

# Personal Safety at Work



Lone Working



## Are you a lone worker?

Lone workers are people who work alone for some or all of the time without direct or close supervision or support.

### Lone workers include:

- Staff who work away from their fixed base, out in the community or in other people's homes e.g. estate agents, social workers, sales people, district nurses, architects, journalists, taxi and bus drivers, traffic wardens, delivery staff.
- Staff who work outside normal working hours e.g. cleaners, utilities repair or maintenance staff, security guards.
- Staff who work in establishments where only one person is on the premises at a time e.g. people working in petrol stations and kiosks, show homes, small shops and bars.
- Staff who work in the same building as colleagues but on their own e.g. receptionists. Teachers and lecturers also belong in this category because, even though they may be surrounded by pupils or students, they often have no immediate support from colleagues.

## Are you at risk?

If you are a lone worker, it is important that you and your employer give particular consideration to your personal safety. This means knowing where you are at all times and taking steps to protect you from being subjected to verbal abuse, threats and physical abuse in any circumstances relating to your work.

According to a survey conducted for Suzy Lamplugh Trust, 81% of lone workers are concerned about violence and aggression.

One in ten of those surveyed had been punched, kicked, or suffered some other form of violent attack.

Often low-level aggression can be dealt with easily. However, facing such behaviour on a regular basis can be as damaging as suffering a major incident. Whenever personal safety is considered, the affects on psychological well-being should be taken as seriously as physical assault.

**i** This booklet is intended to help you to think about and improve your personal safety. Not everything you read will be applicable to you. A great deal will depend on where you work and the job, or tasks, that you do. We suggest you pick out the ideas you think will work for you. These can be adapted and developed into the strategies you need to keep yourself safe.

## Your employer's responsibilities

**The Health & Safety at Work Act 1974** dictates that employers have a duty to ensure the safety and welfare of their employees ('so far as reasonably practicable'). Every organisation with five or more employees is required to have a Health and Safety Policy.

**The Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1992 (updated 1999)** requires every organisation in the UK to undergo a proactive process of risk management. Organisations must assess risk, create safe systems of working, communicate these to their employees and monitor and review their systems on a regular basis.

The law does not state that people may not work alone. What the law does say is that an employer must assess any significant risks associated with working alone.

Risk Assessments should only be carried out by members of staff who are qualified to assess risk and have an in-depth knowledge of the job or task in question. This 'competent person' can be either one person or a team of people and the members of staff who do the job or task also need to be involved. Written evidence of the process and all the actions or decisions made should be recorded.

Risk Assessments should look at all the 'reasonably foreseeable' risks. When assessing ways to reduce the risks, the assessor should consider what is workable. They are allowed to make judgements based on cost v. benefit, but should be prepared to show that all that is

'reasonably practicable', in the circumstances, to reduce or eliminate the risks has been done. Once this process is complete, policies and procedures need to be developed and implemented.

## Your responsibilities as an employee

Employees also have responsibilities regarding personal safety. The law states that they should:

- Take reasonable care of their own safety and that of others
- Follow any personal safety practices outlined by the 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)

## Speak out if you think you are at risk!

For risk reducing measures to be effective, they should be devised, implemented and managed jointly between management and employees.

## People Environment Task

People work alone in many different environments and for many different reasons. It is vital that proactive measures are put into place to help keep you safe when lone working.

To examine the risks involved you must look at the **people** involved, the **environment** in which you are working and the **tasks** you are required to do.

### People

**Who** are you likely to meet? Are they...

- total strangers/members of the public?
- people who are well known to you?
- people about whom you know very little?
- people with a history of violence or aggression?
- likely to welcome your presence or are you dealing with a difficult subject?

Do any of the people you meet pose any significant threat to your personal safety?

### Environment

**Where** are you working? Are you...

- in a reception area or a shop where there is open access to the public?
- going into someone else's home or territory?
- working out on the street amongst members of the public?

- visiting a rural or isolated area?
- able to communicate with base or call for back up if you feel threatened?
- able to let somebody know where you are, what you are doing and if your plans change?

