



National  
Guidance  
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## Avoiding Accidents and Emergencies

Although rare, accidents do happen. On the principle that prevention is better than cure, the following points are intended to assist leaders in avoiding accidents in the first place.

Being prepared for, and having a well-thought-through plan to deal with a serious incident is an important part of any visit plan. For advice on this aspect see other documents dealing with Emergencies and Critical Incidents in this guidance.

### Good Leadership Habits

See also documents [4.2a "Group Management and Supervision"](#), [4.3f "Risk Management – Some Practical Advice"](#) and [4.4e "Terrorism"](#).

Stay alert – develop a leader's 'twitch' or a 360° awareness of the group and environment so that you pick up changing circumstances quickly.

Remain flexible and look for the unexpected – the things that you hadn't considered when planning. All visits should be well planned but it is not possible to anticipate everything, so leaders should be ready to adapt the plan to changing circumstances.

Changes in circumstances can provide excellent learning opportunities but it is important to distinguish between a threat and an opportunity. For example, during a city centre visit you see a crowd gathering in a square. This may be an interesting piece of street theatre or a peaceful protest, which could be used as a stimulus for good follow up work. Alternatively, it could be the beginnings of a violent protest that you should not be near.

Don't be a 'turkey'. Turkeys base their assumptions on their own past experience and simply expect to get food and water every day right up to the time they don't. Applying past experience to new circumstances does not always work, so just because things have always gone well on your visits do not assume that they always will. Learn from others' experience and learn from accidents.

Be a 'swan'. Swans appear to float gracefully and serenely across the surface of the water, but underneath their feet are busy and quietly directing. Leaders should present an outward impression of calm reassurance so that the group is able to enjoy their trip. This is only achieved, like the swan, by constantly keeping your senses working - monitoring, reviewing and planning.

Ask yourself the 'What If?' question, for example:

- What if one of them slips off this path?
- What if that crowd in the square turns nasty?
- What if the bus breaks down?

By constantly asking yourself this question you will be ready to respond – quickly if necessary.

Look for lemons! Accidents rarely have only one cause. They often occur because several factors (each in isolation not critical but often commonplace) come together at the same time - like lemons lining up in a slot machine. Spotting lemons and discussing them with colleagues may help you to avoid this unwanted 'jackpot'. For example:

- Children acting silly and pushing one another over is not that uncommon;
- Rain and wet roads/pavements is common;
- Car drivers being momentarily distracted is common;
- Children crossing roads on off site visits is common;
- However, if these occur at the same time, so that you have a group of children pushing each other, so that one falls over, while crossing a wet road in front of a distracted driver, the potential outcome is a serious accident.

## Lessons from Accidents

**PLAN B** – Always prepare a 'Plan B' (even if this is simply that you turn around and go back to base). The more complex the visit the more complex the Plan B may need to be. Ensure everyone is aware of the Plan B. **DO NOT** be afraid to switch to Plan B – psychologically it is often easier to carry on with plan A: be aware of this and do not delay switching plans. It is better to wonder later if you were too cautious than to regret not changing plans when you had the chance.

**CLEAR ROLES** – Ensure the Visit Leader, other members of the leadership team and the group are aware what their role is and what is expected of them.

**ACTIVE SUPERVISION** – supervision is not simply a passive presence: it is an active employment of the leadership habits outlined above – supervision is about what leaders **do**, not just that they are there.

**PREPARE WELL** – 'Proper Planning and Preparation Prevent Poor Performance'. A well-thought-out plan, including what to do in the event of an emergency, should provide leaders with all the options they need to lead an effective visit. Involve young people in planning and keep them informed of developments and changes.

**BE WATER AWARE** – There are very few fatal accidents on visits but, statistically, drowning is the single biggest cause of them. The water environment provides wonderful opportunities for play, enjoyment and challenge but does require careful supervision. Water need not be avoided but should be treated with respect. The best way to help young people to be safe around water is not to keep them from it but to teach them to swim, teach them safe practices around water and teach them

to recognize the difference between safe and dangerous locations. Remember that water hazards exist on the water margins, even if you are not planning to enter the water. For further advice on managing activities in and around water see documents [7i "Group Safety at Water Margins"](#), [7o "Natural Water Bathing"](#) and [7x "Swimming Pools"](#). If planning water activities such as canoeing or surfing, see document [7a "Adventure Activities"](#).

SAY NO – Visit Leaders tend to want to please, and a group of young people desperate to do something that they were looking forward to, is difficult to resist. Leaders **must** be strong enough to act upon their judgement. If, for example, children are expecting to paddle during a trip to the local river and your judgement is that something has changed since you planned the trip and this is no longer a good idea, then you say NO.

## Useful Pointers

Refer to documents in this guidance that are relevant to the type of visit and the locations, group, activities, transport, etc. involved.

Plan well, including what to do in an emergency. Ensure everyone knows what the plans are.

Choose competent leaders and never delegate responsibility for supervision to anyone unless you know they are suitably competent.

Educate participants in the procedures/skills that they may need. For example, training primary aged children on how to cross roads in a large group can be done in the school grounds using markers.

Have a clear code of conduct and ensure that all of the visit leadership team and participants understand and follow it.

Ensure that all leaders' and participants' medical needs are known and that leaders are competent to handle them. Be aware of possible adverse interactions between some medications and some environmental factors. For example, leaders taking diuretic medication or young people taking bed-wetting medication could run increased risks of dehydration in hot conditions.

Have 'rally points' when moving around cities, towns or other busy places. A rally point is somewhere that everyone knows to meet if things go wrong. For leaders who have not been to the location before, and for young people, photographs of rally points are a useful addition to their briefing.

Ensure that drivers take adequate rest breaks on long journeys: the Highway Code recommends a break of at least 15 minutes after every two hours of driving.

In poor weather conditions monitor young people to see that they are suitably dressed and coping with the weather.

If appropriate, advise participants about the dangers of over-exertion in the heat and of dehydration, which can cause headache, dizziness and nausea. In hot weather, monitor fluid and salt intake and wear loose, lightweight clothing – preferably made of cotton or other natural fibres – and use suitably factored sun protection creams and sun hats/glasses.

On residential visits:

- On arrival check the rooms, security arrangements and evacuation arrangements and ensure everyone is clear about what to do;
- Hold evening briefings with all leaders to review issues and prepare for the next day;
- Spend time early in the morning explaining/confirming arrangements for the day to the group;
- Recognize that many health problems on longer visits are caused by lack of food, of liquid or of sleep;
- See also document [4.2b "Residentials"](#).

On visits abroad:

- Be aware, and keep reminding young people, that traffic may approach you from the opposite direction to normal;
- Be aware of different environmental hazards, e.g. some diseases are more common in some countries - know what preventative action to take and what to do if a group member becomes infected;
- Ensure that everyone is aware of cultural expectations and dress, and behaves in a way that avoids offence;
- See also document [7r "Overseas Visits"](#).

