

Guide 8: What steps should I take when designing my sessions?

Delivering a sport and physical activity service
A toolkit for mental health providers



Guide 8: What steps should I take when designing my sessions?

This guide covers

- Building your service around your participants.
- Setting objectives.
- The venue and equipment.
- Choosing the best person to lead the session.
- Coaching and training.
- Practical tips for adapting existing sessions to make them more inclusive.
- Planning to reduce and avoid risk.
- Supporting people to build their confidence to engage in community-based activities.
- Working with the local physical activity sector to raise awareness of mental health considerations.

By thinking carefully about the outcomes you want to achieve from each session, and working with participants and volunteers to design them, you can make sure you're providing a good experience for all involved.

Which objectives should I set for each session?

Setting objectives will help you meet the needs and aspirations of your participants.

Ask yourself the following questions.

- Who am I trying to reach through the services? Are you looking to engage specific demographics such as inactive people, older people or children and young people, for example?
- What type of session should I deliver for this audience? Should it be beginner, intermediate or advanced?
- Will the session be open to everyone, regardless of whether they have experience of a mental health problem?
- Is your session going to be a 'one-off' taster, hosted by a local provider? Or are you planning a series of sessions?
- Where would you like participants to progress to after your sessions have finished?

In all cases its best practice to work with participants and volunteers to develop the sessions. It's also helpful to engage with external stakeholders when thinking about

the journey you want your participants to take when your programme ends. More information about this can be found in guide 4: *How do I identify and engage my key stakeholders?*

Here are some questions you could ask to help you identify what your volunteers and participants would like to see in your service:

Audience	Questions you might want to ask
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are your personal barriers and motivators (these do not have to be sport specific)?• Are you already active? If so, how? What do you like/dislike about the activity?• What do you see as the main barriers to being active?• What does your ideal activity session look like? Can you describe it?• What kind of support might help you overcome these barriers?• What type of activities might you like to try?• What else would you like to see as part of the session, such as social element?• What else would appeal to you? Why is it appealing?• Where should this take place (geographical location, type of venue, etc)?• Who would you like the sessions to be led by?• How would you like the sessions to be delivered? What difference would this make?
Volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does being active mean to you?• What would encourage you to volunteer for a physical activity programme?• What would be the barriers to volunteering?• What type of support would you want?• How do you think it would differ from the current volunteering opportunities offered by your organisation?

What equipment/venue considerations will I need to make?

- Do you need a specific sport venue or could the activity be done anywhere?
- Do you need a specific playing surface? For example 3G, grass, sports hall, sprung floor multi-purpose hall, sports hall, badminton courts or grass?
- Do you need any specific markings? For example, tennis courts.
- Do you need a quiet area for participants who want to take time out?

Your local County Sports Partnership (CSPs) and sports development team should be able to help with locating a good venue.

Consider the equipment you might need.

- Do you have equipment or can the coach or venue supply this?
- Can you borrow equipment from a local club, school or CSP?
- Do you need your own equipment? If so, could you access a small grant to purchase the things you need?

Who should lead the session?

The experience from the Get Set to Go programme is that the ability of staff and volunteers to build relationships with participants was ultimately more important than having a qualified coach. For some activities you will need a qualified coach.

The table below outlines the different types of session you might deliver, and will help you identify when you might need a qualified coach.

Session name	Broad definition	Involvement from the leader	Recommended qualifications	Liability and insurance
Coached or taught session	A coach leads a structured session which includes a warm up and a main activity. The main activity focuses on developing skills and techniques.	High level.	NGB Level 2 or above in sport or physical activity.	Usually covered by the coach or provider's own insurance. If the coach is also a member of staff for your organisation you should check your insurance covers them if they do not have their own public liability insurance.
Facilitated have-a-go session	Facilitated have-a-go sessions are designed for people to try different sports or physical activities. Sessions can be multi-sport or focus on one activity. They are facilitated i.e. the environment is set up, the leader may provide information and encouragement, but would not provide coaching or advice on technique.	Medium level.	The leader would ideally hold a leadership qualification, for instance: Sports Leaders Award; Street Games Doorstep Sport qualification; or health or leisure related qualification.	We would recommend checking that your insurers will provide cover for non-coaching staff to lead such sessions.

