



# Staying safe when volunteering alone

## A guide for MS Society volunteers

This guide is for MS Society volunteers who meet people face to face or make home visits as part of their volunteering role.

We have developed a range of resources to support you to make safe volunteering choices:

- [Lone working and volunteering policy and procedure](#)
- [Staying safe when volunteering alone – A guide for MS Society volunteers](#) (this document)
- [Staying safe when volunteering alone – Lone volunteering checklist](#)



See [Lone volunteering](#) on our volunteer website for more information.

You should always discuss your concerns about lone volunteering with your **Coordinating Team** before you undertake them.

You can also speak to your **Local Networks Officer** or other staff contact.

We never want you to take any unnecessary risks when volunteering for us. If in doubt, follow your instincts and do not put yourself in a risky situation. If you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, leave the situation as quickly as possible.

## Meeting face to face and making home visits

You may be asked to meet with a person face to face or offer a home visit for people that are isolated.

You must never make a home visit alone. This guidance on home visiting is for people in pairs.

Consider the following before arranging to meet, and when meeting, a person:

- Our policy is that staff and volunteers do not undertake home visits alone. We understand that this may be inconvenient, but your safety is our priority.
- If home visiting is the only possible way to visit or meet with someone, ensure that at least two people visit together. Even if the person being visited is not alone at home, a volunteer visiting them must be accompanied by at least one other person.
- If you can, and the person needing support is able, meet at a neutral venue, in a public place and in daylight hours.
- If this is a first meeting, wherever it takes place, it is sensible to ask another volunteer to go with you. If a professional has made a referral for support you could ask them to be there.
- Always make a specific appointment, time and venue, and know who will be there. Let someone know the details of the appointment.
- Always take a mobile phone with you so you can easily contact help in an emergency or difficult situation. Know who and how to contact the relevant person/emergency service.
- Have a contact buddy, another volunteer, friend or family member, who you can call for advice if you need to. You should call when you arrive and once the meeting is finished. Make sure they know when they should hear from you, and what to do if you haven't contacted them at the agreed time.

### If visiting a person in their home is the only option

- Always ensure that you have someone else who can accompany you.
- Where you are unable to do that, you must make alternative arrangements, for example, meeting elsewhere.
- If that is not possible, signpost people to other options for support.
- Make an assessment of the situation before you visit. Ask about where they live, their family situation, and whether they have any pets. Find out whether anyone else will be there, who made the referral and the reason for a home visit.
- Work out your route and how you plan to get there in advance.

- Always make a specific appointment, confirm the address, time, and who will be there. Let someone in your **Coordinating Team** know the details of the appointment.
- Always take a fully charged mobile phone with you so you can easily contact help in an emergency or difficult situation. Know who and how to contact the person you have told about your meeting, or the appropriate emergency service in the unlikely event you will need to do so.
- Ensure you have a system in place to let someone know you have arrived, when the visit has finished and that you and any accompanying visitors are safe.
- When you get there follow your instincts. If anything makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, leave and rearrange a more suitable meeting.
- Think about where the meeting takes place in the house; ensure you have a clear exit route if you need it.
- Think about your emotional wellbeing and boundaries. Remember, you are not a friend - you are offering support. If discussions become uncomfortable you may have to refer to others for support.

### Incidents or 'near misses'

You must report any incidents or near misses to your **Group Coordinator**, where there is one, and to the **Head of Health and Safety** using the [Incident form](#) on the volunteer website.

See our [Lone Working and Volunteering Policy and Procedure](#) for more on reporting incidents and near misses.

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