

## *Minimising Risks: a Guide for Walking Groups*

### Introduction

- As with any physical activity, walking carries risks. These guidelines are designed to help you minimise them.
- Furness u3a expects **ALL** walkers to take responsibility for their own safety at all times, and to look out for the safety of others.
- If, despite your careful planning, an incident occurs, please complete and submit an Incident Report; a template and guidance are on the Furness u3a website: [u3asites.org.uk/furness/page/120675](http://u3asites.org.uk/furness/page/120675)

### A Guidance for All Walkers

#### Before the Walk

- Read the summary given by the leader, and decide whether the walk is suitable for you.
- Consult a weather forecast.
- Bring clothing and footwear that are suitable for the route and the likely weather.
- Consider bringing walking poles, especially if the ground is rough, steep or slippery.
- Bring adequate food / drink / water [dehydration is a danger in warm weather].
- Bring a fully-charged mobile phone / your emergency contact card <sup>1</sup>/ a first aid kit [ideally including a small, lightweight emergency blanket] and a whistle.
- If you can use them, it is a good idea to bring a map and compass [or electronic mapping device].
- Make a note of the leader's mobile number [included in the notes circulated before the day].

#### On the Day

- Decide whether you are fit to join a group activity. Normally stay at home if you are unwell with a potentially infectious condition. Bear in mind any current Government or Public Health advice.
- On the walk, if you fall ill or have an accident or become tired, inform the leader or back marker.
- Follow the route set by the leader. If you need to leave the route temporarily [eg a toilet break] inform the leader or back marker.
- If you get separated from the group: make sure your mobile phone is switched on and ring the walk leader, or blow your whistle.
- If you want to leave the group walk permanently and make your own way back, inform the leader or back marker. [You will cease to be covered by u3a insurance as soon as you leave the group walk, unless you are in a breakaway group authorised by the leader.]

## B Guidance for the Walk Leader

### Before the Walk

- Do a recce, to:
  - check that the proposed route is feasible for the level of fitness of the group,
  - identify any hazards to be drawn to walkers' attention;
  - identify any options for shortening the walk if necessary;
  - identify potential locations for a lunch stop and other breaks.
- Walking alone on a recce carries its own risks, so consider taking a friend with you. Also, it is a good idea to make sure that someone knows roughly where you are planning to walk on your recce, and how to contact you in an emergency.
- Prepare a written summary of your walk, for emailing to all group members.
  - The summary should include:
    - start and end points;
    - directions for car drivers and details of any public transport options;
    - overall distance and [if known] cumulative ascent;
    - a summary of the route;
    - the type of terrain and any hazards [such as steep gradients, slippery rocks or deep fords];
    - overall grade, on the Easy – Moderate –Hard scale [use your judgement, based on what the group will expect];
    - your mobile phone number.
  - If, exceptionally, dogs are not allowed, state this clearly, with an explanation.
  - If you want, you can add other details such as a map, points of interest en route, toilet facilities en route, or where to get refreshments after the walk.

### On the Day

- Appoint a back marker [unless the group is very small, eg 5 or fewer].
- Do a head count, so that you and the back marker know how many are walking.
- Give a brief oral briefing before starting out, reiterating points from the written guide and adding other information as appropriate.
- Find out whether any walkers have first aid training, and consider asking one walker to be "incident manager" in the event of an accident.
- If you see anyone you consider to be inadequately equipped, draw this to their attention, but note that they are responsible for their own safety and for making the final decision about whether to participate.
- Be prepared to adjust the route, or authorise a breakaway group taking a shorter route, in the event of changes to the weather, walkers becoming tired, walkers falling ill, accidents or other unforeseen events.
- Remember that the group will probably include several experienced walkers and good map readers, who will always be happy to help you.
- During the walk:
  - stay near the front but regularly check that you can see the backmarker, and slow down or stop if the group is getting too spread out;
  - set an appropriate pace for the level of walk;
  - check the route frequently;
  - periodically check that all walkers are still present.
- If a walker needs medical attention, it can be more efficient for the group to arrange transport to A&E rather than calling for an ambulance. For further information, consult:
  - [St John's Ambulance -when-to-call-an-ambulance/](#)
  - [NHS Advice head-injury-and-concussion/](#)