Do any of the places you go to pose a significant threat to your personal safety?

**When** are you working? Is it...

- during office hours when there are many people around?
- late at night or early in the morning when you are more isolated?

Do the hours you work pose a significant threat to your personal safety?

### Task

**What** are you doing? Are you...

- dealing with cash?
- enforcing a rule?
- denying a service?
- carrying valuables or medical supplies?
- acting as a security service?
- supervising groups of young people?

Does the task you are carrying out pose a significant threat to your personal safety?

# Assessing the risks

## If there is a problem

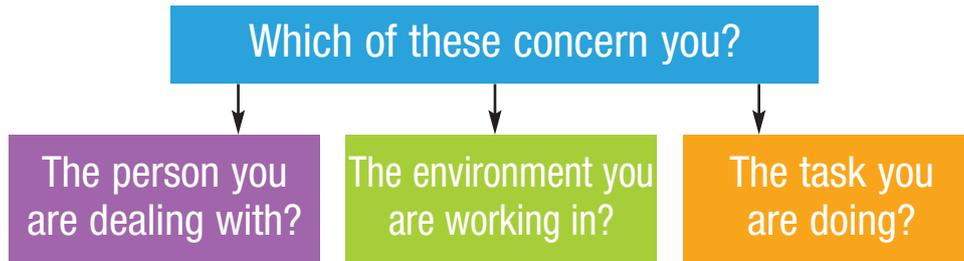
- How will you call for help?
- Who will respond?
- What will they do?

## If you don't report back at the end of your shift/day

- Who will notice?
- What will they do?

Considering the answers to these questions may help you to recognise potential problems and areas that may pose specific risks.

Learning to assess risk is something we can all do. A quick Risk Assessment, like the one shown below, can help you decide how safe a situation is and what action you should take to avoid danger.



Read through the following imaginary case study and see if you can identify the risks that Tony takes and the steps he could have taken to keep himself safe.

*Tony works every Saturday in his local video store; it is a small store with only six employees. There have never been any problems, but the store is in an area where robberies have taken place. No security devices have been installed and the owner has never really considered what risks may be present. The store is run in a very relaxed manner and the staff are left to cope with any problems as best they can.*

*Most Saturdays are busy with lots of people rushing in and out. There are always at least two staff on duty until around 8pm when it starts to become quiet. After this time, Tony is left on his own to finish the shift and lock up at 10pm.*

*On this occasion, at around 9pm, two men come into the store and chat to Tony about his day; they ask whether it has been busy and what time he will finish tonight. Being friendly, Tony talks freely and agrees with them that it is a little boring having to do the late shift and lock up on his own. He thinks it a little odd that the two men leave without renting a video, but thinks no more of it.*

*At about 9.45pm Tony starts cashing up as usual and seeing the men walk past the store, he waves to them. He is keen to get out of the store and go for a drink, so at*

*10pm exactly he picks up his coat, puts on his personal stereo, turns off the lights and goes outside to lock up.*

*As he is locking the front door the two men appear and demand he give them the takings from the day.*

**Both Tony and his employer need to learn from this incident. Let's consider what could have been done to prevent it, before Tony was left on his own.**

- A risk assessment of Tony's job should have been carried out. This should have highlighted the potential for 'reasonably foreseeable' problems to occur.
- Security cameras could have been installed. These might have put the thieves off.
- Someone could have helped Tony lock up. An extra member of staff at a vulnerable time such as this would have reduced the risks.
- The company could have made their procedure for cashing up safer. This might have included cashing up after the shop had closed, in the back office or with the main lights off.
- Tony could have been encouraged to call for assistance if he felt uncomfortable before closing time. Such a system might also have raised Tony's awareness of the potential problems.
- A safety alarm could have been installed on the shop door. This could have given Tony a means of calling for help and might have deterred the men.

## What were Tony's options whilst working alone?

- Tony could have been more careful in his conversation with the two men. Telling them about closing times and the fact that he was going to be alone gave them exactly the information they needed.
- Tony could have been more aware of his surroundings when locking up. Wearing his headphones may have prevented him from hearing the men approaching. Not concentrating may have meant that he missed early warning signs.

