

Resources for young leaders



Managing Safety

Safety doesn't have to be intimidating. To manage risk effectively, you just need to be prepared. A large part of staying safe is about being organised, planning, asking the right questions, and doing things that promote safety. This doesn't take away from the group experiencing an appropriate sense of adventure. This guidance will help you to put the Scout motto into practice before, during, and after sessions.

The right ratios

First things first, you need to make sure you have enough adults. The number of adults you'll need depends on your section and how many young people you have.

Remember, these ratios are the minimum. Your risk assessment for the activity may show that you need more adults than the minimum to keep everyone safe.

Before you begin, it's a good idea to check you're using the [most up to date ratios](#).



Leader in charge

All meetings, events, and activities must have an identified leader in charge who's responsible for overseeing the safety aspects. Their responsibilities include doing headcounts, completing registers, allocating specific roles to other leaders, and making sure other leaders are aware of their responsibilities.

The best way to do organise the leader in charge is for all of the leaders involved to agree on one person who'll step up and take on the role. In the context of safety, the leader in charge doesn't necessarily have to be the person running the event or activity. The idea is to have someone whose primary focus is the safety of everyone taking part.



Stay in touch

The InTouch system is designed to manage communications, including in the event of an emergency. It manages communications between leaders, commissioners, parents and carers, and young people at any Scouts event or meeting (including weekly section meetings). The InTouch system creates clear communication channels between the people at the event and people who aren't there. You should make sure everyone involved knows about the system in advance.

It's a good idea to give parents or carers the names of the membership team and a contact number for them. Often, parents and carers only know adult volunteers by the name they use at Scout meetings (for example, Akela at Cubs). This can make it really difficult to find contact information for leaders if parents and carers need it. Giving parents and carers contact details is especially important when you're meeting away from the usual meeting place or when there are changes to the programme.

When working out the InTouch system for an event or activity, think about:

- How the leaders at the activity will communicate with parents and carers at home (and vice versa).
- How leaders will communicate with young people completing an activity independently using a passport (and vice versa).
- How young people taking part in an activity will communicate with parents and carers (and vice versa).
- How leaders present at the activity will communicate with commissioners (and vice versa).

Make sure everyone involved knows about your clear channels of communication before the event begins.



Assess the risk

Risk assessments should be a useful overview and assessment of the potential hazards for an activity. They should consider the environment, equipment, and resources you'll use.

Risk assessments should be useful, practical procedures for minimising risk. The whole point of completing a risk assessment is to make sure that you're aware of any potential risks and that you've considered ways to reduce these risks. You must then communicate your risk assessment, in the most appropriate way, to all those involved or taking part. Risk assessment shouldn't be filed away somewhere – keep them around so you can share them with everyone taking part.

Use the five steps of risk assessment:

1. **Look for the hazards.** Think about any objects or conditions that could cause harm.
2. **Consider who might be harmed and how.** Don't forget to consider people outside your planned activity, like members of the public.
3. **Evaluate the risks.** What controls and safety measures are in place? What additional controls do you need?
4. **Record and communicate your findings.** You'll probably need to share rules or instructions with volunteers and young people. You may want to write up a checklist, as this is likely to be useful for other activities in the future too.
5. **Review.** During the activity, check whether conditions that might affect risk have changed. After the activity, talk about what could have been safer or better.

Look for the hazards

A **hazard** is anything that could cause harm. Hazards can be unsafe conditions, like cables across the floor, a slippery or uneven surface, or the weather. Unsafe acts could be a hazard as well.

You should look at all your activities, including non-routine tasks. Look at what actually happens rather than what should happen. Look for the hazards that are really obvious, not every single little thing.

You can use the [safety checklist](#) as a starting point – it includes a long list of common hazards. Add to this list as you talk with other leaders involved in the activity.



Consider who might be harmed and how

First, consider **who** is involved in the activity. There might be young people, adult volunteers, and visitors. What could happen to cause them harm?

Consider if some people are less likely to recognise a hazard. This may include **younger members** (like Beavers), those with **additional needs**, or **teenagers** who are more likely to take risks. Think about how you can adapt for your section – Beavers may need more supervision, while if you're working with Scouts you'll need to be aware of how they perceive risk to help keep them safe.

Sometimes, people may have got used to a hazard being present. This might mean that they know how to behave around it, but **visitors** might not know that the hazard is present. Think about a heavy entry door, for example – people who come through it every week know how it closes, but new visitors won't be aware.

Adult volunteers are often great at identifying hazards which might hurt others, but they can sometimes forget to look after themselves. For example, adults sometimes do things that they're not used to, like lifting heavy things, which can result in injury.

Once you've identified who might be harmed, you need to think about **how** they might be harmed. If someone falls from a wall, their injuries will be different depending on how high the wall is or what surface they land on – this is the **how**.

