



National
Guidance

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Emergencies and Critical Incidents - Guidance for Leaders

See also documents [4.1a "Avoiding Accidents and Emergencies"](#) and [4.1b "Emergencies and Critical Incidents – Overview"](#), which includes definitions of the terms 'Emergency' and 'Critical Incident'.

In this document, the generic term 'emergency' is used to include both an Emergency and a Critical Incident.

Most incidents that happen during off-site visits can be dealt with by the visit leadership team. However, some incidents can be serious or beyond the ability of the visit leadership team to cope, and thus require support from the establishment and/or the employer.

By their nature, emergencies are usually unexpected and can therefore be stressful. However, training and careful pre-planning of what to do beforehand can mitigate the trauma of being caught up in one.

In planning for and dealing with emergencies, you should follow any specific guidance provided by your establishment and/or employer. Your establishment should have an Emergency Plan – see document

[4.1d "Emergencies and Critical Incidents – Guidance for Establishments"](#).

Before the Visit

Emergency Procedures

Visit Leaders should agree Emergency Procedures with their Educational Visit Co-ordinator (EVC) or Head/Manager. These should include instructions of how to alert the 24-hour (i.e. constant cover) Emergency Contact in the event of an emergency, as well as other actions for the visit leadership team. See document [4.1g "Model Emergency Procedures for Visit Leaders"](#).

All members of the visit leadership team should have easy access to a copy of the Emergency Procedures throughout the visit (e.g. on laminated cards) and be able to take action if there is a problem.

If the visit will involve remote supervision, participants should have an appropriate version of the Emergency Procedures and be trained in how to apply them.

Training and Practice

During an emergency you will not have time to read this guidance – you will be reliant on training and effective practised systems. Emergency Procedures should be regularly tested, and all members of a visit leadership team should be able to deal with an incident, including alerting the establishment in the event of an emergency.

Practical training and practice can help leaders and participants to switch into emergency mode when needed. You should consider practising various realistic scenarios and emergency drills relevant to the type of visits you lead (e.g. coach or minibus breaking down on a motorway, rapid group collection/head count in a public place, fire drills at any accommodation). It is good practice to involve participants in planning and practising for incidents and emergencies, unless there are reasons why this would be inappropriate.

Communications

Communications can become swamped during an emergency, particularly if parents/media are trying to call for news. Phone numbers which are not in the public domain should be agreed to maintain communications in the event that primary channels become overwhelmed. Parents should not be given the telephone numbers that activate the establishment's Emergency Plan or the employer's Critical Incident Plan.

Ensure that mobile phones have enough credit, are charged and, if necessary, are waterproof/weatherproof. Check whether there is mobile coverage from your provider in the area of your visit.

Carry alternative means of raising the alarm where necessary (e.g. VHF radio, Personal Locator Beacon, EPIRB).

If the visit is overseas, ensure that your phone(s) are enabled for roaming and that your establishment's phones (including the Emergency Contact phones) are enabled to make overseas calls.

First Aid and Medical

You should ensure that there is an appropriate level of first aid cover for the nature of the visit, and ensure that first aid kits are appropriately stocked and accessible. See document [4.4b "First Aid"](#).

Basic first aid is not complicated, and many lives could be saved each year if more people knew how to open an airway, place a casualty into a safe airway position and deal with major bleeding/shock. Good practical first aid training is an excellent way to provide young people with a useful life skill while enhancing their self-esteem and self-confidence. It is also an excellent team building/group work activity. It is, therefore, good practice to provide some form of first aid training (whether certificated or not) to all young people and staff.

Ensure that all individual medical needs are known and that leaders are competent to handle them. See document [4.4d "Medication"](#).

During the Incident

Immediate Action

The Visit Leader should take charge of an incident and follow the agreed Emergency Procedures unless and until relieved by the emergency services or by an appropriate member of employer/establishment staff. If the Visit Leader is incapacitated, all members of the visit leadership team should be able to take charge and to at least initiate the Emergency Procedures.

The Visit Leader should:

1. Assess the situation, establishing the nature and extent of the problem but ensuring that they do not put themselves or others at further risk.
2. Make sure all members of the party are:
 - a. accounted for;
 - b. safe;
 - c. adequately supervised;
 - d. briefed to ensure that they understand what to do to remain safe;
3. Allocate roles to other leaders and/or suitable participants. An effective emergency response requires several things to happen at once and the Visit Leader cannot attend to casualties, ensure that others in the group are moved to a safe place and kept safe, call for help from the emergency services, instigate the Emergency Procedures and keep notes of the incident all at the same time.
4. If there are injuries, take action to establish their extent and administer appropriate first aid. Aim to:
 - a. Preserve life;
 - b. Prevent the condition worsening;
 - c. Promote recovery: treat for shock; reassure and keep warm.
5. Contact the appropriate emergency service(s) – in the UK dial 999 or 112 for the police, fire and rescue, ambulance or coastguard (for mountain/cave/mine rescue ask for the police); if overseas, ensure that your Emergency Procedures include the appropriate numbers. They will guide you through the information they need but this will include:
 - a. Your name and the name of the group/establishment;
 - b. Location;
 - c. Nature of emergency and number of injured persons;
 - d. Action taken so far.
6. Alert your Emergency Contact. You may be in shock and need support. News travels fast and your establishment/employer will need accurate information.
7. Control any communications by the rest of the group. Rumours spread very quickly and can cause serious and unnecessary upset.
8. Avoid splitting the group – unless it is the only way to get help – and leave nobody on their own.

Secondary Action

Uninjured group members should be moved to shelter or away from the immediate vicinity of any casualties. Ensure that they:

- are adequately supervised throughout;
- are returned as early as possible to base;
- receive appropriate support and reassurance.

Ensure that an appropriate adult accompanies any casualties to hospital, taking with them parental consent forms and medical information for the injured persons.

Consider other people who may need contacting, and whether this is better done by visit staff or establishment/employer staff, e.g.:

- Other groups who are part of your visit;
- Embassy/Consulate/High Commission if abroad;
- Local accommodation/contact;
- Tour operator/provider;
- Insurer.

Direct contact with a parent of a group member from the scene of the incident should be avoided. This task should be carried out from the establishment home base by senior staff.

DO NOT speak to the media, and do not admit any liability or sign anything. Refer all media or legal enquiries to the appropriate person at your establishment or employer.

It is useful to keep an accurate record of events and actions as close to real time as possible. Any leader with spare capacity should, therefore, keep notes – see the section below on Recording the Incident.

Maintain contact with the emergency services and the establishment/employer contact until the emergency is over.

Continually monitor, reassess and review – ensure nothing has been forgotten and all leaders and participants are coping, cared for and secure.

Recording the Incident

Make an accurate record of all details as soon as possible – do not leave this until later when your memory of details may be confused. If it is appropriate to do so, take photos.

Record the following:

- Time and date of the incident;
- What happened;
- Accurate location;
- Names of casualties and details of injuries;
- Names of others involved but not injured;
- Relevant environmental information (e.g. weather, ground/water conditions);
- Actions taken, including all communications;
- Details of any moves from the incident site (times, who moved, where to, how);

- Names and contact details of witnesses;
- Registration numbers of any motor vehicles involved;
- Proposed actions.

After the Incident

Consider the emotional needs of any staff, participants and others who may have been adversely affected.

If necessary, provide an accurate detailed statement to your establishment or employer. Follow your employer's and establishment's reporting requirements, including completing any accident and incident forms and complying with RIDDOR regulations.

Review the lessons learned and ensure that these feed into future visit plans, emergency plans and staff training. Share the experience and learning with colleagues.