## What were Tony's options at the time of the attack?

- By the time the men appeared in the doorway, Tony had very few options for dealing with the situation: flight (get away), compromise (give the men the money and try to remain safe) or fight (not a safe option – he could have been injured).

*The earlier we spot potential risks and make safe choices, the more likely we are to have the opportunity to avoid them.*

During the time before the incident, there were lots of chances for Tony to make safe choices. As time went on his choices became more and more limited. This case study highlights the importance of taking steps to reduce or avoid risk as early as possible.

### Many choices



Before the start of Tony's Shift

### Some choices



Whilst Tony was alone

### Very few choices



Incident

## Let's look at some solutions!

Remember, not all of these ideas will work for you but some of them may make a difference to your safety. Take the ones that you think will work and from them, create your own Personal Action Plan. Talk to your co-workers or line manager about those which you feel should be implemented by your team, your department or your organisation as a whole.

## Working alone away from base

### *First Things First*

#### Tracing lone workers

Some people really enjoy the freedom working alone allows: the fact that they can be flexible and plan their own day. Ensuring traceability is important in keeping staff safe and it should not restrict this freedom. Tracing is different to tracking; it is about making sure someone knows where you are and what you are doing and most importantly, knows exactly what to do if you don't return or check in at the expected time.

**Remember** it is important not to rely solely on a tracing system: someone knowing where you are will not help prevent a difficult situation arising. It may help to raise the alarm if you do not return, or make it a little easier to summon help if you need it, but it doesn't make you invincible. You should still ensure you do all you can to stay

safe and never enter into situations where you think your personal safety could be at risk.

There are many different ways to implement tracing systems for lone workers such as 'buddy' or computerised systems. 'Buddy systems' involve team members partnering up to let each other know when they have arrived at appointments and when they are leaving. The 'buddy' takes responsibility for contacting the other if they have not signed in or out when expected and raising the alarm should the need arise.

It is important to ensure that there is a protocol in place if the lone worker fails to check in at an agreed time or if they raise the alarm. Knowing what to do is vitally important for the 'buddy'. No colleague should be left to decide on the next course of action without support and guidance from line management. It is equally important for the lone worker to know exactly what to expect in the way of help or assistance. The protocol for raising the alarm (and whether that be taken as far as calling the Police) should be put in place before a lone worker sets out. Protocols such as these must be enforced and failure to follow them should be grounds for disciplinary action.

Tracing systems, operated by outside providers, could be considered if a buddy system is impractical. If you require further information on using tracing systems, Suzy Lamplugh Trust can offer some guidance on the issues you should consider.

Before you set out you should ensure that someone (via an automated or buddy system) knows:

## ■ Where you are going

Try to leave the full address and telephone number (if confidentiality is an issue, why not leave these details in a sealed envelope, only to be opened if you do not return?). Try also to leave details of how you are getting there i.e. your train or driving route, or mini-cab firm number.

## ■ How long you are going to be

If possible, try to leave information regarding the expected length of the visit or meeting. Let others know if you are coming back to the office or going straight on somewhere else. If your plans change, let your buddy know.

## ■ The purpose of your visit

Are you going to meet somebody in order to deal with a difficult subject and will you be welcome? Leave as many details as possible about the person you are going to see, such as name and a brief description. This information may help someone to judge how quickly he or she may need to raise the alarm if you fail to report in or return. If you are going to meet someone who is unknown to you, make sure your colleagues or 'buddy' are aware of this.

## KEY INFORMATION that should be kept on file

- **Contact telephone – including your home and numbers** – mobile number and a number for your next of kin or the people you live with, if applicable.
- **Car details –** including make, model, colour and registration number.
- **Medical – information** – any health issues that may affect you whilst lone working

*Keeping recent photos of all staff could also be considered*

**Before** setting off for an appointment, try to decide for yourself if you feel safe and confident. It is far better to think about this in the relative safety of your workplace. It may be a good idea to write a checklist which you could read and tick off before you leave. Remember you can conduct your own Dynamic Risk Assessment at any time during your appointment.