Now that you've identified who might be harmed and how they might be harmed, you can think about what the risk is. **Risk** is the chance of someone being harmed by the hazard. For example, the risk of walking along a wall 30cm from the ground is low, but walking along a wall that's two metres tall and has no railings has a high risk of harm.



Evaluate the risks

Controls are ways of removing or reducing risk. When you're deciding how risks are going to be controlled, it's useful to work through the following questions, in this order:

- Can you remove the hazard entirely?
- Is there a less risky option?
- What can you do to reduce the risk of people being in contact with the hazard?
- What instructions and supervision are needed?
- Is protective or safety equipment available to reduce risk?

The controls on your risk assessment should keep everyone safe. Think about how you'll adjust your controls to keep people with inclusion requirements (for example, people with additional needs or religious requirements) safe.

Always start at the top of this list. Removing a hazard entirely is always the best option – if this isn't possible, explore the other options in order

When you're thinking about these questions, you should consider what you can reasonably do. Don't just go for the quickest or cheapest option, but think about what would be reasonable for you to put in place as a control in the setting you're in.

In the example of the heavy door, you might not be able to remove the door. Is there another, less risky entrance? If you need to use the door, think about you could keep it open safely. Could you also use signs to make people aware, or supervise the entrance?



Record and communicate your findings

Thinking about a risk assessment isn't enough. You need to [record](#) your risk assessments and communicate to share them with others. Recording a risk assessment means that you document it – it's usually on paper in a structured format, but you could also save it to a mobile device or use a notepad. Audio recordings are OK if you can't record your risk assessment in writing.

Documenting a risk assessment helps you to think it through. It also makes it easier to review it when you next do a similar activity, and helps make sure that what you've decided to do is clear and well communicated.

However you decide to record your risk assessment, the most important thing is that you document it so that you can share with others – and that you then communicate it with everyone involved.

Think about:

- How do you involve others (adults and young people) in doing and documenting your risk assessment?
- How will you inform others (adults and young people) about the risks you've identified and the controls you're putting in place to keep everyone safe?

Ways of recording a risk assessment

There are lots of ways of recording your risk assessments. We have an online template, but you could

also try annotating your activity instructions sheet, making notes on a phone, or using an online risk assessment tool. Audio recordings are OK if you're not able to record your risk assessment in writing. Whichever method you choose, put the date on your risk assessment, show who was involved in it, and include when it'll be reviewed.

Communication

Now you've got a beautiful risk assessment, it's important that you don't keep the information to yourself! Tell others about what you've done and what measures are in place to keep activities safe. Involve everyone in keeping activities safe. It doesn't matter who else is involved, every single person should feel that they can stop an activity if they feel it's unsafe.



Review

Documenting your risk assessments isn't the end of the process – you also need to make sure they're regularly reviewed.

Dynamic risk assessment

Things may change during an activity, so you need to be able to respond and change the activity if needed. This is called a dynamic risk assessment. If you step back and look at what the activity is trying to achieve, it could lead you to do it a different way. You might make changes to the route, venue, people's training, the adult to young person ratio, and the equipment participants have.

Remember to record any changes you make. You may be able to do this at the time, adding them as notes to a copy of your risk assessment sheet, or you might need to add them later. The changes you made will contribute to your later review of this activity for next time. For example, you might have responded to:

- **changes in weather.** Maybe you risk assessed for a walk, but it's started to rain, so you need to decide if you continue the walk or take shelter. This is vital, as if you don't notice and respond to the changes in weather, it'll create or increase risk. You should be prepared at stop at certain points and ask yourself things like 'Should I continue with this activity?' or 'When do I need to do headcounts to make sure everyone is still OK?' Consider how you share any outcomes and changes to your plans.
- **changes to the people attending.** Maybe you're running a game for Cubs or Beavers and more people than you expected turned up, or maybe people are finding the game trickier than you intended. You might change the rules slightly or decide to switch to a different game.
- **the environment.** Maybe you arrive at your meeting to find the access tower still up from the painting that's been going on. You need to think fast, as the young people are arriving soon. You might relocate outdoors (if the activities would work and the weather is OK) or you might adapt your programme to work around the ladders.
- **timings.** Maybe your planned activity finishes early, leaving you with 15 minutes to fill. Don't worry – you can grab an active game from your games bank and run it using your generic active games risk assessment as long as you dynamically adapt the risk assessment to the specifics of the game.



Keep your cards close

If in doubt, we have different coloured cards to support leaders in delivering a safe Scouts experience for everyone.

- Use the [safety checklist](#) to help you plan and risk assess your activity.
- Our code of practice for adult leaders is the [Yellow Card](#).
- For young people and Young Leaders, the code of practice is set out in the [Orange Card](#).
- If you want safety guidance and emergency procedures, refer to the [Purple Card](#).
- To learn about our policies on alcohol, use the [Green Card](#).

Never be afraid to change or stop an activity if risk increases.
