



University Ethics Committee

Best practice for lone workers and fieldwork in homes:

Pre-visit site checks

- Gather as much information as possible on the selected participant and location prior to any home visits. Any participants who are deemed to be high risk for any reason should not be contacted.
- Indicate any medical conditions or circumstances which may affect your ability to undertake the activity safely
- The research participant should be briefed about the purpose of the research prior to the home visit and given an information sheet with contact details (not personal) of the research team.
- Contact the participant prior to the home visit to ascertain any additional risks so far as reasonably practicable.
- Notify a colleague / supervisor of the time and location of visits, the name and address of the family they are visiting,
- The following questions should be asked to gain some basic information in order to conduct a preliminary risk assessment:
 - Is there adequate parking available at the location?
 - How many people will be on the premises during the visit? Who are they and what relation are they to the participant?
 - Does the participant own any pets? If so, will they pose a risk? (e.g., vicious dogs, overfriendly large dogs, allergens.) If they pose a risk can they be restrained or kept separate during the interview?
 - You should advise the participant; you will ring them closer to the visit date to check they are still available for the home visit and to recheck their details.

Lone working

- The safest way to conduct such research is to work in pairs.
- Working alone by employees and students is discouraged, as far as possible, but it is recognised that in some situations it is not reasonably practicable to avoid.
- Lone working should only be sanctioned after a thorough assessment of the risks. The following should be considered:
 - What is the nature of the work?
 - Is the work in a location with high incidence of crime?
 - What information is available on the participant prior to the visit?
 - Is this a first visit?
 - Can one person safely handle all the equipment involved in the study?
 - Is the site in a remote location?

- Is there adequate telephone reception at the site, in case of emergency?
 - What level of experience does the student/employee have?
- Two or more persons must be present for all studies involving participants with a history of violence or other issues (or if background information on the participant is not available) or covering issues that may be considered as provocative to some participants.

Lone working: Communication

- If lone working is required, an effective means of communication must be established. Have your mobile switched on and with you at all times when you are out on a home visit or meeting a study participant. Ensure your mobile is in working order and fully charged prior to leaving. Save your contact person's number and any emergency numbers.
- Find a reliable person who is happy to act as your contact person. For students this should be your supervisor and for all staff researchers a co-investigator or supervisor. The contact person should be provided with a detailed itinerary and be available to take calls for the time you are out on the road. Your contact person should be provided with instructions to call for help in the event that you do not check in by a prearranged time.
- Ensure you adhere to whatever call-in schedule you have organized with your contact person. If you encounter any problem or issue when out, ring and let your contact person know so it can be duly noted.
- An appropriate emergency plan should be in place should the lone worker fail to check in.
- Always check the participants' address / meeting location in advance to see if they are in a mobile phone black spot area. If they are, a second person should attend, either to assist or to observe.
- Consider using the Safezone App to check in when you arrive and check out when you leave each home.
- Consider carrying a personal alarm.

On-site safety

- In urban areas consider wearing a high-visibility jacket.
- Do not enter areas of private property, schools or hospitals without first obtaining permission.
- Always carry any necessary medical cards.
- Staff and students should use their staff/student photo ID card to provide identification to study participants.
- Park in a spot where you can't be blocked in or obstructed from leaving.
- Check to see that any pets, which may pose a risk, have been restrained or kept separate during the visit / meeting.
- Introduce yourself and show your ID, remember to check that they still consent to the home visit before entering the premises.
- Familiarise yourself with your surroundings as you enter the premises; make sure you will remember the path back to the exit / entrance.
- When conducting interviews, chose a seat where you don't have your back to a doorway and where you can clearly see all doorways into the room.
- Keep your car keys on you at all times.
- Make sure you keep all your personal documents, mobile phone, wallet etc. secure at all times.

- Try to keep to your appointment times and don't linger at any premises longer than you need to.
- When conducting interviews in a private dwelling, stay in the communal rooms.
- Do not enter someone's home if you don't feel comfortable or safe. If you feel uncomfortable while in a person's home, you should take steps to leave immediately.
- When approaching a family's home an assessment of the situation is important – you can abandon or postpone the visit if you are in any doubt of your own safety.
- Do not enter a house if the person you have arranged to see is not there.
- When visiting people's homes, try to let them lead the way. Avoid being the first to go into any room.
- You should always make sure that the exit from the room is clear.
- Do not give your personal telephone number or address to clients.
- You should not enter the home of anyone who is under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- A professional and friendly attitude should be adopted but over-familiarity must be avoided.
- Minimise personal risk by not wearing valuable looking jewellery and if travelling by car not to leave any items of value visible inside.

Violence and Aggression

During a home visit / interview, monitor for signs of impending violence such as facial expression, verbal threats, raised voice, clenched fists and / or increase in breathing rate, etc. If during a home visit you feel at all threatened:

- Summon help if needed.
- Try to appear calm, speak slowly, clearly and softly and use simple language.
- Do not attempt to contradict the person, if they are angry.
- Do not move closer to, or touch them.
- Avoid body language such as crossed arms, hands on hips or shaking fingers.
- Avoid direct eye contact.
- If you can withdraw, step back slowly and retreat out of the premises.
- If you cannot withdraw you are entitled to use reasonable force to protect yourself.
- If you are injured seek medical assistance, notify your supervisor and contact the Police.

Monitoring and reporting

- You should notify any incidences of violence and aggression to your Supervisor/ PI immediately. A University Incident Report form should also be completed.
- If awkward or potentially threatening situation arises, this should be reported to the Head of Department as soon as possible. On return from the visit, provide all relevant information, e.g., if you felt at risk or if there was an incident. This should be formally recorded and reviewed with the Head of Department to ensure appropriate follow-up action is taken and to minimise any risk in subsequent visits.

Further Information on [Safe 360](#)

General Information on undertaking a [risk assessment](#)