

# Health and Safety

for congregations

*Isolated and remote work*



## How this guide can help you

Working alone can put people in a more vulnerable situation. Without the support of others nearby, a safety or a security incident may be more significant. Risks can also be heightened if we are travelling in a remote location or going alone to someone's home. Although we hope personal safety will never be an issue, it is sensible to take precautions.

This guide has been developed to help create good practices that minimise the risk of harm where workers perform remote or isolated work.

## Remote and isolated work

Working alone has become a normal and expected situation for many people - working in their homes due to lockdowns. It has also become commonplace for a minister to work from an office in the manse and to conduct visits to people's homes. It is rare for issues to arise, but we should be prepared for an issue just in case. Work performed for the congregation is considered remote or isolated when someone doesn't have access to others to help if an unexpected incident occurs. Isolation may occur because of the location, time or nature of the work being done. Assistance from other people may include rescue, medical assistance and emergency services.

Workers should avoid working alone if it is not necessary, and work with others where possible, however, if this is not feasible, we should assess the risk, and all reasonable precautions should be implemented to safeguard workers from harm.

## Assessing the risk

Working alone or remotely can increase the risk of performing tasks. Exposure to aggression, violence and poor access to emergency assistance are common hazards. A risk assessment helps us understand the nature of the harm that could be caused by the hazard, how serious the harm could be and the likelihood of it happening. When performing a risk assessment, you should involve staff and volunteers. It is important to consider the perception of workers and how safe they feel. Our risk management guide will help you work through the risk management process. It can be found [here](#).

Responses to the following questions can also be helpful when assessing the risk of working alone or in remote locations:

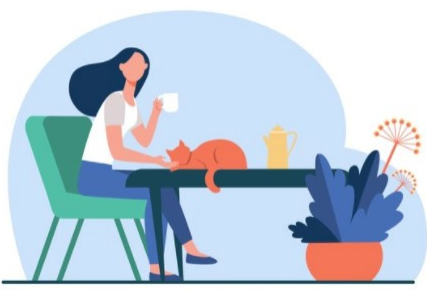
- What is the length of time required to work alone and what is the time of day when the person may be working alone?  
There may be a greater risk at night
- Is there access to communication? Would access be impacted if there was an emergency?
- Are there systems for keeping regular contact?
- Is the work in a remote location that makes immediate rescue or attendance by emergency services difficult?
- If travel is required, what is likely to happen if there is a vehicle breakdown?
- Are high risk activities performed when working alone, such as cash handling or using ladders when working alone?
- Is cash kept onsite?
- Is contact with people who are aggressive or violent anticipated?
- Is pastoral care being provided to someone who may be aggressive or unpredictable?
- What is the person's level of experience and training? Are they able to make sound judgements about their safety?
- Are there pre-existing medical conditions that may increase the risk?

## Controlling the risk

If a risk is identified, controls must be implemented to reduce the residual risk or alternative arrangements should be made. To reduce the level of risk, the following controls can be implemented:

- The layout and design of the church and buildings we occupy can be designed to reduce risks by enhancing visibility and installing monitored CCTV
- Establish if the church/building needs extra security. Refer to our guide on security found [here](#)
- Establishing communication systems, consider how an alarm will be raised in the event a problem arises. Consider how these will be accessed in an emergency. Remember mobile phones are not always reliable in remote areas
- Consult the phone provider if you are unsure if a phone signal can be sustained for the entire period the worker is alone. If gaps in coverage are likely, other methods of communication should be considered. It is important that batteries are kept charged and a spare is available
- Establish systems so you know where people are expected to be. Schedule check ins, so others are quickly alerted if there is an issue
- Satellite tracking systems may have the capability to sending messages as part of a scheduled call-in system and have distress or alert functions





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## Controlling the risk continued...

- No staff member, contractor or volunteers should ever plan to be alone on church premises with children or young people. However, if they should find themselves in this situation, it is important that another adult is made aware immediately. They should assess the risks involved in sending the child or young person home, against the vulnerability of being alone with them
- Personal security systems or personal duress systems could be considered
- Do not perform high risk activities when there is no one around to call in the event of an emergency
- If there are known medical conditions, consider wearing a medical alarm that can alert emergency services if required
- In the event of an emergency, follow the emergency plan. Our emergency planning manual is found **here**

## Home visits

Home visits can be potentially risky situations, and therefore it is important that appropriate risk management measures are in place before a home visit is undertaken. One to one contact with individuals in the context of pastoral care should also be properly planned and any risks considered.

When undertaking home visits:

- Assess the need to attend in person. Attend in pairs where behaviour may be unpredictable. A plan should be established to minimise the risk of harm
- Ensure that workers attend in pairs on the first visit if the person isn't known
- Someone else should always be aware the movements of volunteers and staff undertaking home visits. This means providing them with the address of where they will be visiting, details of the person they are visiting, telephone numbers if known and expected arrival and departure times
- No staff or volunteers should ever undertake a visit to a child or young person in their home unless another adult is present
- Staff and volunteers should be alert to any signs of potential danger during a home visit and be prepared to leave immediately if they have any concerns
- Confrontation should always be avoided
- Pets should be secured before the visit if they present a safety risk
- Where possible, home visits should be conducted in the morning or early afternoon, rather than the evening or late afternoon to avoid travelling in the dark and to increase visibility. If this is not feasible, consideration should be given to working in pairs
- Keep regular record of pastoral encounters, including details such as date, time, subject and actions to be taken

## Personal safety tips

- Before putting yourself in a vulnerable situation think about how you could react if you started to have concerns for your safety. What would you do to raise an alarm?
- Always consider potential escape routes so you know in advance how to remove yourself from a situation
- Consider whether you should have duress alarm
- If a situation arises that you are unfamiliar with, or in which you feel unsafe, withdraw and seek further advice or assistance

**Remember:** Remember, your safety and the safety of your family is a priority, even if it means setting boundaries in the way we serve others

## Monitoring and review

Control measures should be monitored and reviewed. If necessary, these should be revised to ensure they work as planned.

You should review control measures:

- When the control measure is no longer effective
- Before a change is made where isolated or remote work will be introduced
- If a new hazard is identified
- Before undertaking a home visit
- Annually when you review your risk register

## Training and instruction

Workers including volunteers need training to prepare them for working alone and, where relevant, in remote locations. It is important to provide information about the safety of their role, so they are equipped to recognise risks, and know how to implement controls to take care of their own safety and security. Training should also cover responding to violent or aggressive clients (including emergency response), using communications systems, administering first aid and obtaining emergency assistance. Workers should also be made aware that they should cease any activity where they feel their personal safety is threatened.