## Questions for your checklist could be:

- Do I really need to make this visit/meeting and do I have to make it alone? Could I ask this client to come to the office/centre?
- Have I left all the relevant information on the white-board, in my diary and with a buddy? (if using a buddy).
- Have I done my personal safety checks? (considered the risks and thought through the **'what ifs'**).
- Do I have a mobile phone that I can take, with emergency numbers programmed in? Is it charged and topped up?
- Do I feel confident to go?

Unless you can answer **YES** to all of the above questions or you are happy that you have put in other measures to keep yourself safe (e.g. you may decide that a mobile phone isn't necessary, but have other systems in place instead), then you should not go. Work with your team or line manager to solve the problems **BEFORE** you leave.

Remember that a mobile phone will not prevent an aggressive incident but can be useful for summoning help. Do not let a mobile phone make you complacent. Remember that coverage is just one thing that can prevent mobiles from working.

# Travelling whilst working alone

## *On Your Way: tips for staying safe*

### Public Transport

- Obtain timetable and fare information before travelling.
- If you work for an organisation that receives unwelcome attention from the public, try to hide anything that would make you identifiable as an employee of that organisation.
- When waiting for public transport after dark, try to wait in well-lit areas and near emergency alarms and CCTV cameras.
- If something or someone makes you feel uncomfortable, act upon your instinct. It may be better to move seats before a problem arises.

### Taxis and Cabs

- Ask your employer to put together a list of reputable firms and/or contact your local council for details of licensed minicabs in the area. You could also look on the internet.
- Try to make bookings for outbound and return journeys, before you leave.
- If you cannot book in advance, make sure you keep the details of several taxi or minicab firms with you in case the first firm you call is busy or your booking does not arrive.

- When making a booking, ask for driver and/or car details and confirm them (without offering up the information) when the cab arrives, to be sure you are getting in the right car.

### Driving

- Put together an emergency kit for your car. This might include an extra coat, a torch, bottled water, spare change and an emergency mobile telephone charger.
- Join a vehicle recovery service and check the representative's ID when they respond to your call.
- When driving to meetings, try to plan where you will park before you go. If safer to do so, park as close to your destination as possible. If you will be returning after dark, consider what the area will be like then and try to park near street lights.
- When approaching your car, be aware of your surroundings, have your keys ready and before entering, quickly check that no one is inside.
- Do not keep valuables on a front seat where they could be grabbed through a window.
- Keep your doors locked in built-up areas or in stop-start traffic.
- If you break down, be aware of your surroundings and only get out of your car when and if you feel it is safe to do so.

- Road rage incidents are rare and, by not responding to aggression from other drivers, can often be avoided.
- If the driver of another car forces you to stop and then gets out of his/her car, stay in your car, keep the engine running and if you need to, reverse to get away.
- When parking, in a car park, consider where the entrances and exits are. Try to avoid having to walk across a lonely car park to get to your car. Park away from pillars/barriers. If you can, reverse into your space so you can drive away easily.

### Using your vehicle as an office

- Try to keep all valuables out of sight e.g. locked in the boot of the car.
- If you have a mobile phone, keep it near you while you drive. Remember to use a hands free kit if you use the phone whilst driving.
- If you are working on paperwork (etc) in the car, keep doors locked and try to remain aware of your surroundings. Think 'Is this a safe place for me to park?'
- Try not to use isolated car parks, for example at motorway service stations.
- If you are approached and feel uncomfortable, use your horn to attract attention or discourage the other person.



**Remember to PLAN:**

**Prepare**

**Look Confident**

**Avoid Risk**

**Never Assume it won't  
happen to you**

Travelling whilst  
working alone

# Travelling whilst working alone

## Walking/Out and About

- Do you carry many bags or lots of paperwork – how do you think this affects your personal safety and ability to move quickly? Can you find a way to carry less? Try to keep at least one hand free whenever possible.
- Consider carrying a personal safety alarm.
- Remain alert and aware of your surroundings at all times.
- A confident appearance (walking tall, normal pace, arms relaxed) will make you look less vulnerable.
- Try to avoid danger rather than confront it – keep to well-lit or busy streets and avoid danger spots as much as possible.
- Walking away from an argument can be a simple but effective way to prevent an incident.

