

Wales Council for Voluntary Action

Supporting charities, volunteers and communities

Model policy series

8 Guidelines on safety for home visits



These guidelines will be supported by training on particular topics from time to time.

You visit people who may need help because they are ill or under stress, or who simply may be frail. They may therefore be unable to maintain high safety standards in their homes, and this may affect both them and you.

- Be aware that many accidents do occur in the home, and that sensible measures can prevent injury and even death.
- Should you come across any condition or piece of equipment around the home which seems unsafe, talk to your client about it – bearing in mind that you are a visitor in their home – and, with their permission, tell your supervisor of your concerns as soon as possible.

These notes highlight the main points but are not an exhaustive list.

Personal safety

- It is up to you not to put yourself at risk. Our golden rule for volunteers is 'if you are not sure whether it is safe to do it, don't do it!'
- When going to and from a client, be aware of possible dangers. If you are worried about visiting the client on your own, or in the dark, or in a particular area, discuss your concerns as soon as possible with your supervisor. Personal alarms are available to volunteers on request.
- Trust your judgement. If the actions of anyone in the home you are visiting set off 'alarm bells', believe your intuition and position yourself for an easy exit. Please note that this situation is most unlikely to arise, but it is better to be forewarned.
- If you have not been trained, do not under any circumstances, attempt to lift a client from a recumbent or sitting position to an upright position, or move the person from a chair to a bed or wheelchair. It is easy for an untrained person to injure themselves trying to do these manouvres and if you drop the client, you could injure him or her as well.

- Do not climb onto unstable pieces of furniture, such as rickety chairs, when carrying out minor DIY work.

Electricity

- Electrical flexes, plugs and sockets should be in a good state of repair.
- Power points must not be overloaded, i.e. several appliances working from the same point.
- Mains operated appliances, including portable appliances, must not be used in bathrooms.
- Electrical appliances, plugs and flexes must not be handled with wet hands.
- Electric blankets should be kept dry and flat, and serviced regularly.
- Do not carry out any electrical repairs yourself unless you are a professional electrician. Even routine tasks such as changing a fuse or wiring a plug must not be undertaken.
- If you have ANY doubts about a piece of equipment or item, do not use it.

Gas

If you smell gas in the house and you cannot locate the source, or if you detect or suspect a leak:

- ensure that all naked flames are extinguished (including cigarettes)
- open all doors and turn off the gas taps
- do not switch on the lights
- contact the gas emergency services (*telephone number*) and seek advice.

Cooking

Many fires start in the kitchen. These are some of the dangers:

- pilot light going out
- pan handles must be kept clear of flames as they will get hot, but should not stick out into the kitchen.
- chip pans must not be filled more than half way
- cookers should be checked regularly while in use

Heating

- All fires and heaters should be adequately guarded
- check that there is no smell of gas, especially near meters
- portable heaters must be kept clear of furniture and not put where people can trip over them.
- It is dangerous to air clothes near a fire or a cooker
- check that oil heaters are not giving off smoke or smells.

Safe movement

It is vital that the home is as safe as possible. However, remember that you are a visitor in somebody else's home, and that you can only make suggestions on improved safety to the person you visit.

Check the following potential problem areas, and point out hazards in a diplomatic and friendly way:

- that doorways, hall, passages, stairs and landings are free of clutter and that they are well lit, even at night
- that carpets, rugs, mats and lino which are torn, worn or wrinkled and/or move easily may be hazardous
- that fixtures and fittings are secure
- that all areas are free from trailing flexes
- that anything spilt on the floor is cleaned up at once.

Fire

Don't smoke in the client's home – even if the client smokes. This will ensure that if there is a fire, you cannot be held responsible. If a fire should occur whilst you are with a client:

Do not put yourself at risk!

- remove yourself and client to a place of safety
- dial 999 and ask for the Fire Brigade.

Medicine and chemicals

- The golden rule for volunteer visitors is that it is not your role to assist the client in any way with medication.
- As a volunteer visitor you should also not be handling chemicals, but do remember that lavatory cleaners and bleach should never be mixed, and never transfer chemicals (e.g. bleach) into other containers.

The information in this document is for information only. It is not a substitute for professional advice and we cannot accept any responsibility for loss occasioned as a result of any person acting or refraining from acting upon it.

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