

Sandwell Mind policy on safe lone working

Sandwell Mind aims to comply with its obligations under the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act and to maintain a safe working environment for all employees. Lone working procedures for each service are in place to ensure that when staff work on their own they do so in a way which is as planned and safe as possible. Safe lone working practice is one of the subjects covered in the induction training package of the organisation, and service managers must satisfy themselves that individual workers are fully aware of the relevant lone working procedures before allowing staff to work on their own. Staff have a responsibility to ensure that they follow these procedures and that they do not knowingly put themselves at risk of harm in the course of their duties.

Consideration of the risk factors involved in working with individual service users is built into the assessment and support planning processes of the organisation, and staff are expected to use these structures to make a sensible judgment as to whether they consider it safe to work alone with a service user (or group of service users) in any given setting. However the nature of lone working means that the circumstances and settings vary considerably, and not all services use assessment and support plans. Because of this the lone worker and their line manager should always keep working practices under regular and ongoing review in handovers, at team meetings, during supervision, and at other times as required. The priority must always be that workers feel safe in the course of their duties and that they are not knowingly exposed to circumstances where this may be in doubt.

As a basic principle all lone workers must ensure that someone knows where they are and which service user, or group of service users, they will be working with. Lone workers must also make clear the time they should be expected back at base or to have finished their span of duty. If a lone worker fails to return or to check in as expected then the line manager should assess the situation and should take appropriate steps in response - this response is likely to vary according to circumstances. When in doubt there is always the option of contacting the emergency services for advice.

In cases where staff are regularly and routinely working alone the organisation will undertake an individual risk assessment and update it on an annual basis. Where it is considered appropriate mobile phones and personal alarms will be issued to staff. The organisation will maintain a record for each worker, containing details such as description, recent photograph, mobile phone number, vehicle type, home address and telephone number, and other relevant information. This information can be used to assist in tracing the worker should this become necessary.

If any situation appears to have clear implications for personal safety then lone working should not continue until safe working practice has been discussed and agreed upon by the worker, their line manager and any relevant others. Any incidents of hazard, threat, violence or 'near miss' whilst lone working must be reported by the staff member concerned to the relevant service manager, as soon as possible. The organisation can then offer support to the staff member and can look at whether the existing lone working procedures need to be amended or altered in any way, based on real life experience.