

Woking Leisure Centre 50+ Club Walk Risk Assessment Guidance

Walking, especially the sort we do as part of the Woking Leisure Centre 50+ Club programme, is a very low risk activity. However, as walks are organised activities, those who organise and lead them are regarded in law as having an 'enhanced duty of care' to the people who attend.

To ensure the safety of walkers and protect ourselves and our walk leaders against any possible legal claims, we ask that walk leaders carry out a risk assessments of each route for best practice.

Why do a risk assessment?

There are two main reasons that we recommend leaders to carry out risk assessments:

The first is that if done properly they really can make a difference in helping to look after walkers. Ideally walk leaders should have a copy of the route's risk assessment at that walk, providing a handy checklist of potential problems and what to look out for. Although walking is low risk there can still be issues on walks and incidents do happen. Crossing busy roads is a good example - it's so easy in a group of walkers to just follow the person in front, so if the risk assessment highlights a busy road crossing this should prompt the walk leader to remind the group to be careful.

The other reason is to protect volunteer leaders and the Woking Leisure Centre 50+ Club. As walks are organised walks, those who organise and lead them are regarded in law as having an 'enhanced duty of care' to the people who attend. This means that in the event of an incident on a walk, there is a chance that an injured party could allege it was as a result of negligence and attempt to claim damages from the leader and/or Woking Leisure Centre 50+ Club. Being able to produce evidence such as a risk assessment which showed that the leader was aware of the risks on the walk and had taken appropriate action to mitigate them could be a crucial defence against allegations of negligence. In the event that the claim was successful, our civil liability insurance would cover it so long as the walk had been organised by the Woking Leisure Centre 50+ Club and the leader had completed a risk assessment form and followed it.

Carrying out risk assessments

Risk assessments should be common sense and not be too onerous to do if you simply see them as a way of helping leaders remember any special points of concern or actions they should be taking on that walk. The Woking Leisure Centre 50+ Club has a risk assessment sheet which should be used to carry out a risk assessment of each walk route. The walk leader should complete the form before the walk, be familiar with, and have a copy of, the risk assessment and the pre-walk notes, when leading the walk. A signed copy should be deposited with the Woking Leisure Centre 50+ Club Walk Coordinator after the walk.

Risk assessment isn't about eliminating risk – that would in any case be impossible. It's just a way of formalising something that all of us do anyway – looking out for and assessing risks, and take steps to reduce them. It's important to document the process because, in the case of an incident, we can protect ourselves by demonstrating we took due care in managing risks.

Important points to remember

Risks will vary from person to person. For example a child or someone slow and unsteady on their feet may be more at risk from traffic or trips and falls than a fit and able bodied adult. Assess risks for your walkers, not for you.

Risks will vary according to weather conditions and season. For example risks of slips and trips may increase in icy conditions, or if heavy rain creates mud on an unsurfaced path. Use your common sense to think about how changing conditions might affect a route, and risk assess in different seasons.

The most likely risks you will encounter are from:

- Traffic, particularly at crossings and where walks run alongside busy roads.
- Cyclists who may use paths that are shared with pedestrians.
- Animals, particularly farm livestock.
- Slips and trips on uneven and slippery paths and steps.
- Areas of water, particularly if children are present.
- Wet and muddy paths.

Keep things in proportion! Walking is one of the lowest risk physical activities. Resist the temptation to see risks everywhere.