

## Lone working

One to one contact with individuals in the context of pastoral care should be properly planned, its risks considered and details of the contact recorded effectively (day, time, venue, who was present and what was discussed / said). It is essential in pastoral care to acknowledge appropriate physical, sexual, emotional and psychological boundaries at all times. Inappropriate touching or gestures of affection are to be avoided. **In some situations a worker may find them self alone with a client or someone they do not know. This might be in the community, in someone's house, an office or other type of building or even in a car. It is important in all situations where you are presented with a lone working situation that you take into account this guidance.**

### Planning lone working: considerations for risk assessment

- Is lone working necessary? Confidentiality can usually be assured with other people within reach.
- If there are casual callers take precautions before opening the door.
- Who will be involved? And who else should know about it?
- When and where will it take place? Avoid making arrangements which could be misinterpreted.
- Is there a risk of violence? A good working definition of violence is: *Any behaviour which produces damaging or hurtful effects, physically or mentally, on people.* **If it is considered that there is a risk of violence NEVER undertake lone working and explore other options instead.**
- Are there any increased risks to the particular worker?
- Are there any known medical or other factors which could make either party more vulnerable? **Some medical and other conditions can lead to disinhibition – leaving you and the other person more vulnerable.**

If one or more of these issues lead to a concern about the level of safety from seeing someone alone you must take this seriously and consider alternative options wherever possible. Whenever a lone working arrangement is to take place the following measures should be applied:

### Control measures

- The proposed lone working should be planned in advance wherever possible and noted in an appropriate diary or other record. Where possible it should be notified to an appropriate person. (This is not necessary when work is done at home and does not involve face to face contact with other people.)
- Some of the people the lone worker are at risk of meeting are those who, through medical reasons or substance abuse, are liable to mood swings leading to physical violence. It is recommended good practice to encourage the person you are meeting to enter a room first and for the lone worker to

seat themselves closest to the door. Should the situation lead to risk of violence, the lone worker then has a higher chance of withdrawing safely. The earlier that you spot a potential problem arising the more choices you have to avoid it. The following is a list of things to do to spot a potentially violent situation and deal with it effectively:

- i) Be aware of changes in the behaviour of the person you are with, especially if they seem to be becoming more angry or irritated. It is very rare for aggression or violence to come from nowhere.*
- ii) Try to use your own communication skills to defuse a difficult situation early on. Think about not only what you say but how you say it.*
- iii) If the person you are dealing with is getting angry, try to remain calm. Do not be drawn into their anger.*
- iv) Try to distance yourself both physically and emotionally*
- v) If all else fails – be assertive but avoid meeting aggression with aggression, use exit strategies (have a pre-planned way to excuse yourself from a difficult situation), apply diversion techniques, use your voice – shout a specific instruction such as ‘Call the Police!’ or pretend to see someone and call out for help, use a personal safety alarm*

- The lone worker must have access to a landline phone or carry a mobile phone or alarm device and be accustomed to use it.
- **Consider the merits of installing CCTV in the building where lone working might usually occur.**
- Automatic warning devices can be obtained for use in risky places or activities.
- Lone workers should check in with their line manager or other nominated person once they have completed their task or have safely reached their home following it. In the event that the lone worker fails to do this in the designated time, the line manager / nominated person should try to contact them to check that they are okay and if unable to do this seek advice from the local Police.

### **Recording key information about lone workers**

The following information should be kept on file for each person who undertakes lone worker duties in your organisation:

- Contact telephone – including home and mobile number and a number for their next of kin or with people they live with (if applicable)
- Their car details – including make, model, colour and registration number
- Medical information – Any health issues that may be relevant for their health whilst lone working

- A recent photo of the member of staff / volunteer is also desirable

### **Checklist questions to use when deciding the appropriateness of a lone working appointment**

- Do you really need to make the visit / meeting and do you have to make it alone? Could you ask the person you are seeing to come to the office instead?
- Have you left all the relevant information about your visit / meeting in your diary, with your line manager / nominated contact?
- Have you undertaken your personal safety checks? (considered the risks and thought through the 'what ifs')
- Do you have a mobile phone that you can take, with emergency numbers programmed in? Is it charged and topped up?
- Do you feel confident to go?

Unless you can answer YES to all of the above questions or are happy that you have put in place other measures to keep yourself safe then you should not go. Work with your team and line manager to solve the problems before you leave.

### **Responsibilities of employees / volunteers**

- *Take reasonable care of your own safety and that of others*
- *Follow any personal safety practices outlined by your employer*
- *Report any shortcomings or failings in safety practice*
- *Report any incidents of violence or aggression and near misses (i.e. when a situation could have escalated into actual violence).*

### **Aftercare**

*After a violent or aggressive incident, ensure that the lone worker is provided help and support with the following:*

- *Reporting the incident to management or the Police*
- *Arranging time off work*
- *Transport home or to hospital*
- *Replacing belonging lost or damaged in the incident*
- *Provide emotional support immediately after an incident:*
  - *Allow the other person to talk as much as they wish. Take things gently (many victims of violence need time before they can speak about their experiences)*
  - *Remember that verbal abuse can be just as upsetting as a physical attack*
  - *Avoid criticising their actions or speculating on what may have provoked their attacker. You can discuss later what can be learnt for the future*
  - *Remember that people respond differently (short and long term) – some will want time off work, others will want to go back to work*

- *Ask them what help they need.*

***If a serious incident has occurred, the relevant risk assessment(s) should be reviewed and changes made where necessary.***