



# LONE WORKERS

## Definition

People who work by themselves without close or direct supervision.

## Implementation of the Policy

Within the school it is expected that implementation of this policy will be by:

- A risk assessment approach.
- Ensuring that all staff are properly trained in the Health and Safety requirements about working alone or in isolated situations as they relate to their particular job. That refresher and updating training feature in all establishment training plans.
- Reminding individual staff (especially those newly employed by the Department) of their personal responsibility under Health and Safety Legislation and their duty of care to others.
- Ensuring that response arrangements are clear, workable and that out of hours arrangements comply with any Corporate or departmental or establishment standards.

## Guidance for Staff who work alone

The following notes are intended to provide practical guidance for staff who work alone or in isolated situations in undertaking risk assessments and preparing local Procedural Guidelines within the context of the departmental Policy Statement.

### Activities that Carry Risk

The following are examples of some of the activities carried out by lone workers in the school that could expose them to risk.

- Staff working alone in buildings e.g. Site Supervisors, Catering Staff, Teachers, Managers.
- Called out after hours to deal with emergency situations e.g. key holders responding to reported activations of intruder alarm systems.
- Staff handling/carrying cash.
- Staff undertaking primary home visits.
- Visits or meetings terminating late in the evening.
- Travelling on foot particularly after dark.
- Areas lacking good public transport.
- Parking restrictions which prevent parking close to intended destinations.
- Staff working alone with hazardous machinery.
- Staff working in third party premises

This is not an exhaustive list and site examples will vary.

Staff who work alone should also assess their ways of working. Many people do their jobs the way they have always done them without thinking about whether they are putting themselves at unnecessary risk. Some of the things to consider when examining possible risks to staff are:

- Does anyone know where they are?
- If they change their plans, do they inform you?
- Do they check or vet people they are going to meet alone?
- Can they be contacted?
- Is there a check-in system and do they use it?
- Do they think about where they park - is it safe?
- Do they use the quickest route or the safest?

- Do they carry money or valuables?
- Do they carry an alarm, and do they know how to use it?
- Is it safe for them to use a particular item of equipment or machinery alone?
- Are they sufficiently competent to use the equipment alone?
- Has their induction procedure covered this area of working?
- Are they currently medically fit to work alone?

## Staff Working Arrangements

Establishing safe working arrangements for solitary workers is no different from organising the safety of other employees. Staff need to recognise the existing law and standards that apply to their work, and then assess if the requirements can be met safely by people working alone. If not, appropriate arrangements must be made.

Solitary workers face particular problems and some of the issues which need to be addressed when planning safe working environments are identified in the following paragraphs.

Solitary workers should not be exposed to significantly more risks than employees who work together. Precautions should take account of normal working conditions and foreseeable emergency situations, e.g. fire, equipment failure, illness, violent incidents and accidents. Staff should identify all the circumstances where they work alone and ask:

- Does the workplace or activity present a special risk to the solitary worker?
- Is there safe access and exit for staff?
- Are staff aware of emergency procedures out of hours?
- Can one person safely handle all of the circumstances which are likely to arise?
- Can all of the equipment, substances and processes involved in the work be safely handled by one person? The work may involve lifting objects and people who are too difficult for one person to manage alone or without special equipment.
- Will cash be handled?
- Will there be a risk of violence?
- How will the person be supervised?

Although solitary workers cannot be subjected to constant supervision, it is still the school's duty to provide appropriate controls of the work. Supervision complements information, instruction and training, and helps to ensure that staff members understand the risks associated with their work, and that the necessary safety precautions are carried out. It can

also provide guidance in situations of uncertainty, e.g. when disgruntled or aggrieved visitors could arrive unannounced on the school sites.

The extent of supervision required depends on the risks involved, and the proficiency and experience of staff members to identify and handle safety issues. Employees new to the job, undergoing training, doing a job which presents special risks or dealing with new situations may need to be accompanied.

Solitary workers should also be capable of responding correctly in emergency situations wherever they are e.g. by using outside telephone line and emergency exits. Emergency procedures should be established where necessary, and staff members trained to implement them. Solitary workers should have access to adequate first aid facilities and mobile workers should carry a first aid kit suitable for treating minor injuries.

