

Lone Working: Guidance for Assessing Risk

Clergy will find themselves working alone for some or all of their day. It is important that adequate arrangements are made to ensure that they are physically safe at all times and that they are protected, as far as is possible, from any false allegations which may occur.

When clergy are working alone they should consider these suggestions and determine which is practical in their situation:-

- Have an arrangement with other people whereby they know what your plans are for the day.
- Tell people how you may be contacted and/or when you plan to make contact with the parish office or a colleague. If you change your plans let your contact know immediately.
- Let other people know whom you are meeting, when and where, so that someone is looking after your welfare.
- Liaise with other professionals in the community so that you are aware of houses or other places where there is potential for violent behaviour.
- Ensure that transport is in good working order.
- Carry a mobile phone, which should always be kept as fully charged as possible, and have it readily to hand in the case of an emergency. A mobile phone should never be relied on as the only means of communication however as signal strength may be poor in some areas.
- Refrain from attempting to do any work which would normally require more than one person e.g. heavy manual lifting unless/until other colleagues arrive to assist.

PERSONAL SECURITY

Being alone in Church Buildings

The area round the church and associated buildings - do they present any special risk if you are alone? It is sensible to do a risk assessment on the environment around the Church and associated buildings, both for yourself and for any others who may be there at times when there is no other activity taking place eg organists, parish administrators, cleaners, and consider the practicality of the following:

- Ensure that doors are locked behind those alone in the buildings at specific times.
- There may be a need for a security lock and access phone on some buildings.
- Ensure that someone else stays with you in Church until the end of the service.
- Do not respond to alarms in the middle of the night alone.

Safety in the house

Whilst working alone in the house there are a number of things you can do to minimise risks to personal security:

- Ensure that all windows and doors are secured to prevent unauthorised access, so that the house is as safe as possible.
- Be careful not to tell anyone that you are alone. This applies to people who telephone or e-mail you, as well as to visitors.

Callers to the house

It is sensible to determine what the parish's policy is about giving money and/or food, and then ensure it is consistently applied when callers come to the door asking for money. Useful tips are:

- Have a list of resource centres to which the caller can be directed, both local authority and charities.
- Decide whether to make an arrangement with local cafes/shops about exchanging goods for vouchers, or keep a stock of food to hand out.
- Set times and boundaries when help is available and do not make "knee jerk" responses on demand.
- Think carefully before inviting any caller inside especially if you are alone.
- The Suzy Lamplugh Trust advises making a phone call after the visitor has arrived, telling someone that you will get back to them at a certain time, after their visitor, 'X' has left. This acts as both an information call and a deterrent.

Making a Visit

The level of risk posed by home visits depends as much on the circumstances surrounding the visit as to the environment.

- Will the nature of a visit or the person being visited be likely to increase the risk of violence?
- Will you be alone and/or in a remote location with the person you are visiting?
- Has the person being visited had a history of unbalanced behaviour?
- Do you require training in risk assessment or in dealing with difficult people?

Other useful tips would be to:

- Ensure that you have as much information on the parishioner being visited and their home environment as possible prior to the visit so that risks can be assessed.
- Park as close to the building as possible in a well lit area.
- Avoid confrontation: do all you can to defuse a potentially violent situation

- Be aware of your surroundings and potential hazards. Always be aware of your exits and if possible try to sit facing the exit. Wherever practical avoid being in a situation where the person being visited is between you and the exit.
- Ensure your mobile phone is left switched on and is easily accessible
- Trust your intuition. If you feel uneasy, act on it straight away and leave
- Ensure that you carry identification and be prepared to identify yourself.
- Carry out a “10 second risk assessment” when you first arrive at the premises and the front door is opened. If you feel that there is a risk of harm you should have an excuse ready not to enter the house and arrange for an alternative meeting.
- Make sure that when you enter the home that you shut the front door behind you and make yourself familiar with the door lock in case you need to make an emergency exit.
- If there is a known problem with animals at a particular address or location, you should ask the occupants to remove or secure the animals before arrival.
- If you are confronted by an aggressive animal on a first visit to an address you should not put yourself at risk.

If you are making a visit to a parishioner you have concerns about, a system should be in place so that someone ensures that you have returned back to your home at the completion of the visit. If a problem arises, a system of code words or phrases should be agreed and used that will help you convey the nature of a threat to your colleagues so that they can provide the appropriate response such as involving the police.

Systems need not be overly complicated. It may be as simple as telling a colleague where you are going and when you are expected back; arranging to ring the parish office or churchwarden at the conclusion of a visit or call; having a mobile phone to enable someone to contact you if your return is overdue. Use of diary systems or noticeboards to indicate whereabouts may form part of this system. However, the system should ensure for risky visits that your return or a call from you is actively expected and waited for, and that action is taken to contact you if you do not return or the call is not made.

WHEN DRIVING YOUR CAR

People tend to feel safer when driving and harassment or actual attacks are rare. A few sensible precautions will help minimise the risks, and make you feel more confident. Remember also that some drivers become more unnaturally aggressive behind the wheel.

