information about prior history of violence from service users is available	
Arrange for a reliable relation of the service user to be present, particularly if an employee might be vulnerable to sexual harassment	
Conversely arrange with the service user that difficult relatives are not present	
Dress appropriately for the area and don't wear expensive jewellery. Wear clothes that do not hinder movement in an emergency. Check that any alarms or mobile phones are working	
When travelling by tube, you should try to minimise risk, for example by staying close to other passengers on platforms and not using empty carriages	
When travelling by car, always keep the car locked and drive with bags and valuables concealed. Try to park in well-lit areas; always back into parking spaces. Have your keys ready when approaching your car. Make sure cars are well maintained and with adequate petrol to minimise the chance of this type of breakdown	
When walking avoid back alleys and rough ground .Keep to busy, well-lit roads and avoid poorly lit or quiet areas.	
Contribute to the update of risk assessments	

Appendix 2 Information gathering

- D Are there any issues in relation to the safety of the building and its location?
- D Will the service user have any family or friends be present?
- D Does the service user have any pets and if so are they likely to present problems?

Service user's attitude or presentation

- D Is there information about the service user's mental health?
- D Is there any diagnosis or previous history that will help to assess this?
- D Is there any history of sexual disinhibition or sexual offences?
- D Is there any history of racist, sexist or homophobic behaviour? This might influence the choice of worker.
- D Have there been any threats or acts of aggression?
- D Is the service user currently taking any medication and if so what are its possible effects?
- D Has medication recently been changed or has the service user been refusing any prescribed medication?
- D Is there a history of drug and/or alcohol abuse?

Carers and/or family presentation and assistance

- D What is the attitude of the carer?
- D Are they likely to be supporting the notion of assessed outcome or are they likely to be negative?
- D Are the carers under stress at the present time and will they need particular assistance either during or after the assessment?
- D Are the carers in any way at risk from the service user? Are they the focus of any of the service users problems?

Child care issues

- D Are there any children in the situation?
- D Are those children known to Children's and Adults services?
- D Are there any at risk issues?