Suitable systems should be devised to monitor the locations of solitary workers, and include a check at the end of the working period to confirm that all is well. In addition, it is desirable to consider:

- Procedures where staff periodically visit and visually monitor people working alone.
- Procedures where regular contact occurs between the solitary worker and supervision is maintained by telephone.
- A reporting back procedure must be considered in conjunction with recording the whereabouts of staff particularly where visits are protracted, or completed at the end of the day, in the evening or over the weekend. Knowing that a staff member will be making a telephone call to a colleague following the visit will remove the fear that they have been held against their will, or are unable to leave because they have been harmed. **Appropriate relatives of workers should be provided with a telephone contact to call if the worker fails to return home.**

## Handling Money and Valuables

Any staff members carrying or dealing with money or valuables are clearly at risk and the school must protect these staff.

They should provide protective equipment training and safe systems of work that diminish or avoid the risk of violence. Failure to do this may also amount to unfair constructive dismissal. It must be clear that if members of staff fail to follow instructions and procedures designed to protect their safety, this could be a disciplinary matter as they will

have contributed to their injury and any compensation claims for damages or unfair dismissal may be reduced accordingly.

The school needs to assess the risks affecting the safety of staff and devise measures which will either eliminate or reduce them to an acceptable level.

- Consideration of alternative banking systems that negate the need for staff to handle or carry money.
- The need to double-up on staff who are required to handle and collect cash and valuables.
- Changing from coin-operated pay telephones to card-operated phones.
- The security of the environment in which cash is received and handled.

### **Working alone with Machinery**

A number of working environments are equipped with machines which have the potential to cause serious accident and injuries including entrapment of parts of the body. These include lathes, saws and planers for woodworking, and shredders. Such machines should not be used by persons working alone in buildings or otherwise out of immediate emergency contact with other people.

All such machines should also be capable of being locked-off when not in use to prevent use by unauthorised and untrained people.

### **Violence to staff**

Serious acts of violence towards employees who work alone are relatively infrequent. Nevertheless, indicators do point to a rise in violence and aggressive incidents in the course of work. Men as well as women are at risk and violence occurs in any community.

Most people tend to operate from a basis of expectations and assumptions that other people will behave within certain norms. When situations are or become violent the initial feelings generally include surprise and shock because the violent behaviour is unexpected. In retrospect, many victims of violence can identify signs or signals that led up to the outburst. Hindsight is all very well but knowing how to recognise the danger beforehand and acting on the recognition is what is really useful in keeping safe.

What is interpreted as violent behaviour by one person may not be seen in the same way by another. For example, you may find swearing offensive but your colleague may not. For this reason the definition used is as follows:

*“Violent behaviour is that which produces damaging or hurtful effects, physically or emotionally in other people”*

This includes not only physical violence but also verbal abuse, threatening behaviour and harassment which should never be overlooked when defining violence.

## **Reducing the likelihood of violence**

The following notes give further information on how to reduce the likelihood of encountering aggressive incidents and what to do if violence occurs.

### **Safety on home visits**

To minimise the risk of violence it is essential that the school has a consistent practice for dealing with visits outside the office. The following are points to be observed.

#### **Joint visits**

Staff must never visit clients who are known to be violent alone. If it is suspected that violence is likely to occur during a visit, staff should go with a colleague and/or the Police.

If staff members are accompanied by the Police, their respective roles should be clear, i.e. the staff member will complete the task and the Police are there to keep the peace. It is possible that consideration will have to be given to the effects on the client of arriving with a Police Officer. This can be worked through at the time, or at a later date. Remember that if there is a high risk of violence and there is no alternative to a home visit, then that risk is reduced if you involve the Police.

Visits to be attended by two or more members of staff need to be thought through beforehand in regard to their respective roles. Is the accompanying colleague expected to act as a bodyguard? Will they be attending as co-worker? Who does what during the interview should aggression occur? If an assault takes place? If threats are made?

