



# Policy: Working Alone

**Date agreed by Governance Board: Nov 2017**

**To be reviewed: Nov 2020**

This Policy makes reasonable attempts to balance the rights of people who use the service with the rights of members of staff and volunteers to feel safe in carrying out their work.

It is good practice to be prepared for eventualities that cannot be predicted and therefore this policy gives some guidelines on how Speak Out expects those involved with it to operate.

Speak Out has a responsibility to all volunteers and members of staff (including freelance) as well as to all people with learning disabilities who use the project. For this reason the members of staff co-ordinating advocacy work will ask to be informed by any person making a referral to the scheme about any behaviour an individual requiring advocacy support may have, that could be considered challenging to others. This information will be treated as confidential and will only be shared in relation to the safety of others.

- Staff will complete a risk assessment prior to ongoing work with a person with a learning disability. This should cover any risks concerning the person with a learning disability as well as any risks presented from their wider social networks
- When having a first meeting with a person with a learning disability always check 'need to know' information.
- Managers must ensure any staff or volunteers are told 'need to know' information prior to their ongoing work.
- Speak Out managers have the final say on ways of working with individuals to ensure safety for all.
- Knowledge of the risk assessment process will be discussed through volunteer training and staff induction.

Before any advocacy partnerships are formed, staff will meet with the person requiring advocacy support to assess the situation. The staff member must arrange for a third person, who knows the person wanting advocacy support well, to be present at the initial meeting. If this is not possible



then another Speak Out staff member or experienced advocate should accompany them. With issue advocacy, there are times when it might not be possible to have a third party present as the person with a learning disability might not have support staff or family to do this. In this case, the advocate should arrange the meeting at Speak Out (with other staff in the building) or in a public place such as a café or library.

It will be necessary for some advocacy partners who regularly exhibit behaviour of a violent nature, to always have a third person present while they are getting advocacy support, from either a co-ordinator, citizen advocate volunteer issue based advocate or as a last resort the person's own support staff.

Ideally Speaking Up Network groups should be facilitated by a staff member and a volunteer. However they can be facilitated by a paid member of staff as long as another Speak Out member of staff is in the near vicinity or a risk assessment determines that this is not necessary. In this case, they should have an on call procedure in place in case of an emergency.

Speak Out Drop in should always have at least one paid member of staff and another staff member/volunteer present. If this is not possible, the Drop In will be cancelled.

When accompanying people out in the community all staff and volunteers must have key contact information about the people they are supporting should an emergency occur.

The safety of people is a top priority and at all times quick, clear decisions must be made to bring a situation under control and to reduce pressure. Practical steps that can be taken to minimise or prevent violent incidents are listed below:

- When visiting a person for the first time, or at any time you feel there may be a risk, make sure that another person knows where you are. Agree a time when you will return, if you have not made contact by the agreed time, there should be a previously arranged process to raise the alarm to check your safety.
- If you have any concerns about meeting a person, make sure it is not in an isolated place and that there are others around should they be needed.
- Remove yourself from any situation as soon as you feel it is becoming uncomfortable or threatening, particularly if you feel that your presence is making a situation worse.
- If you are concerned or worried ensure that you are able to leave the scene of the meeting quickly.
- Avoid raising your voice and remain calm, polite and objective. Facial expression and body language is important so try to establish eye contact without staring.
- Avoid being confrontational, sit if possible and remain seated. Do not become involved in an argument.
- Do not attempt to restrain any person who may be aggressive unless you have been trained and feel confident to do so.

If the Police have to be called because a person is aggressive, abusive or physically violent to a member of staff or a volunteer, they lose their right to confidentiality as far as their names,



addresses and details of the incident are concerned. However, only the Police will be told this information. The nature of the incident should be discussed within the staff team and a decision made on the appropriateness of any individual being offered further support from the organisation.

If a member of staff or a volunteer have been subjected to abusive or aggressive behaviour from a person they are advocating for, they should be offered support as soon as possible after the incident has occurred. It should not be underestimated how such an incident may undermine confidence and leave a person feeling vulnerable.

Violent or verbally abusive incidents are few and far between but the issues raised in this policy should be explored during induction training for staff and volunteers with the added assurance that this would be a very rare occurrence. This will ensure that people have some awareness on how to deal with such occasions should they arise.

Staff should not make appointments with new volunteers or other professionals who are unknown to the project when they are alone. They should ensure that these meetings happen in a public place or when other staff are in the near vicinity.

Staff often work before or after normal office hours at Westwerks. They should ensure, as far as possible that they maintain safe working practises. Examples of these include making sure that another staff member or family member knows where they are and when they plan to leave and they carry a charged phone with them. If staff/ volunteers have particular needs relating to a disability, a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) must be completed to ensure that their safety is not compromised whilst working alone. Examples of this might include not being able to hear fire alarms, not being able to open emergency exits etc