

Lone Worker Policy

Purpose

This policy applies to all staff employed by SOS Homecare Ltd who are 'lone workers'. A lone worker is defined as "any employee who works by themselves without close or direct supervision."

SOS Homecare Ltd is committed to, so far as is reasonably practicable, the effective support and management of staff to provide a safe working environment for all lone workers. SOS Homecare Ltd has a responsibility for the health, safety and welfare at work of its employees. These responsibilities apply equally to those staff who, for whatever reason, work alone.

Aims

This policy aims to:

- Increase staff awareness of safety issues relating to lone working.
- Ensure that the risk of working alone is assessed in a systematic and on-going manner, and that safe systems and methods of work are put in place to eliminate risks to staff working alone or to reduce those risks to the lowest practicable level.
- Ensure that appropriate training is available to staff in all areas, equipping them to recognise risk and provide practical advice on safety when working alone.
- Ensure that appropriate support is available to staff who are required to work alone.
- Encourage full reporting and recording of all accidents/incidents relating to lone working.
- Reduce the number of incidents and injuries to staff related to lone working.
- Ensure that the company complies with relevant health and safety legislation and best practice.

The Hazards of Working Alone

Staff who work alone face the same hazards in their daily work as other workers. However, for lone workers, the risk of harm is often greater. Hazards facing lone workers include:

- Fire – it may be difficult for an isolated worker to evacuate a building when the Fire alarm activates
- Violence and personal safety - the nature of the work of the SOS Homecare often involves staff visiting clients in their home which can lead to an increased risk to personal safety
- Lifting and handling – moving and handling tasks may pose more risk to an individual member of staff
- False allegations of abuse – health care professionals may place themselves at risk of having their actions misunderstood or misinterpreted by clients, particularly if working alone whilst undertaking personal care.

In practice this policy will apply to a small number of staff, especially when they are working in isolated locations and/or when carrying out known high-risk activities. High risk activities may include:

- Undertaking work within isolated areas
- Undertaking work within known high-risk areas
- Working/visiting clients in their own home
- Working alone at base
- Working with people who have known risks e.g. violence and/or aggression
- Times when staff are carrying medication, equipment or valuables
- Times when employees are travelling between site/homes/offices
- Times when employees are handling cash and/or banking

- Times when staff are undertaking personal care, especially on clients who may misunderstand intentions.

Responsibilities

The Care Governance Team is responsible for:

- Ensuring a system of policy and guidelines is distributed to all managers and employees
- Ensuring appropriate training is available to all staff to enable the accurate implementation of the policy and local guidelines
- Monitoring the implementation of the policy and its effectiveness on staff safety
- Providing resources which are identified by risk assessment (e.g. personal attack alarms)
- Ensuring that, in the event of a physical assault on a member of staff, systems are in place so that police are contacted immediately either by the person who has been assaulted or an appropriate manager or colleague and that full co-operation is given to the police in any investigation.
- Ensuring all staff are aware of the need for, and their contribution to, the risk assessment process for lone working, that applies within their current role
- Working with staff in order to eliminate or reduce risk to its lowest practicable level and formulate a work plan to ensure that staff have a mechanism for reporting back to their team leader/supervisor at agreed intervals
- Ensuring all incidents are reported and monitored via the appropriate line manager and risk manager

The Training Manager is responsible for:

- Ensuring all new staff to the company receive an induction pack, included in which will be reference to the Lone Worker Policy, and this will be highlighted as part of the Induction

Managers are responsible for:

- Ensuring other agencies/services involved with a service user are informed of risk assessments and any subsequent reviews and changes to the work plan are communicated appropriately
- Identifying all staff under their control that are lone workers as defined in this policy
- Ensuring risk assessments and their reviews are formally recorded and communicated
- Assessing the need for lone working in all cases
- Devising and implement safe working systems in relation to lone working to avoid or control risk where necessary
- Providing appropriate alternative arrangements or provide back up when it is unsafe for staff to work alone
- Ensuring systems are in place for staff to be traced and that these systems are regularly checked
- Ensuring that this Policy is disseminated, implemented, and monitored

All staff are responsible for:

- Familiarising themselves with the Lone Worker Policy and their responsibilities within it.
- Being aware of, and complying with, the risk assessment process for lone workers relevant to their current role(s) within SOS Homecare
- Being aware of their own personal safety, and that of their colleagues, and the environment they are working in
- Advising their line manager and seek guidance if they find they are (unusually) working alone
- Ensuring they comply with reporting-in systems and inform their manager if they are not maintaining their usual schedule

Post-Incident

A full debrief will be conducted with all staff involved in a serious lone worker incident. Arrangements for professional counselling will be made where necessary.

