

## 2.2: Safety management and safeguarding

**Outdoor learning, with its acknowledgement of risk and the associated benefits of taking part in outdoor activities in the natural environment, provides a blend of physical, mental and emotional challenges that will be experienced uniquely by each participant. Encountering risk in facilitated outdoor learning settings enhances awareness and develops judgement skills that have transferability to other contexts<sup>1</sup>.**

The benefits of overcoming these challenges can be significant but the risk element means that they may also have negative consequences if not managed sensitively and empathetically. Providers of outdoor learning have a duty under law to identify the significant hazards and put in place measures to either reduce or manage them. They should also make participants aware of the risks and their role in managing them.

Operating, first aid and emergency procedures form the basis of effective and safe practice when combined with appropriately deployed competent staff.





## **Practitioners and providers of outdoor learning should ensure that they:**

- ✓ Understand their operating remit.
- ✓ Have an awareness of the environmental, technical (equipment/technique/skill related) and human related hazards relevant to the activity and environment.
- ✓ Have an appropriate level of technical competence, judgment and decision-making capability.
- ✓ Can understand and apply the risk-benefit approach to risk management.
- ✓ Can develop generic, specific and dynamic risk assessments that reflect the hazards inherent in an activity.
- ✓ Can set and manage appropriate routines and boundaries that reflect the needs of the group, the environment, and the activity.
- ✓ Understand and question their own practice to challenge assumptions and accepted behaviours.



## **Questions to develop practice:**

- » Are practitioners clear about the benefits of participants encountering managed risk as part of their development?
- » Do practitioners contribute to risk management systems, policies and procedures?
- » Are practitioners inducted, trained and monitored appropriately?
- » Is there an open culture of incident reporting and learning?
- » Is there a robust risk management system in place?
- » Are practitioners aware of their responsibilities regarding risk management?
- » Are practitioners deployed appropriately? Are they suitably competent i.e. qualified / experienced / current?
- » Are practitioners aware of emergency and critical incident management procedures?
- » Do practitioners have the appropriate skills for their operating context to quickly adapt their sessions to changing conditions, be they environmental or situational?
- » Are providers and practitioners aware of lessons learned from previous incidents and in communication loops about local and national practice requirements?



## Safeguarding

Everyone in outdoor learning should be involved in providing a safe, inclusive environment that actively prevents harm, harassment, bullying, abuse and neglect. Safeguarding is enhanced when providers and practitioners consider both prevention and response.

**Prevention** reduces the risks children and adults may face from practitioners, participants or colleagues.

**Response** is the set of activities that are undertaken when a safeguarding concern has been reported to, or come to, an organisation's attention.

Harassment and abuse can be based on any grounds, including the protected characteristics of age, race (including skin colour, nationality, ethnicity or national origin), gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, disability, or religion. In addition, it may also be based on language, philosophical beliefs or athletic ability. It can include a one-off incident or a series of incidents. It may be in person or online. All abuse is rooted in the improper use or attempted creation of a position of influence, power or authority by an individual against another person. It may be between practitioner and participant, between participants, or between practitioners and other staff or volunteers.





## **Providers of outdoor learning should ensure that they:**

- ✓ Have policies in place to safeguard and protect children, young people and adults from harm.
- ✓ Follow these policies and ensure compliance with them.
- ✓ Have clear lines of accountability for the commissioning or provision of services.
- ✓ Have senior staff or board members with the required knowledge, skills, and experience to take leadership responsibility for the organisation's safeguarding arrangements.
- ✓ Have a culture of listening to participants and taking account of their wishes and feelings, both in individual decisions and the development of services.
- ✓ Have clear whistleblowing procedures in place.
- ✓ Have clear escalation policies for staff to follow when their safeguarding concerns are not being addressed within their organisation or by other agencies.
- ✓ Have arrangements which set out clearly the processes for sharing information, with other practitioners and with safeguarding partners.
- ✓ Have a designated person with responsibility for safeguarding.
- ✓ Adopt safer recruitment practices and ongoing safe working practices for individuals who work regularly with children, including policies on when to obtain a criminal record check.
- ✓ Provide appropriate supervision and support for staff, including undertaking safeguarding training.
- ✓ Provide safeguarding training at induction.
- ✓ Create a culture of safety, equality, and protection within the services they provide.
- ✓ Have checked country specific and local safeguarding requirements

## **Practitioners should ensure that they:**

- ✓ Are aware of their responsibilities for safeguarding and protecting children, young people and adults from harm and promoting their welfare.
- ✓ Know how they should respond to safeguarding concerns and how to make a referral to local authority children's social care or the police, if necessary.

