



Royal College  
of Nursing

# Lone working

Guidance for RCN representatives



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## Guidance for RCN representatives

### Introduction

One of the key roles of RCN representatives is to represent members, individually or collectively, on matters relating to their employment. Some of these members may be absent from the workplace through ill health, following a workplace accident, or as a result of suspension.

While contact can be made over the telephone, there will be occasions when a face-to-face meeting is necessary. This meeting may be in the workplace or in an environment outside the workplace, for example at an RCN regional office, in a cafe or at the member's home. In some cases members may feel that it is not 'safe' to be seen speaking with their representatives at work.

### Definition

The Health and Safety Executive defines lone workers as those who work by themselves without close direct supervision.

Health and Safety Executive (2009) *Working Alone – health and safety guidance on the risks of lone working*.

### Rationale

Lone workers are more vulnerable to assault, particularly nurses and others who carry out visits to patients' homes. The risk of assault to representatives doing home visits is perceived to be lower than, for example, the risk to nurses visiting patients alone in the community. However, representatives can potentially meet

difficult situations when home visiting members, particularly if a member or their family or friend/s are aggrieved with the RCN.

While the RCN does not employ RCN representatives, it does recognise that it has at least a moral duty to provide advice and guidance to its representatives so that they can protect themselves. This moral duty stands alongside the RCN's commitment under the RCN Dignity Charter.

### RCN Dignity Charter

The RCN Dignity Charter sets out members' rights and responsibilities. In relation to violence and aggression, the charter calls on members to:

- value and respect other members and staff in all their diversity
- not attack anyone personally (verbally or non-verbally) or insult them.

The charter also states that RCN activists have the right to carry out their RCN role in an environment that is safe and supportive.

For full details of the RCN Dignity Charter visit [www.rcn.org.uk/activist](http://www.rcn.org.uk/activist)

### Scope

These guidelines apply to RCN accredited representatives when undertaking the following roles within the RCN role descriptors:

- safety representatives role descriptor 11 (publication code 003 153) – represents RCN members on matters related to workplace accidents/incidents

- stewards role descriptors 1 and 2 (publication code 003 152) –
  1. Prepares and presents cases on behalf of RCN members.
  2. Supports, advises and represents RCN members in the case of grievances, employer's disciplinary procedures or employment conditions and practices dealing with issues such as equal opportunity or job evaluation.

Further details about the RCN role descriptors can be found at [www.rcn.org.uk/publications](http://www.rcn.org.uk/publications)

Where the lone working policy of the RCN representatives' employer extends to representative work undertaken as part of the facilities agreement, representatives should familiarise themselves with the policy.

## Good practice guidelines

The following guidelines should be followed to reduce the risk to lone working representatives:

1. whenever possible avoid carrying out meetings outside the employer's premises. Meetings with members can be arranged to coincide with visits to human resources or occupational health. Employers, through local trade union facilities agreements, should provide representatives with facilities to meet with members. The employer's lone worker policy should also be referred to where one-to-one meetings with members are carried out within the workplace
2. where it is not possible to meet with the member on the employer's site, other venues, such as a local café or RCN regional office, should be used.

## Home visits to members

In line with the lone worker policy for RCN staff and officers, it is recommended that meetings with members should not take place in members' homes. Where there are exceptional circumstances, for example where the member cannot travel outside their home due to a disability, visits should be carried out in pairs with another RCN accredited representative, branch officer or RCN officer.

## Incident reporting

Representatives should report to their RCN officer any incidents that cause them concern (including threats), from members or others, when acting on the RCN's behalf.

## Dissemination and communication

This guidance will be communicated to RCN representatives undergoing the learning and development pathway. Representatives not currently undergoing or due to undergo the pathway will also be made aware of the guidelines during mentorship. The information will also be placed in the activists' area of the RCN website at [www.rcn.org.uk/activist](http://www.rcn.org.uk/activist) and promoted in *Activate*.

## Equality impact assessment

Disabled members whose conditions mean that they are unable to travel to a work base should not be adversely affected by these guidelines. Appropriate steps should be taken to ensure that such members have access to representation.