Session name	Broad definition	Involvement from the leader	Recommended qualifications	Liability and insurance
A sports taster session (coaching or have a go)	A sports taster session is usually a one-off, one hour (or shorter) session, designed to give the participant an introductory flavour of the activity. They provide a great opportunity to engage new participants without them feeling like they have to commit. If you don't have the capacity to put on a course of sessions, running tasters is a good way of encouraging your participants to look at what else is available in the community.	If coaching taking place – high level. If participation is just facilitated – medium level.	See coaching. See facilitated involvement.	See coaching. See facilitated involvement.
Pay and play/turn up and play	Participants turn up and take part. They are usually aware of the rules and play with no support from organisers.	Low level. The playing environment is usually set up in advance.	None.	Usually at the individual's own risk (pay and play squash leagues/badminton, etc).

Depending on their level of experience of working with people with mental health problems, coaches and venue staff may benefit from mental health awareness training.

Where possible we recommend working with existing qualified coaches or investing in coaching qualifications for your staff and volunteers. If you're struggling to find someone, your local County Sports Partnership or sports development team should be able to help you. They can also support you to access funding opportunities and training courses to develop your coaches.

Training available to help your staff and volunteers develop their coaching skills

Sport England has information on the type of training available to anyone interested in becoming a coach, or improving their skills. They also provide information on the funding available to support people to develop their skills. Find out more on the 'Volunteers and Coaches' section of the Sport England [Sport England](#) website.

Here are two short courses that you might want to consider.

- **Mental Health Awareness for Sport and Physical Activity (MHASPA)** – a three-hour workshop delivered by Mind to help staff in the sport sector:
 - Understand common misconceptions about mental health and how stigma and discrimination impacts on people with mental health problems.
 - Identify the positive impact that being active has on physical and mental health.
 - Appreciate the barriers that stop people with mental health problems getting active.
 - Talk confidently about mental health and know where to signpost people who need support.
 - Identify practical actions for making your service more inclusive and accessible for everyone.

It was really great to cover such topics with Mind, and to be able to gain a good understanding for my new provision. I am really passionate about offering a safe and relaxed environment for people to take part in activity together and improve their mental wellbeing.

Community Sports Activator, Bedford Borough Council

- **Inclusive Community Training** – a three-hour workshop to help community groups and organisations gain practical skills in running inclusive physical activity sessions. It is delivered through the English Federation of Disability Sport (EFDS) and is designed to help delegates:
 - explore creative ideas to support disabled people and people with mental health problems to access physical activity and sport.
 - learn about local sport opportunities for participants, leaders, volunteers and coaches.

What makes a good coach?

A good coach will help their participants become physically active and stay engaged.

The CARE[®] model

What is the CARE[®] model?

At Mind we use the acronym CARE to summarise our approach to inclusive coaching in a sports and physical activity setting.