*[Adapted from statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 (Chapter 4)]*



## Questions to develop practice - providers:

- » Does your safeguarding policy state the welfare of participants and staff as a primary concern and is it made available to all who access our services?
- » Do your safeguarding procedures clearly identify those with responsibility for safeguarding and provide step-by-step guidance on what action to take in responding to safeguarding concerns?
- » Upon joining the organisation, how are staff informed about where they can access information and guidance?
- » Do you encourage or require staff to undertake appropriate safeguarding training?
- » Are ongoing safeguarding risk assessments carried out and steps taken to minimise any risks identified to reduce the possibility of harm?
- » How is safeguarding learning covering behavioural expectations and treating people with dignity, respect, sensitivity, and fairness included in programmes?
- » What is your safe-recruitment process?
- » Are your safeguarding reporting policies and procedures clear and understood?
- » How do you work with partners to safeguard participants and staff and share learning?
- » How do you ensure your safeguarding policies and guidance documents are relevant, appropriate and up to date?

### Further reading

**International Safeguards for Children in Sport**

**International Safeguards for Adults in Sport**

**Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 (Chapter 4 - England)**

**National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland**

**Working Together to Safeguard People: Code of Safeguarding Practice (Wales)**

**Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland**

**Keeping Children Safe in Education**



## Mental health

With the current desire to improve access to the outdoors for all for health and wellbeing benefits there is a risk that participants can be exposed to potential harm, as those experiencing mental or emotional challenges may inadvertently be placed in situations with practitioners insufficiently trained to deal appropriately with their needs.

### Trauma-informed approach

Trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual and considered by them to be harmful or life threatening. While unique to the individual, generally the experience of trauma can cause lasting adverse effects, limiting the ability to function and achieve mental, physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being<sup>2</sup>. Traumatic stress may have happened to more than 50% of people<sup>3</sup> and providers and practitioners should safeguard participants and staff from further harm by upholding the six principles of trauma-informed practice: safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment and inclusivity<sup>4</sup>.

**‘Providers must ensure their approach values the individuality and diversity of participants as well as being clear about the ethical framework and related code of practice being upheld.’**

*IOL Outdoor Therapy Statement of Good Practice (Richards, Hardy and Anderson, 2023, p.2)*





## Where high quality outdoor learning is taking place:

### Practitioners and providers:

- » Are familiar with the **Outdoor Mental Health Interventions Model** and where their work falls in terms of their competence, professional responsibility and leadership in a particular intervention.
- » Remain within the boundaries of their own professional competence.
- » Recognise the signs, symptoms and widespread impact of trauma.
- » Respect boundaries by upholding choice, consent, confidentiality.
- » Use neutral, respectful language, showing empathy, avoiding labelling or judging.
- » Avoid re-traumatisation by considering locations, approach, pace, breaks, support.
- » Consider the potential impact of activities for individuals, group members, others involved, and their wider family and community.



## Questions to develop practice - providers:

- » Are you aware of HSE accepted risk management and good practice?
- » Do you build high quality, effective, non-judgemental relationships?
- » Does practice support self-directed development and change?
- » Are you mindful of the health and wellbeing needs of the people you are working with?
- » Can you recognise when your clients are experiencing fear, and do you have strategies to deal with this?
- » Are you aware of mental health first aid approaches?
- » Do you know where the limit of your competence lies with regard to dealing with mental health issues?
- » Is your therapeutic knowledge, skills and experience in-line with the service offered, and appropriate to the needs of your client(s)?
- » Can you demonstrate competence for safely leading activities appropriate to the client(s) in the outdoor environment in which you work?

## Further reading

**IOL Outdoor Therapy statement of good practice**

**Managing risk in outdoor learning Education Scotland**

**Nothing Ventured – Balancing risks and benefits in the outdoors** (Tim Gill, 2010)

*Safety, risk and adventure in outdoor activities* (Bob Barton, 2007)<sup>5</sup>

**Challenging assumptions of fear**

(Jack Reed and Heidi Smith, 2021)<sup>6</sup>

*No Fear* (Tim Gill, 2007)<sup>7</sup>

## References

- 1 Gill, T. (2010) *Nothing Ventured...Balancing risks and benefits in the outdoors*. English Outdoor Council.
- 2 Gov.UK (2022) *Working definition of trauma-informed practice*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-definition-of-trauma-informed-practice/working-definition-of-trauma-informed-practice>
- 3 Public Health Scotland (n.d.) *Adverse Childhood Experiences*. Available at: <https://www.healthscotland.scot/population-groups/children/adverse-childhood-experiences-aces/overview-of-aces>
- 4 SAMHSA(2014) *SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach*. Available at: <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/sma14-4884.pdf>
- 5 Barton, B. (2007) *Safety, Risk and Adventure in Outdoor Activities*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- 6 Reed, J. & Smith, H. (2021) 'Everything we do will have an element of fear in it': Challenging assumptions of fear for all in outdoor adventurous education, *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2021.1961092>
- 7 Gill, T. (2007) *No Fear: Growing up in a risk averse society*. London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