## Hotels

**Before booking into a hotel, consider the following questions:**

- Does the hotel have a secure car park?
- Are staff available 24 hours?
- Do the rooms have phones, spy-holes or chains on the door?
- Will the hotel hold your room if you are late arriving?
- Is there somewhere you can eat in the hotel?

Try to avoid using your room as a meeting room – most hotels will have a café or meeting room you could use.

## Valuables

- Only carry the minimum necessary while working and do not draw attention to yourself by overtly displaying valuables, e.g. mobile phone, expensive jewellery etc.
- If you have to carry valuable equipment e.g. laptops, ask your employer for guidance on how to do this as safely as possible.
- Your safety is always more important than your possessions. If someone tries to steal your possessions it is safer to give them up.
- Do not attempt to recover any stolen goods yourself; contact the police.

## Working alone from a fixed base

- Agree on a protocol for visitors to the building; you may decide not to allow any visitors into the building when only one person is there.
- Consider displaying opening times that only include times when there are two or more people in the office.
- Ensure a colleague knows you are working in the office alone and, if possible, when you plan to leave. Let them know when you have left – make sure a protocol is set up so your 'buddy' knows what to do if you do not call in when expected.
- If you spend time alone with clients in your workplace, consider how you would raise the alarm if necessary. It may be wise to have a discreet way of calling for assistance so that you can get help BEFORE things get out of control. Some organisations use silent alarms or code words – there should always be an agreed and practised procedure for what happens next.
- Consider a 'safe haven' (a room that locks) where you could retreat to if necessary – ensure this contains a phone.
- Keep doors and windows locked if possible.
- If practical, consider installing an intercom system. If you do, make sure it is always used appropriately.
- When working after dark, consider drawing the blinds (if you have them) so that people outside cannot see in.

## Working alone at the front-line (reception, retail etc)

- Ensure that you have a means of communicating with others – if this is not possible with your own colleagues you may be able to team up with other workers in the area. For example a row of small shops could establish radio contact with a code word they use to raise the alarm.
- Consider installing emergency alarm systems to summon assistance, or even the Police.
- Try to ensure that any cash is kept out of sight.
- Never try to stop a thief on your own – always give up cash or valuables if threatened (your company would rather lose their property than a member of staff).

## Working in isolated/rural areas

- Ensure you have a means of communicating with others in case a problem arises – be aware that mobile phones may not work in some areas.
- Global positioning systems, if practical, may help if you are in very remote areas and have little or no contact with colleagues.
- Tracing systems may also be useful – consider a system that requires you to call back regularly.
- Walk away from situations you consider threatening – avoidance is often the best defence.

## Working from home

- Try not to advertise the fact that you work from home to prospective clients.
- Could you consider using neutral territory for meetings – perhaps your local community centre could rent out a room cheaply?
- If clients have to come to your home, use rooms that are as professional looking as possible.
- Try to give the impression that other people are in the building: leave a radio on in another room or call through to the 'other person' to say how long you expect to be.
- Consider setting up a buddy system with someone (perhaps a friend who also works from home) so that they know your plans for the day. Let that person know if your plans change.
- Consider getting someone to call you on the phone 10 minutes into the meeting to make sure you feel confident. Have a predetermined code word ready in case you want to summon help.

## Working in other people's homes or premises

- Give some thought before you arrive to what exit strategies you could use if you felt uncomfortable or threatened. Thinking about these in advance will help you recall them quickly in a time of stress. For example, you could say 'I'm sorry I've left some paperwork I need in the car'. This could give you time to de-stress before returning, or could allow you to phone from the safety of your car, saying you have been called back to the office and will re-arrange the appointment.
- Be mindful of the fact that you are entering someone else's territory. Your presence there may be unwanted and/or pose a threat.
- Be prepared to show ID, explain your reason for visiting and wait to be invited in before you enter.
- Conduct your own 'Dynamic Risk Assessment' on the door-step before you enter. If you feel at all uncomfortable, make an excuse and leave. Trust your instincts.
- Do not enter the premises unless the person you expect to meet is there. If they are not, say you will return later or re-arrange the appointment for another day.
- Give the person you are visiting some indication of how much of their time you expect to take and try to stick to it.

