

EMERGENCIES



Leaders in charge of participants during an excursion have a duty of care to make sure that the participants are safe and healthy. They also have a common law duty to act as a reasonably prudent parent would. Leaders should not hesitate to act in an emergency and to take life-saving action in an extreme situation.

Emergency procedures are an essential part of planning an excursion. Local authority establishments should follow their authority's guidance on emergency planning procedures, which should include a definition of an emergency or serious incident. Local Authority Emergency Planning Officers should be able to advise on what type of incident should trigger an emergency response.

If an accident happens, the priorities are to:

- assess the situation;
- safeguard the uninjured members of the group;
- attend to the casualty;
- inform the emergency services and everyone who needs to know of the incident.

Who will take charge in an emergency?

The group leader would normally take charge in an emergency and would need to ensure that emergency procedures are in place. The group leader should liaise with the representative of the tour operator if one is being used.

Pre-arranged home base contact.

The home base contact's main responsibility is to link the group with the establishment, the parents and the local authority (where appropriate), and to provide assistance as necessary. The home base contact should have all the necessary information about the visit.

Emergency procedures framework

All those involved in the educational excursion, including supervisors, participants and their parents, should be informed of who will take charge in an emergency, the named back up cover and what they are expected to do in an emergency, and that the local authority has arrangements in place for dealing with emergencies. This information might be provided in small card format which can be carried at all times during the excursion.

Emergency procedures framework during the visit

If an emergency occurs on an excursion the main factors for leaders to consider include the need to:

- establish the nature and extent of the emergency as quickly as possible;
- ensure that all the group are safe and looked after;

- establish the names of any casualties and get immediate medical attention for them;
- ensure that all group members who need to know are aware of the incident and that all group members are following the emergency procedures;
- ensure that a leader accompanies casualties to hospital and that the rest of the group are adequately supervised at all times and kept together;
- notify the police if necessary;
- notify the British Embassy/Consulate if an emergency occurs abroad;
- inform the home base contact. The home base contact number should be accessible at all times during the visit;
- collect details of the incident to pass on to the establishment, which should include: nature, date and time of incident; location of incident; names of casualties and details of their injuries; names of others involved so that parents can be reassured; action taken so far, including where casualties have been taken; action yet to be taken (and by whom);
- notify insurers, especially if medical assistance is required (this may be done by the home base contact);
- notify the provider/tour operator (this may be done by the home base contact);
- write down accurately and as soon as possible all relevant facts and witness details and preserve any vital evidence;
- keep a written account of all events, times and contacts after the incident;
- complete an accident report form as soon as possible. Contact HSE or local authority inspector, if appropriate;
- ensure that no-one in the group speaks to the media. Names of those involved in the incident should not be given to the media as this could cause distress to their families. Media enquiries should be referred to a designated media contact in the home area;
- ensure that, although group members may wish to reassure parents etc individually, they are discouraged from making direct telephone or other forms of contact in the immediate aftermath of an incident. At that stage full details may not be available and inaccurate information might cause unnecessary speculation and anxiety for relatives and others at home;
- ensure that nobody in the group discusses legal liability with other parties.

Emergency procedures framework for home base

Prior to the excursion, the name and 24 hour telephone numbers of a home base contact should be identified. It is advisable to arrange a second home base contact as a reserve. Local authority establishments will normally have an authority named person as well. Heads of establishments and group leaders should bear in mind that the contact lines may become busy in the event of an incident and that alternative numbers to ring would be useful.

The main factors for the home base contact to consider include the need to:

- ensure that the group leader is in control of the emergency and establish if any assistance is required from the home base or local authority;
- contact parents. Details of parents' contact numbers need to be available at all times while the group is on the excursion. The home base contact should act as a link between the group and parents. Parents should be kept as well informed as possible at all stages of the emergency;
- liaise with local authority. The home base contact should act as a link between the group and the local authority and arrange for the group to receive assistance, if necessary;

- ensure, if the group is abroad, that the local police at home are informed;
- liaise with the authority's media contact. If a serious incident occurs, the home base contact should liaise with the designated media contact as soon as possible;
- report the incident using appropriate forms, if necessary. Some incidents are reportable under the *Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR)*.

Media contact

Education authorities usually have a designated person to deal with media enquiries for their establishments. The media contact should liaise with the home base contact, the group leader and, where appropriate, the emergency services. In the event of an emergency all media enquiries should be referred to the media contact. The name of any casualty should not be given to the media.

After a serious incident

It is not always possible to assess whether group members not injured or directly involved in the incident have been traumatised or whether other participants or staff in the establishment have been affected. In some cases reactions do not surface immediately. Establishments in this situation have sometimes found it helpful to contact local community support services and to seek professional advice on how to help individuals and the establishment as a whole cope with the effects of a tragedy.

Following any serious incident in which an authority's emergency procedures have been utilised, it would be appropriate to conduct a review of the incident and how it happened, and of how the procedures were implemented. Any lessons to be learned should be incorporated into risk assessments, operating procedures and emergency planning arrangements.