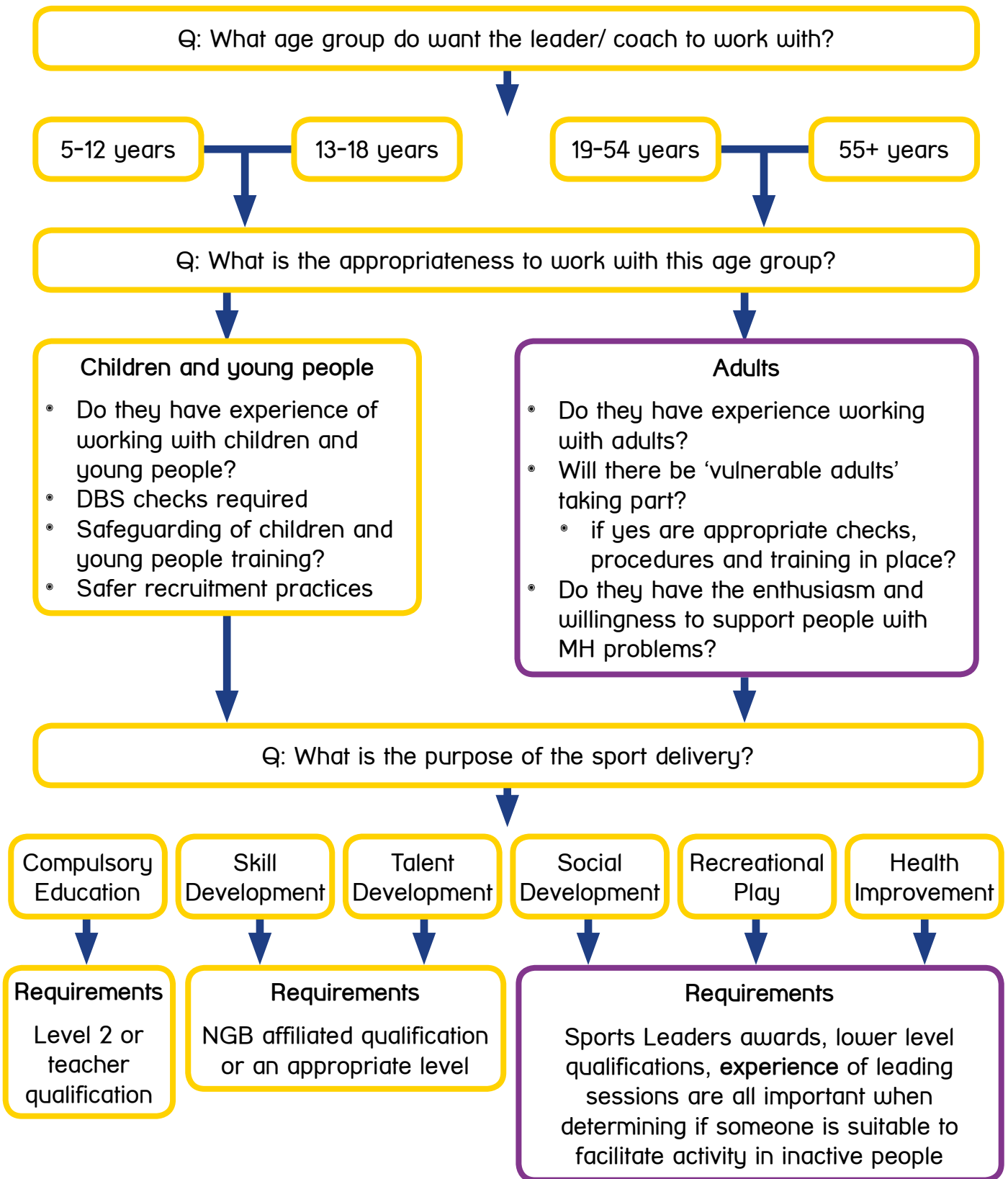
- **Coaching and customer skills** – a good coach (or instructor) can coach anyone. You don't need to make technical adaptations for people with mental health problems, but you do need to see the individual and respond to their needs and motivations.
- **Awareness** – understanding the individual is really important. What are their motivations and aspirations? What does their usual behaviour look like and, if it changes, what type of support do they want?
- **Respect** – a good coach will respect all participants and not single people out. It's important not to ask intrusive questions, and to make yourself available should people need to talk in confidence. The Time to Change campaign website has some quick tips on how you can start conversations about mental health.
- **Empathy** – a good coach listens to participants without being patronising or trying to solve their problems.

When a coach takes this approach they are always looking to improve the experience for participants and developing new ways to keep them engaged at every stage in their journey.

- **Preparation** – how can you support people from registration to their first session? Could you offer regular welcome sessions or introduce new people to the rest of the group?
- **Action** – support and encouragement are key – recognise achievements and offer space away from the activity if needed. Listen to what motivates your participants and use this feedback to improve their experience.
- **Relapse** – if a participant doesn't attend sessions for a number of weeks then contact them to see how they are. Offer gentle encouragement for them to return or signpost them to alternative activities.

Below are two tools you can use to help you recruit the right coaches.

Qualifications and experience decision tree:



Skills and competences matrix:

Does the individual have the right skills and experience to lead the sessions?