- As you enter, make a note of how the door opens and closes so that you can leave quickly, if necessary.
- Take note of your surroundings and possible exits.
- Take in only what you need and avoid spreading your belongings out – this could give the impression that you are taking charge of the surroundings (don't forget this is someone else's territory) and would slow you down if you needed to leave in a hurry.
- If you are uncomfortable about any animals in the room with you, ask to have them removed.
- Don't give rise to aggression by reacting negatively to bad, dirty or smelly surroundings.

## Dealing with violence and aggression

No one can say with any certainty what they would do if faced with difficult or stressful situations. Many factors can affect the way you behave; from your own confidence and experience to how you are feeling on the day. There are no right or wrong answers but it will help if you think through the options ahead of time.

**Remember the earlier you spot a potential problem arising the more choices you have to avoid it.**

- 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.
- 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.
- If the person you are with is getting angry, try to remain calm. Do not be drawn into their anger.
- Try to distance yourself both physically and emotionally.
- Use tension control techniques – remember these need to be practised to be really useful! You can find more information on tension control techniques on our website at [www.suzylamplugh.org](http://www.suzylamplugh.org)

## If all else fails...your aim is to get away.

- 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 their help.
- Use a personal safety alarm.

**First and Foremost**  
**Trust your instincts**  
**Never underestimate a threat:**  
**if you feel uneasy or alarm bells start**  
**ringing – ACT!**

## Aftercare

Even if you have put into place all of the suggestions made in this and our other booklets, there is no guarantee that you will be able to completely avoid violence or aggression in your working life. It is important to know where you can go for support and help should you suffer an incident.

### After a violent or aggressive incident, you may need help with:

- Reporting the incident to management or the Police
- Arranging time off work
- Transport home or to hospital

- Replacing belongings lost or damaged in the incident

A victim of violence or aggression at work can expect to be provided with reasonable support from their employer. This may include debriefing, counselling, protected earnings, redeployment, time off work and legal support. The support offered should be outlined in the organisation's policy. If a serious incident has occurred, the relevant risk assessment(s) should be reviewed and changes made, where necessary.

A colleague should always be available to provide support immediately after an incident. This emotional support precedes any professional counselling that may be offered later. If you need to provide support to a colleague:

- Allow the other person to talk as much as they wish. Take things gently, however, as many victims of violence need time before they can speak about their experiences.
- Remember that verbal abuse can be just as upsetting as 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 term and long term) – some will want time off work, others will want to go back to work.
- Ask them what help they need.

## Where to find more help and advice

**The Health and Safety Executive** is responsible for the regulation of almost all the risks to health and safety arising from work activity in Britain.

[www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)

**The Home Office** has lots of useful information including a leaflet called *Victims of Crime*, which gives advice on how to apply for compensation if employees suffer an injury, loss or damage from crime.

[www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk)

**Victim Support** is an independent charity which helps people cope with the effects of crime.

UK Victim Support line: 0808 1689 111

E-mail: [supportline@victimsupport.org.uk](mailto:supportline@victimsupport.org.uk)

[www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)

**The Samaritans** are available 24 hours a day to provide confidential emotional support for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair.

Tel: 116 123 (UK)

E-mail [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

[www.samaritans.org.uk](http://www.samaritans.org.uk)

**Crimestoppers**, if you need to report a crime you can do so anonymously. Tel: 0800 555 111

[www.crimestoppers-uk.org](http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org)

**Bully Online** is the world's largest internet resource on bullying and related issues.

[www.bullyonline.org](http://www.bullyonline.org)

**Suzy Lamplugh Trust** delivers training and seminars on many different workplace safety issues and has a number of other resources you may find useful – visit our website at [www.suzylamplugh.org](http://www.suzylamplugh.org) or call on 020 7091 0014 for further information.



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