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FREE PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE

Lone Working Awareness

A Practical Guide for Care Staff

Knowledge Hub Resource 046

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Introduction

Lone working is common across many areas of health and social care, particularly in domiciliary care, supported living, community healthcare and outreach services. A lone worker is someone who carries out their duties without the direct presence or close supervision of colleagues.

Working alone does not necessarily mean working in isolation, but it does mean that individuals may need to make decisions, respond to unexpected situations and manage risks independently until assistance is available. Understanding lone working procedures helps protect both care staff and the individuals they support.

Employers have a legal duty to assess and manage the risks associated with lone working, while care staff have a responsibility to follow safe working practices, report concerns and comply with their organisation's policies and procedures.

Why This Resource Matters

Understanding lone working awareness helps care staff to:

- Recognise the risks associated with working alone.
 - Follow safe lone working procedures.
 - Protect their own safety and wellbeing.
 - Respond appropriately to emergencies and unexpected situations.
 - Identify and report hazards or concerns promptly.
 - Promote safe, high-quality and person-centred care.
 - Meet legal, health and safety and professional responsibilities.
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Key Message

Working alone should never mean working without support. By following lone working procedures, carrying out dynamic risk assessments, maintaining communication and reporting concerns promptly, care staff can help protect themselves while delivering safe, compassionate and person-centred care.

Understanding Lone Working

Lone working does not automatically mean a job is unsafe. However, working without immediate support can increase certain risks, making it important to follow agreed procedures and remain aware of your surroundings at all times.

Lone workers may provide care in people's homes, travel between appointments or work in community settings where help is not immediately available. Every situation is different, so care staff should always remain alert and carry out a dynamic assessment of any potential risks before and during each visit.

Examples of potential lone working risks include:

- Aggressive or challenging behaviour.
- Unsafe environments or poor property conditions.
- Slips, trips and falls.
- Medical emergencies involving the individual receiving care.
- Difficult weather or travel conditions.
- Equipment failures or communication problems.
- Unexpected changes in an individual's behaviour or circumstances.

Being prepared and following your organisation's lone working procedures helps reduce these risks and supports safer working.

Safe Lone Working Practices

Care staff can help protect themselves by:

- Following their organisation's lone working policy.
- Checking visit details before arriving.
- Carrying a charged mobile phone or approved communication device.
- Informing colleagues of their schedule where required.
- Remaining aware of exits and potential hazards.
- Trusting their instincts if a situation feels unsafe.
- Leaving immediately and seeking advice if personal safety is at risk.
- Reporting incidents, near misses or concerns promptly.

Remember

Your personal safety is always important. If you ever feel that a situation presents an immediate risk to your safety, remove yourself from the situation if it is safe to do so and follow your organisation's emergency procedures. Protecting yourself helps ensure you can continue providing safe, effective care to others.

Professional Responsibilities

Every care worker has a responsibility to work safely and follow their organisation's lone working procedures. Employers should provide appropriate training, risk assessments and support, but care staff must also take reasonable care of their own health and safety, as well as the safety of others who may be affected by their actions.

As a care professional, you should always:

- Follow your organisation's lone working policy and procedures.
- Complete dynamic risk assessments before and during visits.
- Keep managers or colleagues informed of your whereabouts where required.
- Carry approved communication equipment when working alone.
- Report hazards, incidents and near misses promptly.
- Maintain professional boundaries and follow agreed care plans.
- Leave any situation where your personal safety is at immediate risk and report your concerns.
- Participate in lone working training and follow health and safety guidance.

Working safely helps protect both you and the individuals you support.

When to Raise Concerns

You should speak to your manager immediately if:

- You feel unsafe before, during or after a visit.
- An individual's behaviour becomes threatening, aggressive or unpredictable.
- You identify significant hazards within the environment.
- Communication systems or lone working devices are not functioning correctly.
- You experience a near miss, accident or incident while working alone.
- Care plans or risk assessments no longer reflect the individual's current needs or circumstances.

Never ignore concerns about your own safety or the safety of others. Reporting concerns promptly allows appropriate action to be taken and helps reduce the risk of future incidents.

Good Practice Reminder

Safe lone working relies on preparation, communication and good professional judgement. By following agreed procedures, remaining aware of your surroundings and reporting concerns promptly, you help protect yourself, support the individuals in your care and contribute to a safer working environment for everyone.

Summary

Lone working is an important part of many roles within health and social care. While working alone presents additional risks, these can be effectively managed through good planning, communication, dynamic risk assessment and following agreed lone working procedures.

Care staff have a responsibility to protect their own health and safety while continuing to deliver safe, compassionate and person-centred care. By remaining alert, following organisational policies and reporting concerns promptly, lone workers can help create safer working environments for themselves and the individuals they support.

Lone Working Awareness Checklist

- ✓ Follow your organisation's lone working policy and procedures.
 - ✓ Carry out a dynamic risk assessment before and during every visit.
 - ✓ Keep managers or colleagues informed of your whereabouts where required.
 - ✓ Carry a charged mobile phone or approved lone working device.
 - ✓ Remain aware of your surroundings and potential hazards.
 - ✓ Leave immediately if you believe your personal safety is at risk.
 - ✓ Report incidents, hazards and near misses promptly.
 - ✓ Participate in lone working and health and safety training.
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Further Information

For further guidance on lone working and health and safety, visit:

Health and Safety Executive (HSE) – Lone Working

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/lone-working/>

Care Quality Commission (CQC)

<https://www.cqc.org.uk>

Skills for Care

<https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk>

GOV.UK – Health and Safety at Work

<https://www.gov.uk/topic/health-safety-work>

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