	Yes	No
<p>Is the individual motivated to work in this setting and with this audience? <i>(Do they have the right values and attitudes?)</i></p>		
<p>Do they have the ability to engage and enthuse the audience? <i>(Do they have previous experience with age group or knowledge of motivations, triggers & barriers to including people with mental health problems?)</i></p>		
<p>Do they have knowledge of the activity? <i>(Do they have experience of coaching, leading, playing, facilitating that specific activity?)</i></p>		
<p>Are they able to prepare and maintain the environment for the activity? <i>(Do they understand dynamic risk assessment?)</i></p>		
<p>Are they able to respond to an accident/incident appropriately? <i>(Do they have this knowledge & experience from within or beyond sport?)</i></p>		
<p>Are they aware of their limits of competency and boundaries? <i>(Do they understand the boundaries of their current qualifications, awards, professional & voluntary experience?)</i></p>		
<p>Are they aware of who to report to and who reports to them? <i>(Do they understand what/who they oversee and who will support them if further experience+/- depth of knowledge are required?)</i></p>		

I already run physical activity sessions – how can I make them more inclusive?

A few ideas for adapting existing sessions to be more inclusive are set out below. The majority of these adaptations will benefit everyone – only a few adaptations need to be made specifically for people with mental health problems.

<p>When briefing other coaches/venues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain that due to the nature of mental health problems, people’s attendance levels will likely vary. • Medication can affect sleep – sessions scheduled for late morning or early afternoon may be better attended. • Encourage support workers, carers or volunteers to take part and gain experience of the activity. This will make it easier to promote it to others. • Highlight the importance of consistency (such as same staff; same timings) and difficulties associated with change.
<p>Before the session</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide awareness training for coaches and other staff. • Some medication can increase an individual’s sensitivity to sunlight. Make use of shaded space or remind people to use sunscreen. • Offer plenty of drinks breaks and have water available. A physical symptom of anxiety is sweating and overheating, and dehydration can be a side-effect of some medication.
<p>During the session</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language can be tricky. Some people may be open about their diagnosis, whereas others may just say that they are ‘unwell’. Find out how people refer to their mental health and use their terminology. A language and terminology guide can be found on the Mental Health Charter for Sport and Recreation page on the Sport and Recreation Alliance website. • Have a plan in case people need a break. Is there a quiet or safe space people can use if they need to? • If someone does leave the session early, check they are okay. • Make arrangements for someone to cover if you are needed in an emergency.
<p>After the session</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If someone is anxious, make sure you follow up with them at the next session. Ask if there’s any support you can provide.

How do I reduce risk?

Carry out a risk assessment for each of your activities, which reflects your organisation's policies and procedures. Where possible involve the coaches and volunteers in writing the risk assessment and consider a range of different scenarios. Coaches should also be expected to risk assess dynamically throughout the session. Risk assessments should be 'live' documents which are regularly updated.

A template is available at the end of this guide. Risks to consider are:

- Playing surfaces.
- Equipment.
- First aid provision.
- Participant and volunteer health considerations (physical and mental health).

Participant health and wellbeing – make sure all participants have completed a registration form and Participant Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PAR-Q). Examples of both forms can be found in the resource section in guide 5: *How do I demonstrate the impact of my physical activity offer?*

Are your facilitators covered by your insurance? We recommend speaking to your insurance company about the activities you will be providing, and asking them to confirm in writing:

- specifically what you are covered to deliver through both your staff and volunteers, and through qualified coaches.
- if there are any exemptions to your cover.
- if any activities require a premium cover.
- if there are any conditions around qualifications required by the leaders of sessions.

Some coaches will be part of the National Governing Body (NGB) membership scheme, which often includes public liability insurance. Some coaches may have taken out their own public liability insurance, or be covered by their club. You should ask external coaches if they have public liability insurance ahead of sessions, and where possible ask them to confirm this in writing. You should also check if you have first aid cover available.

How do I support people to build their confidence to engage in community-based activities?

