

Group Guidance for leading safe, enjoyable and welcoming walks

The Walk Leader Handbook outlining the Ramblers approach to group walks is our starting point (<https://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking-hub/resources-walk-leaders>). It should be read in conjunction with this guide to how we plan to implement its eight guiding principles to meet the specific needs and conditions of the type of walks that we offer.

Principles 1 & 2. *We work as a team/we lead walks within our capabilities (P5-7)* This is one of West London group's core strengths – we are a team of leaders; we support each other both at the planning/recceing stage and on the day of the walk. We encourage co-leading, buddying with a more experienced leader to recce the walk, asking for help on the day. We also provide local training opportunities for people to enhance their skills set and build confidence.

Principle 3. *We plan and assess risks in advance (P8-9).* It is no longer a requirement that a risk assessment form must be completed for every walk. However, it is still essential that leaders identify any actual or potential risks on their walk and plan ways to mitigate them if possible. We strongly recommend leaders recce their walk in advance. It is the perfect time to identify risks such as steep ascents or descents, slippery paths, busy roads, paths shared by cyclists, high or unstable stiles, livestock or other animals near paths etc and plan ways of mitigating the risks eg identifying safe places to cross roads or advising walkers to go in single file on roads where there is no pavement.

Principle 4. *We help walkers to come prepared and share your plan with them on the day (P10).* We let walkers know what to expect in the walk description and advise whether any specific kit is recommended eg boots, poles, extra water. On the day, you should flag up any risks as part of your introductory briefing at the start of the walk and where appropriate during the walk when walkers need to take extra care eg crossing busy roads or descending a steep, slippery slope.

Helping walkers choose walks within their capabilities is a key factor in ensuring safe and enjoyable walks for all. We provide clear advice on our website about what the walk classifications mean (easy, leisurely, moderate, strenuous) and stress the importance of walkers being able to keep up with the rest of the group. If anyone regularly comes on walks that are clearly not suitable for them, leaders have the right to ask them to choose more appropriate walks and/or to drop out at a safe place. If the problem persists, the matter should be reported to the committee to decide what action should be taken.

Principle 5. *We manage group size (P11-12).* Note that the ratios of walkers to walk leaders given in the Handbook are advisory. Local groups are free to adopt their own standard. In West London we believe it is up to the leader to decide whether they want to limit the

number of walkers based on the type of walk it is, the specific conditions or terrain and the leader's own preference as to the size of the group.

If a walk needs numbers to be controlled, this should be clearly indicated in the walk description by requiring people to book a place by email or text directly to the leader. If numbers are not capped, but it seems likely that a large group might be attracted to the walk, it is recommended that you pre-arrange a co-leader to assist. The walk leaders' WhatsApp group may be used to arrange that ahead of the walk.

We recommend that on all walks over 8 people, you have a backmarker and with larger groups (15+) also a middle marker to ensure the group stays together. Ideally the backmarker would be the person who did the recce with you, but if that is not possible, ask anyone you know and trust or who regularly walks with the group to help.

West London have agreed that the walk leader can decide not to go ahead with a walk if there are 3 or fewer attendees (including the leader) on the day.

Principle 6. *We prepare for emergencies (P13).* Walk leaders should ask all attendees to complete the group's signing-in form at the beginning of the walk. They may ask for mobile phone numbers to be provided if they think that would be useful but walkers have the right to decline. We will encourage walkers to carry an In Case of Emergency Card (ICE) kept in an easily accessible pocket of their rucksack or to have emergency details on their mobile. Leaders are asked to distribute ICE cards to those who need one at the beginning of walks.

All leaders are encouraged to complete the Preventing and Managing Incidents e-training available on the Ramblers web-site and to attend a WL group funded in-person first aid course. Mobile phone apps are also useful: the St John's Ambulance for first aid advice and either what3words or OS Locate to provide the emergency services with your accurate location if needed. It is also recommended to preregister Text 999 on your phone. It is important that at least two people stay with someone who is unwell or injured so that if one person needs to go for help or to meet the emergency services there is someone to stay with the patient.

Principle 7. *We pack the right kit (P14).* For the type of walks we normally offer, it is unnecessary to pack a lot of extra kit and we consider it important that leaders don't over-load their rucksacks. Key items would include navigation aids (map and waterproof case, compass if you use one), fully charged mobile phone and a basic first aid kit (cleansing wipes, plasters, a few sterile wound dressings and microtape, tick remover if walking in areas where they are prevalent). We also recommend leaders carry two thermal survival blankets on countryside walks in winter. The group has some first aid kits and blankets available for leaders to borrow.

Principle 8. *We're flexible and adaptable (P15).* It's good advice to stay alert to the group and the conditions, especially deteriorating weather. Be prepared to change your plans if necessary, including shortening the walk and going to the nearest bus stop or station. Keep an eye out for people who are struggling to keep up and make sure you give them time to rest and have a drink when they catch up. Even a recently recced walk can throw up an unexpected challenge such as flooding or a tree blocking the path so be prepared to change

your route or retrace your steps if necessary and don't take unnecessary risks. Be prepared to ask for help or advice: someone on the walk might know the area or be able to work out a good alternative route although the final decision is yours. Remember, we work as a team, you are not alone.