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What does ‘good health and safety’ look like?

What any organisation or group activity looks like with ‘good health and safety’ is pretty easy to describe: people planning, doing or making decisions with risk in mind.

The degree of understanding and skills required to do this will depend on the degree of risk that you or young people are being exposed to, but any organisation or group with good health and safety will have:

People that are aware of any significant risks

Everyone knows who is in charge and who is responsible for what.

People who are carrying out work or social action are aware of the consequences of risk, whether to their own health and safety or to others. This awareness is not inhibiting but enables any task to be successfully undertaken, minimising the chance of injury, ill health or delay.

People are aware enough of the consequences of what they are doing to know when to stop an activity, change what they are doing or ask for help if they have a concern. They know how and where to get help and first aid. They are also happy to talk about the risks associated with what they are doing.

Leaders that visibly promote health and safety and involve people

Group leaders, managers and supervisors make a point of checking that risks have been identified and controlled. They have contact details of parents and carers and know about any medical conditions.

Face-to-face discussions and use of communications visibly demonstrate that health and safety is a core value. Problems and concerns are addressed quickly.

Supervisors actively seek out understanding about significant risks; using this knowledge to plan activities and ensure that any control or emergency measures are up to date and reflect what is going on. Getting people involved in any efforts to understand and control risks is innovative and blame-free; for example using suggestion schemes or involving people in planning tasks.

Some managers have extra skills on managing risks

Particularly for activities that involve higher risks, it is important to have a ‘competent person;’ someone who supervises activities and you can speak to in case you have any questions or concerns about your own or others health and safety. Any channels to report an incident or a near miss are easy to use. Where necessary people have been trained and have protective equipment that is up to date.

And what is not good health and safety...

One person completing a risk assessment form for every minor risk, sticking it in a folder and putting it on a shelf.

Of course the challenge is how to achieve the above. We’ve just described an end point, not how you get there.

Much of this is about using common sense. Our instinctive assessment of risk already prepares us for risk-awareness. The challenge is to educate this instinct to be active when it’s needed. For example, because young people may be new to doing certain tasks, they may not be as aware of the risks when compared to other, more familiar activities, such as crossing a road.

The other downloads are all about helping you get to the end point we’ve described.

HSE has some useful information on young people: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/youngpeople/index.htm>

¹ HSE Statistics 2011/12.