



# Lone Working Policy

**Includes guidance on:**

- How to plan sessions when working alone to minimise risks
- What you can do to protect yourself when issues arise

**Document Type:** Staff Policy

**Reference:** O-004

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**Document Purpose:** This policy outlines the obligations of MCS to ensure the safety of staff and volunteers who are in a lone working situation

**Responsible Group:** Trustees

**Date Ratified:**

**Where this is to be held:** In the main MCS office: a hard copy in the MCS policy folder

**Abbreviations used in this document:**

- BACP British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy
- 'C-000' the suffix 'C' refers to Clinical policy, 'O' Operational policy and 'P' protocol and 'S' Staff followed by the reference number
- HSE Health and Safety Executive
- MCS Marches Counselling Service

**Information from/sourced/referenced:**

- MCS Policies and Procedures
- Staff Handbook (revised 2019)
- Personal Safety at Work - Lone Working (Suzy Lamplugh Trust 2017)

The master copy of this policy, and others referenced, is in the indexed and referenced Policies Handbook. This is held in the office digitally (PDF) and in hard copy. The validity of this copy can be ensured by date checking with the office where any updates are recorded. To ensure its validity, if this document is printed into hard copy or saved to another location it should be;

- a) clearly marked as a copy
- b) checked against the reference number in the handbook

If you would like this document in other languages or formats (i.e. large print) please contact the MCS main office.

**Version History:**

Reference Number	Date of Circulation/Review	Job title/ name of group circulated to
O-006	January 2021	MCS Trustees
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## **Introduction**

This policy covers all staff, whether administrative or clinical. Some items are specific to clinical staff, but as all staff may come into contact with a client calling at the office unexpectedly or early, the guidance for caution with clients is for all.

### **1. Principles**

- 1.1 MCS is committed to the health and safety of all involved in our services. We will ensure in as far as is reasonably practical that people who work alone are not exposed to health and safety risks. The hazard of most concern to workers is violence or aggression [see also Management of Aggression Policy (C-004)]. The booklet 'Personal Safety at Work – Lone Working', written by the Suzie Lamplugh Trust, provides supplementary information on self-awareness in lone working situations.
- 1.2 The Lone Worker's experience may be somewhat fluid and unpredictable and, as such, it is difficult to manage risks before they appear. It is important that in these situations staff feel empowered to make 'on the spot' judgements and decisions (especially if it involves removing themselves from immediate danger).
- 1.3 Even working remotely, it is possible to pick up cues which suggest that a client's intention is aggressive or seductive, and a session may be brought to a close. Such judgements and decisions should be discussed with a supervisor at the earliest opportunity.
- 1.4 Identification of potential risks allows MCS to review risk assessments, policies and procedures, and implement appropriate precautions. Any incidents should be formally reported and recorded in the incident report book. [See also Health and Safety Policy (O-006)]
- 1.5 In unusual circumstances, such as a pandemic when lockdown restrictions may be in place, the likelihood of lone working in the building is increased. The absence of other people should not mean that the health and safety precautions necessary in sharing the space with others can be ignored. It is good practice to maintain the regular washing of hands and sanitisation of furnishings and equipment as indicated. The digital calendar will indicate who may be coming in to the building for counselling and when, but there may be other activity.

### **2. Working Alone in the Office**

- 2.1 Management are required to assess the risks to staff safety. That said, as a member of staff, there are a number of issues you should consider:
  - Has an assessment of your working situation been carried out and if so, when?
  - Have physical security and safety measures been installed?
  - Have emergency procedures been rehearsed? e.g. 'Safe word'
  - Has a system for reporting suspicious incidents or otherwise been established?
- 2.2 What can you do?
  - Make sure you get to know your surroundings as soon as possible, inside and outside.
  - Telephones are available in room 4 and the office.

- Programme your mobile for one-touch dialling with your emergency contact number
- Review your safety procedures frequently
- Lock away and keep out of sight attractive items e.g. handbags, briefcases, laptops – the office is always available for this
- Confirm the identity of the client before you allow them into the building
- Observe your client's body language e.g., shaky, apprehensive, aggressive
- Be confident
- Have a personal safety alarm with you (Alarms are kept in the grey, three drawer unit. Do remember that these are not to raise an alarm but to alarm the other person to give you a chance to get away)
- When taking a client through to the counselling room, follow rather than lead the way.
- When meeting someone for the first time, try to keep furniture between you.
- Have a valid excuse prepared for terminating the meeting at short notice.
- If you have any doubts or suspicions about a client take them to supervision.
- Remember that people outside your office can pose a threat too. Use the door monitor system before allowing anyone in the building.
- Do not allow a client into the building to wait for another counsellor. Their counsellor should have told them not to arrive early. Check on the calendar that the session is booked. If the counsellor is booked in, but has not arrived by the time the appointment should have started, state that you will attempt to contact the counsellor.
- Do not allow friends or relatives of clients to wait for them in the waiting area, this is for clients only. If they have been accompanied you will need to explain to them that the person will need to return at the end of the appointment.
- Arriving at and leaving the building is probably when you are at your most vulnerable. Not necessarily because these are the most likely times when an incident will occur, but because you tend to have other things on your mind.
- Practice the locking and unlocking of any doors so that you do not take longer than is necessary. When leaving, take a good look outside before you exit the office.
- If working alone in the office on a regular basis you should agree a call plan with a 'buddy' or your supervisor. Establish a call-in procedure and stick to it.

### **3. Working Alone Away from the Office**

- 3.1 Risks to safety of employees working away from the office should also be assessed. As a result of the risk assessment, which should be discussed with a supervisor, you may be required to comply with procedures to monitor your safety and security.
- 3.2 You will need to comply with the health and safety procedures of any other building where you see clients. If working in a building managed by another organisation it is your responsibility to make sure that these have been explained to you.
- 3.3 If working from home, you will need to make your own risk assessment based upon the environment in which you will be working.
- This should involve potential risk from a client becoming aware of your location. If working via an online video platform it is sensible to remove clearly identifiable cues from the environment. [See also Remote Working protocol (P-019).

- You will also need to assess the risk to confidentiality for your client if the premises is shared with other people.

3.4 You should not make appointments to see your clients at their home.

3.5 In exceptional circumstances, where there are extenuating circumstances such as the Covid-19 restrictions and social distancing, it may be possible to see a client in the open air. Any location considered should receive an appropriate risk assessment. The extent to which you have an established relationship with the client will determine whether this could be an option.

#### **4. Psychological / Emotional Risks**

4.1 It is recognised that working unsupervised and with autonomy can increase stress levels for some staff.

4.2 Whereas it is understood at interview that lone working can be an aspect of the counselling role, there is no issue with a staff member clearly stating that lone working is not acceptable to them.

4.3 Lone workers have a duty to manage their own health and wellbeing and if they feel uncomfortable because of their lone working arrangements it is their responsibility to raise this in supervision.

4.4 MCS offers regular supervision and the opportunity to discuss work-related issues such as lone working at business meetings.

#### **5. Further Sources of Information**

5.1 Suzy Lamplugh Trust [www.suzylamplugh.org](http://www.suzylamplugh.org)

5.2 BACP – Quick Guide to Lone Working <https://www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/ethics-hub/lone-working-guide/>

5.3 HSE Lone Workers – your health and safety <https://www.hse.gov.uk/lone-working/worker/index.htm>