- Make sure your car is regularly serviced, and check tyres, oil, and petrol/diesel especially before a long journey. Carry a spare safety can of petrol/diesel. Be familiar with the Highway Code. Join one of the national breakdown organisations
- Plan your route in advance
- Tell people at your destination what time you expect to arrive

- Ensure your mobile phone is fully charged and has credit available
- Keep bags, mobile phone etc out of sight; these are easy picking for a snatch thief in a traffic jam or at the lights
- Keep the doors locked, windows and sunroof closed as far as possible, especially in stop-go traffic
- Do not pick up hitch-hikers
- Keep an up-to-date map handy so that you won't need to stop and ask for directions
- When leaving your car make sure it is locked and put valuables in the boot
- After dark, park in a well-lit place, as close to your destination as possible
- When driving alone, especially after dark, do not stop, even for people who may seem to be in genuine distress or requiring help. Stop as soon as is practicable and safe to do so and contact the emergency services as appropriate
- When parking, always point your car in the direction of travel and in a multi-storey car park, reverse your car; leave it as close to the exit as you can, near ground level and away from pillars
- Have your key ready when you return to you car; check the back seat for intruders before you get in
- If you breakdown pull off the road as far as you can and switch on your hazard warning lights.
- Do not leave children alone in the car
- If someone offers help, stay in the car with the doors locked and ask them to phone the rescue service. Do not get into a car with a stranger or try to hitch a lift.
- Use you mobile phone or walk to the nearest phone, noting the road name/any landmarks, and call your breakdown organisation. If you are a woman on your own or with children they will give you priority
- If you break down on the motorway drive or coast to an emergency phone if you can
- If you cannot drive any further pull on to the hard shoulder and switch on your hazard lights
- Leave the car by the passenger door and walk to the nearest emergency phone
- Tell the control room the number of your breakdown organisation, your car registration and the number shown on the nearest marker post
- If you decide to wait on the verge, lock all doors except the front passenger door
- If a car stops while you are waiting, either use the emergency phone to tell the police the registration number or get into the passenger seat of you car and lock the door

- When the breakdown vehicle arrives, wind your window down slightly, ask the driver for identification and check that he/she knows your name without being prompted
- If you are or think you are being followed, drive to the nearest police station or manned and lit building such as a petrol station to request assistance
- Use your car horn to attract attention or help if needed
- If the occupants of a car beside you at the lights try to attract your attention, simply ignore them
- If a car travels alongside you at the same speed, slow down and let them pass. If the driver persists, drive to a busy place, and call the police
- If a car pulls up in front, forcing you to stop, leave the engine on. If the Driver gets out and approaches you reverse and get away. Activate hazard lights and sound your horn continuously
- If anyone tries to force down a partially open window or open an unlocked door, hit his/her hand with the nearest available object such as a shoe
- If you witness an incident, or if someone tries to flag you down, think before leaving the car. Is it genuine? Could you help? It might be safer and more practical to use a mobile phone, or the nearest pay/emergency phone to report what you see

Transporting people in your car

- Before transporting people in your car please ensure your motor vehicle insurance covers you for business use
- The driver and passengers must wear seat belts
- It is inadvisable to transport a person you do not know. If this situation arises, try and ensure you have someone in the car with you that you know throughout the journey.
- When transporting people in your car the following issues should be considered in order to reduce the risk:
 - a) Do you know where you are going and how to get there?
 - b) If you are returning home after dark, have you considered possible risks (eg where you have parked your car)
 - c) Put valuables in the boot (eg laptop, briefcase or handbag)
- If you are transporting a child, the child should always sit in the back and the appropriate car seat or restraint should also be used

WHEN TAKING TAXIS

The majority of taxi services are safe and reliable. Nevertheless, it is advisable to observe certain precautions

- If you cannot hail a licensed cab, carry the phone number of a reputable car company, or ask a friend for a recommendation. Unlicensed mini cabs pose a particular risk and should never be used.
- Whenever possible, book by phone and ask for the driver's name and make and colour of car. Do not get into a cab you have not asked for
- If you can, share a cab with a friend - it's safer and cheaper
- Always sit in the back If you chat with the driver, do not give away any personal details
- Before arriving at your destination, have your cash ready, leave the cab and then pay the driver
- Have your keys ready and enter your home quickly

WHEN WALKING AND CYCLING

Generally, walking is a safe and practical way of getting around. However, people tend to feel more vulnerable on foot, especially if they are walking after dark. There are many ways you can prepare yourself to recognise and avoid potential dangers.

- Know where you are going; check the route in advance if possible
- Keep to well-lit roads and pavements, as far as possible; avoid alleys, subways, dangerous short cuts.
- Carry money and valuables safely. Don't overtly display valuables about your person
- Don't carry much cash
- Carry a wallet in an inside pocket. Stop pickpockets by securing with a safety pin
- Carry a torch
- Carry the following items separately; small change, car and house keys
- Ensure the fastening on your bag/briefcase is secure
- Dress appropriately and wear shoes that are easy to walk /run/cycle in
- Coats or jackets containing valuables should not be left unattended
- Avoid listening to music - it will reduce awareness of your surroundings
- Be aware of potential hazards in the daylight or at night
- Be on guard with strangers

- Be cautious in conversation; do not give away any personal information
- Trust in your instincts and avoid crowds or groups which may feel threatening
- Be wary of stationary vehicles with engines running and people sitting in them
- If someone grabs your bag, wallet or personal possessions, let them go.
- If you think someone is following you, check by crossing the street. If they do follow you, quickly move to the nearest place with people and call the police
- If a car stops and you are threatened, use an alarm and move quickly in the opposite direction

Walking specific

- Walk facing traffic on the street side of the pavements
- Walk briskly if possible and physically able to do so and do not stop in areas that are unknown to you, for example to look at a map or ask for directions. Instead go to a safe place e.g. petrol station and ask.
- When walking, decide when to carry and alarm in your hand and know how to use it

Cycling specific

- When cycling ensure your bicycle is in good working order
- Make sure that you and your bicycle are readily visible (night and day)

Buses, Tubes and Trains

Whilst much has been done to improve safety on public transport, simple measures can be taken to minimise risks:

- Where possible wait for transport at a busy stop or station that is well lit.
- Try and sit near the driver of the vehicle or in an aisle seat.
- Familiarise yourself with the emergency alarm on the vehicle and sit near it.
- Avoid empty upper decks on buses or empty train compartments.
- If threatened by other passengers inform the driver or guard.