#### **Client information**

When meeting someone for the first time staff should ascertain whether it is suitable or possible to arrange the first meeting in the office. If this is not possible they should ask for

a telephone number of the person to be visited and ring them back to confirm the arrangement. They should make sure that they know as much as possible about the identity of the person they are going to see. They should read the client file if one exists, and find out whether colleagues have had previous contact. If so, it is important for them to talk to those colleagues.

They should also make appropriate phone calls to gain as much information as possible, e.g. central index, hospitals and other agencies.

### **Before the visit**

Staff should take a personal alarm with them on home visits and make sure that it is readily accessible. Although it may not bring people to their assistance, the noise may distract the aggressor long enough to enable an escape to be made.

Staff should wear suitable clothing that will not hinder their movement if they need to run.

They should not wear valuable jewellery etc.

### **Time of visits**

Staff should try to arrange visits during daylight hours. Daylight often gives a feeling of greater security both to the staff member and client.

Where possible, visits should be completed during working hours when it is easier to obtain assistance (e.g. being accompanied by another member of staff or reporting back etc.).

If staff need to attend an evening meeting at a client's house they should try to go there and back with a colleague. It may be best for them to use an independent rendezvous and then to proceed together to the venue. They should leave complete details of the visit with their manager including name, address and approximate time of completion. If staff are attending an evening meeting they must ensure they follow safe working procedures. The planning to the location of meetings should consider staff safety.

Avoid walking in poorly lit areas after dark.

When the visit has been completed staff should inform their Contact person (this may be a manager, partner or colleague).

If the Contact person receives no communication from and cannot contact the visiting officer within one hour of the agreed time, then the local police must be informed. and appropriate action taken.

## **Home visits**

Do not be late for an appointment. If lateness is unavoidable contact the person to be visited.

Check empty properties before entering. Preferably go with a second person. Shout and look for signs of occupation, if in doubt don't go in.

After knocking at the door do not peer through the letterbox - fingers and eyes may be injured if someone, intent on causing harm, is on the other side of the door.

If you feel uneasy do not enter a property or particular room.

Make a mental note of escape when entering a property. Where possible, close the door and follow the person inside. Stay nearest to the exit.

Once in a room ensure the way to the exit is clear.

Be aware of someone's personal territory. It can be threatening when someone in authority makes a visit, particularly if you appear judgmental or officious and do not respect the person's privacy. At all times act as a guest in the person's home.

Be aware of any dogs in the household and if necessary request they be put in a separate room. If you get bitten get an anti-tetanus jab as soon as possible.

If a violent incident occurs attract attention by shouting and/or throwing something through a window. You should take reasonable steps to protect yourself.

## **Recording movements**

It is imperative that an adequate record is kept of the whereabouts of all staff. Good practice dictates that people in the office have these details in order to pass on appropriate information in an emergency.

Ensure that trips out by staff, whether or not visiting a member of the public, are recorded clearly in the office in a designated book etc. Also ensure that it is someone's responsibility in your section to check the diary every day. The record should include the names of the individuals to be visited, the venue of the meetings, the times and if possible a telephone number where they can be contacted. Staff should also make sure that their office records are kept in an accessible place, i.e. not locked in desk drawers etc. If visiting arrangements change, staff must ensure that base records are kept up to date.

Where possible staff should advise colleagues how long they intend to be away from the office. If going straight home following a visit they should telephone the office to let someone know.

If staff are on a visit and it is clear that they are going to be back in the office later than originally planned, they should ring the office to provide a new estimate of their anticipated absence.

## Safety in the Establishment

Wear your ID badge at all times.

Be aware of anyone following you into the building if they are not wearing an ID or unknown to you. Report anyone who looks suspicious immediately.

If you are working late on your own at school make sure the site staff or a colleague knows you are there. Remember to check out.

Working alone in offices without security protection should be avoided unless absolutely necessary.

## Training

It is essential that Management ensure that training in personal safety and awareness, dealing with money and valuables, coping with violence and developing risk assessments is given top priority.

Staff must receive personal safety and awareness training as part of **standard induction procedures**. The training needs of existing staff should also be assessed, and training provided to meet those needs.

## Monitor and Review

The implementation of this policy and its procedures should be regularly monitored. Following any incident a Risk Assessment should be carried out and its findings used to inform change to procedures and working practices.