Risk Assessments

Risk assessment is essential to good risk management. Assessments shall be carried out for and by all staff whose working practice makes them vulnerable. This includes staff that are site based but work in isolation as well as mobile staff whose work takes them out into the community. In all cases there is a fundamental question about the need for lone working. Managers must decide whether systems can be adopted to avoid workers carrying out tasks on their own. If this is not possible the working practice of the member of staff plus other contributory factors must be risk assessed.

Risk assessments for lone workers should include:

- Safe access and egress
- Risk of violence
- Safety of equipment for individual use
- Channels of communication in an emergency and availability of emergency equipment
- Site security
- Security arrangements
- Client risk assessment
- Channels of communication in an emergency and availability of emergency equipment
- Reporting and recording arrangements
- Communication and trace ability
- Personal safety/security

Local managers must ensure that risk assessment systems are in place to meet the specific needs of all lone workers within their area of control. Employees who need assistance from the police whilst out and about or travelling should dial 999. SOS Homecare is actively committed to protecting staff from violence and assault and will support criminal proceedings against those who carry out assault. All staff are encouraged to report violent incidents to the police and will be supported by their manager throughout the process. Except in cases of emergency, employees should inform their manager or on call of any incidents immediately. If necessary, the employees' manager will thereafter take responsibility for contacting the Police to report the details of the incident.

Incident Reporting

The incident must be reported to the line manager at the earliest opportunity.

The individuals involved in the incident will complete the Incident Form and forward it to their line manager. This can be completed on EveryLIFE PASS or via the office.

If the incident involves a client, details of the incident should be fully documented in that client's notes.

Staff will be offered appropriate support (which may include a referral to professional counselling) from their line manager, following a serious lone worker incident.

Preventative measures and guidelines

Office based employees who are attending meetings off-site have a responsibility to leave details of their diary and plans for the day at their base.



Employees based in the community will contact their base at the beginning of their shift unless call monitoring is in place and this can be seen electronically.

Review

This policy will be reviewed annually.

Appendix A - GUIDENCE ON LONE WORKING

STAFF WORKING ALONE WITHIN A DEPARTMENT DURING OFFICE HOURS SHOULD:

Ensure that you can access a telephone to call for help if needed;
Ensure that keys are secured and not accessible to visitors;
If anxious regarding your personal safety call security or Emergency Services for help;
Where possible, avoid meeting people if you are alone in the workplace;
If meeting someone, let other people know who, when, where and telephone to let them know that the person has arrived and that you will get back to them at a certain time;
Not tell anyone that you are alone in the workplace;
Report any incidents to the relevant Manager as soon as practical after any events;
Never assume it won't happen to you – plan to stay safe.

STAFF WORKING ALONE OUTSIDE OF OFFICE HOURS SHOULD:

From time to time, employees may need to carry out their office-based work outside of normal office hours, such as weekends and evenings. The following precautions must be taken to ensure that your health and safety continues to be protected:

Always let your line manager know if you are staying behind in the office at the end of the normal working day. If necessary, agree to contact them when you leave.

If you are working at weekends or very late at night/ early in the morning let a friend or relative know your whereabouts and the time that you are expected back. Contact them at regular intervals to verify that you are OK. If you change your plans, let your contact know immediately.

Ensure that all windows and doors are secured to prevent unauthorised access, so that the working environment is as safe as possible.

Do not open the doors to any strangers no matter what identification they have. If they are meant to be there, they will either have keys or another means of access Never give security codes or keys to any stranger. Again, there are channels they can use to gather information if they are legitimate and are meant to have access.

Make sure your fire escape routes are available to you and not locked.

Do not use lifts at these times, as you may become trapped inside and unable to gain assistance or attention.

Should the fire alarm activate whilst you are in the office alone, you must leave the building immediately by the nearest fire exit. Make your way to the front of the building, a safe distance away and wait for the emergency services to arrive.

Should you discover any problems with equipment whilst in the office, do not attempt to repair or tamper with the controls. If it is not serious, report it to your manager the following working day.

On leaving an office, ensure that all windows are closed, and doors locked.

