



#### Find out more:

T +44 (0)20 8741 1231

E [mediaquery@britsafe.org](mailto:mediaquery@britsafe.org)

W [www.britsafe.org](http://www.britsafe.org)

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## Factors influencing risk and young people

There are specific factors that anyone responsible for the care of young people should be aware of (and which will help them properly assess and control risks – see the download *Risk assessment for youth social action*).

The British Safety Council has worked with young people, schools and employers for many years, and young people – like anyone – have an inbuilt instinct to assess risk and act accordingly.

This – in combination with the largely low-risk environments that social action will be undertaken in – does mean that people should not fear providing young people with opportunities for social action.

The trick to health and safety is to educate our innate abilities to apply to new and unfamiliar risks, and the following may be useful to bear in mind when involving young people in social action:

### Lack of familiarity

Any social action takes place in an environment, whether shop, community hall, care home or an outdoor event. For many young people, these environments – including the rules, safety signs or emergency exits that make up these environments – will be unfamiliar. Do take this lack of familiarity into account when you assess how to keep young people safe.

### Still developing - physically and mentally

Young people may be more at risk as their muscle strength may not be fully developed and they may be less skilled in handling techniques or in pacing the work according to their ability.

When assessing a young person's physical capability, it could be as simple

as asking yourself the question, can a still developing young person be expected to lift the weights my older, more experienced volunteers or employees can?'

Psychological capacity such as memory and attention is still developing. Assessing this can be as straightforward as making sure a young person understands what is expected of them, checking their understanding and their ability to remember and follow instructions. It is important that young people are given any necessary information and supervision (see the download: *Advice on induction and supervision*).

### Impressionable

Young people are still forming their views on the world. They can be susceptible to peer pressure, for example, if others are taking unsafe risks they may follow suit.

This could lead to some young people working longer hours, not taking breaks, not raising issues about safety for fear of being seen as a 'complainer', or attempting to carry out tasks that they are not trained to do. Create opportunities for young people to talk openly about their experiences of doing social action.

### Lack confidence

Young people may be too intimidated to challenge older people. They may not 'speak up' about a safety issue for fear of being wrong or being blamed. Some young workers may say that they understand a procedure or instruction when they do not – so as not to appear foolish or forgetful. Again, this is about creating opportunities to talk openly and to listen.

<sup>1</sup> HSE Statistics 2011/12.