## Assessing risks for meetings with members outside the employer's premises

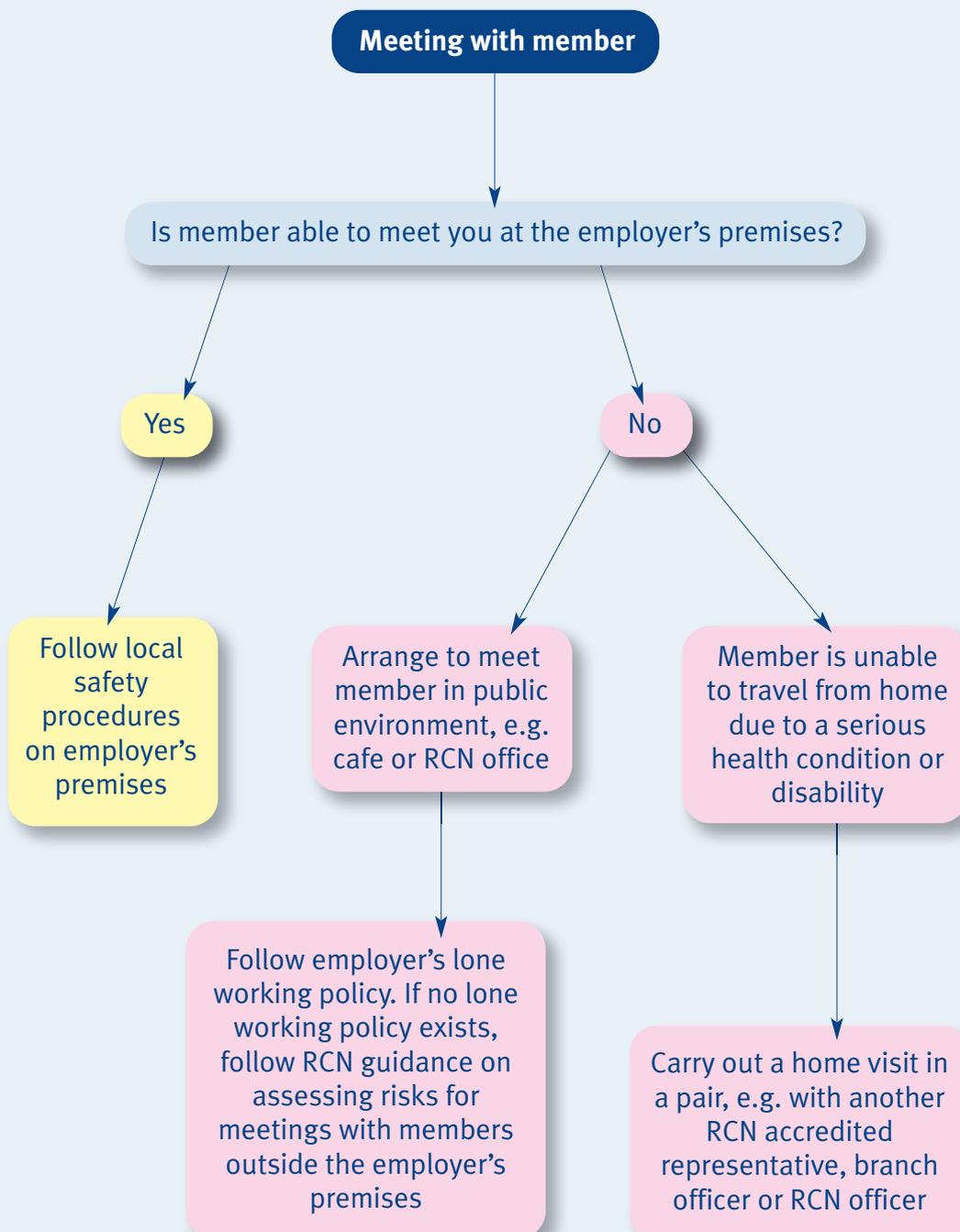
- When arranging meetings with members, the venue must be appropriate for the purpose – considering safety, confidentiality and the privacy and dignity of participants.
- Ensure that you have as much information on the member as possible prior to the visit, so that any risks can be assessed.
- Where risks are identified, there is a need to record movements outside of the employer's premises. Arrangements should be made so that another person knows where you are. This could be a work colleague, another representative or RCN officer, or possibly a manager (where this is appropriate and would not be a breach of the member's confidence). Details should include:
  - date of visit
  - name of the person you are meeting
  - address of meeting place
  - contact phone number
  - purpose of visit
  - expected time of return to workplace.
- Where particular risks are identified, members should ensure that they have the means of raising the alarm, such as a mobile phone.

## Further information on lone working

Health and Safety Executive (HSE) (2010) *Work-related violence*. Available from: [www.hse.gov.uk/violence/law.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/violence/law.htm) (accessed 04/07/11) (Web).

NHS Business Services Authority (2005) *'Not Alone' – A Guide for the Better Protection of Lone Workers in the NHS*. Available from: [www.nhsba.nhs.uk/SecurityManagement/Documents/not\\_alone.pdf](http://www.nhsba.nhs.uk/SecurityManagement/Documents/not_alone.pdf) (accessed 04/07/11) (Web).

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The RCN represents nurses and nursing,  
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