Ensure you have access to a phone in case you need to call the emergency services.

Park as close to the building as possible, in a well-lit area. Move your car closer to the building, if necessary, to minimise the risks if leaving the building on your own

If an incident occurs, follow the accident incident reporting procedure.

Never assume it won't happen to you – plan to stay safe.

LONE WORKING OFF SITE

When making lone worker visits it is important to communicate with others about your intentions during the delivery of your services.

You must inform a colleague of:

- The location of the visit/meeting
- A contact telephone number, if possible
- The time of the appointment
- The likely or estimated length of the meeting/visit

- The time when you are expected to return to the office/base or call in
- If not returning to the office, the time and location of your next visit or the time when you are due to arrive home

Colleagues may be aware of issues that you are not, you should ascertain as much information as possible about the appointment.

Visiting Clients in their Own Homes/Premises

Before making a home visit alone, the member of staff should assess the risks prior to the first visit to ascertain whether it is safe enough to attend alone. If you have any concerns regarding the safety of a particular home visit, you should either take a colleague with you, or rearrange it for a time when the risks can be minimised.

This guidance is designed for all staff who visits clients within their own homes. Prior to a home visit taking place the employee should: -

- Obtain as much information as possible about the client and the location to be visited
- Always ensure that fellow workers know where you are. Details should include: details of expected time of return, names and addresses of the clients being visited and time of appointments when visiting alone, mode of contact (e.g. mobile phone numbers)
- Make sure that you carry appropriate personal identification e.g. ID badge to verify your authenticity.
- When not required to wear a uniform dress appropriately for the area or client to be visited, particularly when the client's culture demands that women are covered and do not wear expensive-looking jewellery items
- Wear shoes and clothes that do not hinder movement or ability to run in case of an emergency
- Ensure that your mobile phone is working and accessible.

Whilst travelling to the home visit

Ensure;

- That the vehicle is well maintained and has sufficient fuel
- Bags, and equipment are concealed and cannot be seen when the vehicle is parked
- You only carry to individual appointments equipment that is needed

Consider

- The time, the location and the route
- Lock car while waiting
- Are you being followed? Uneasy? Or uncertain?
- Remain with or return to your vehicle, drive away for a short while
- Drive to place of safety
- If suspicions are confirmed, contact the Police

On arrival

- Be alert, aware, safe
- Park with care – as near to the address as possible, in a lit area away from subways and waste ground
- Do not leave valuables in your car or on show
- Assess the situation on approach and be prepared to abandon or postpone the visit if in there is a concern for safety
- Have identity badges available on request

- If the person answering the door makes you feel uneasy about entering, then an excuse should be made not to enter; for instance, when the client or relatives are drunk or 'high' on non-prescribed drugs.
- You should follow the occupants in when entering and not take the lead
- Remain alert while in the house look for anything that may present a problem
- When taking a seat within the property, ensure you are near an exit route
- If you feel uneasy during the visit, you should make an excuse to call the office and use the phrase "Please check the purple file". This will alert the office staff that you are concerned for your safety, and they will be able to take appropriate action.
- Be aware of any obstacles that may prevent one from exiting the premises quickly
- If in doubt - Do not enter premises – seek advice/ assistance

IF VIOLENCE IS THREATENED – LEAVE IMMEDIATELY

Checking back with the team following a home visit

If for whatever reason you find you will not be back at the expected time you must ring and let colleagues know of any alterations.

Known High Risk Home Visits

If any visit is deemed to be a potential high risk, it may be necessary to visit in pairs. The need for such additional support should be discussed with your manager so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

For such visits it is recognised as good practice for the employee to report back to their work base to confirm that the visit has ended and that you have safely left the person. A record must be made of the times entering and leaving the client's home.

When a Colleague does not Return as Expected

If one of your colleagues has not returned to the office or rung in to confirm their whereabouts, then the first and most important thing is to remember not to panic! It may be that they have genuinely forgotten to let you know of changes to their plans or have been delayed.

In the first instance ask your other colleagues whether they have heard from that person or have been properly notified of changes to their plans.

If not, ring their last visit client phone number or work mobile and check to see that they are safe. If you receive no answer, or if they answer but sound distressed/use the phrase "please check the purple file", then you should notify the Manager immediately. If they are not available, notify the most senior person on the premises and/or the person on-call.

If it has not been possible to obtain contact, the Manager should then try to contact the person at home or through their next of kin before contacting the police.