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Risk assessment for youth social action

This document sets out principles to help you to assess risks. Going through this process will help young people carry out social action in a healthy and safe environment.

Risk assessment is where good health and safety begins. In simple terms it means identifying the hazards, assessing the associated risks and how to control and reduce people's exposure to these risks.

Should you do a risk assessment for everything?

No. If you are volunteering to help young people do social action you don't have to do one.

If you are employed by a voluntary organisation you should already have risk assessments for certain activities (not necessarily written, see download *Social action, the law and young people*).

But whether you are a volunteer or employee, the best approach is:

- Consider if there are significant risks involved in the social action.
- If yes, then assessing and controlling risks is the best way forward – both to protect young people and support their work for the community.
- Don't try to remove all risks – aim to protect people by putting in place measures to control significant risks, so far as reasonably practicable. Your risk assessment should only include what you could reasonably be expected to know.
- Record your significant findings, but there is no need to record everyday risks. Keep it simple and focus on controls. Please note that if you are working in a voluntary organisation with fewer than five

employees but organising a number of young people to carry out social action on a voluntary basis, you are not required to have a written risk assessment.

- But written or not, risk assessment is a fundamental basis for creating healthy and safe conditions for volunteers or young people.

Risk assessing in practice

You think that there are significant risks attached to the social action you have planned. What do you do?

A good starting point is to walk around the place where young people will be carrying out social action and look for any hazards (things that may cause harm), such as tripping, falling or lifting. Remember psychological hazards – such as verbal abuse – can have an impact on people's mental health.

Then think about the risk, which is the chance, high or low, of somebody being harmed by the hazard, and how serious the harm could be.

Think about how accidents could happen and who might be harmed. Ask people who have done similar activities what they think the hazards are, as they may notice things that are not obvious to you and may have some good ideas on how to control the risks.

Concentrate on the real risks – those that are most likely to cause harm. Consider the measures you are already taking to control the risks and ask if you have covered all you need to do. Your efforts to assess and control risks should be in proportion to the degree of risk involved in the activities.

Once you have identified the risks and what you need to do to control them, you should put the appropriate measures in place. Can the task be changed to reduce a risk? Is there any instruction or training that is needed for a particular task?

If it helps you to manage the risks and tell people what they need to know, then do write your findings down. For most people this does not need to be a big exercise – just note the main points about the significant risks and what you concluded.

Risk assessing and young people

If you are helping a young person carry out social action for the first time you should review any existing risk assessments, taking into account the specific factors for young people before they start (See our factsheet *Factors influencing risk and young people*). This should be straightforward in a low-risk environment, for example an office with everyday risks.

So, when walking around a place looking for hazards, think about these in terms

¹ HSE Statistics 2011/12.



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of someone who is young and inexperienced. Some risks might be obvious to you, but not to someone who doesn't have your experience. If social action is being carried on outside, think about the activities in relation to the public or the weather for example.

Consider whether the social action you have planned is beyond the young person's physical or psychological capacity. This is not hard. For example, you can assess their capacity for lifting, or for remembering and following instructions (memory development is age-related). You should have contact details of parents/carers and any details on medical conditions.

It is worth monitoring any significant risks once young people are carrying out social action. Listen to what they say about any risks they may have faced. Anything you were not aware of? Are there any control measures you need to change?

This way your risk assessment stays up-to-date. It gives you comfort and becomes a useful tool that actually helps young people get on with the work they want to do for the community.

More on specific factors

See our download *Factors influencing risk and young people* for more information

on this to help you assess and control any risks that young people may be exposed to.

The Health and Safety Executive has some excellent resources to help you with risk assessment, including templates:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/manage.htm>

This is also useful for those new to helping young people into social action:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/youngpeople/workexperience/cutting-bureaucracy.htm>

¹ HSE Statistics 2011/12.