To make sure your service has maximum impact, you should either link your sessions with those already taking place in your community, or create a clear pathway for participants and volunteers to engage with community-based activities, as this will build their confidence and skills. Ideas for making this happen include:

- Inviting volunteers and staff from other community sessions to get involved with your activities.
- Run sessions at the same venue, same day and a similar time to the community activity so participants can see what else is on offer.
- Consider establishing teams that could train together, or even compete against each other.
- Create a clear pathway for participants to access volunteering opportunities, both within your sessions and the within your community.
- What are the opportunities for participants and volunteers to support or lead certain aspects of the session, such as warming up, or setting up equipment
- Think about the type of qualifications/training that you or your partners can offer. Can the session become self-sustaining by being led by suitably qualified volunteers?

How do I work with local physical activity partners to promote awareness of mental health?

Provide staff and volunteers with training that develops an understanding of mental health conditions, and the practical ways they can support people to be more active. For instance Mental Health Awareness for Sport and Physical Activity (MHASPA), Mental Health First Aid or Mental Health Awareness training.

The resources from the [Time to Change campaign](#) can be really helpful in getting staff and volunteers thinking about the stigma surrounding mental health. You can also reference [Mind's information pages](#).

Case study: Jolly Joggers, Dudley Mind

Jolly Joggers is a beginners jogging group led by a small team of volunteers from Dudley Mind. All the volunteers have personal experience of mental health problems and are qualified Leadership In Running Fitness (LIRF) coaches. Jolly Joggers provides a friendly, welcoming and supportive introduction to running for people with mental health problems. Over 12 weeks the group builds up from walking to jogging for approximately 30 minutes, following a specially adapted model of the NHS Couch to 5k plan. The group celebrates week 12 of the programme by joining the weekly Wolverhampton parkrun 5k (3.1 miles), followed by a graduation ceremony.

At the end of each session Jolly Joggers past and present meet up at a café. This provides an informal setting where participants can get to know new people and reflect on their experiences at the session. Information sheets are provided at the end of each session outlining the achievements of the group, and reminding participants of the session structure. Throughout the term the group takes part in a range of activities, including Time to Talk Day, Easter egg hunt, treasure hunt, Mental Health Awareness Week and World Mental Health Day.

Resources

Example risk assessment template

NB this list is not exhaustive

Author:					
Date written:		Review Date:			
Description of risk	Likelihood (1-5)	Severity (1-5)	Risk (H, M, L)	Mitigation activities/ controls	Person responsible
Session-associated risks: water, height, ice, equipment, etc				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants, volunteers and staff are only allowed to participate with the correct equipment and after instruction on how to use it. Everyone is aware of the potential key hazards and how to avoid them. Everyone is aware of how to signal for help and who they should signal to. 	
Mental health declines during a session and requires support				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All to be made aware of any quiet areas or break times. Session leaders to receive appropriate mental health awareness training and know organisation's signposting procedures. Session leader has details of emergency contacts including any health-related support. 	

Description of risk	Likelihood (1-5)	Severity (1-5)	Risk (H, M, L)	Mitigation activities/ controls	Person responsible
<i>(continued)</i> Mental health declines during a session and requires support				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Session leaders understand the relevant procedures and that they are not a crisis service. • Clear safeguarding procedures including when to break confidentiality. 	
Indicates risk of harming self or others				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All coaches/ volunteers to receive appropriate mental health awareness training and know organisation's signposting procedures. • Session leader has details of emergency contacts including any health-related support. • Session leader has contact details for member of staff who has Mental Health First Aid training, if they do not already have this training and physical first aid training. • Session leaders understand the relevant organisational procedures such as risk to self and others policy / breaking confidentiality policy and that they are not providing a crisis service. 	

Description of risk	Likelihood (1-5)	Severity (1-5)	Risk (H, M, L)	Mitigation activities/ controls	Person responsible
Participant has physical health condition and needs support				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All participants to have completed a PAR-Q prior to the session and any issues raised in the PAR-Q to have been addressed beforehand. • Discussion with participant to ascertain abilities and limitations. Coach to provide alternative activities as appropriate and to monitor participation. • All to undergo appropriate warm-up exercises before starting activity and cool down at the end of session. • Session leaders to receive the appropriate level of first-aid training. • Session leader has details of emergency contacts including any health-related support. • Signpost to relevant medical support. 	
Participant behaves inappropriately to staff, volunteers, participants or members of the public				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaches and volunteers to receive training on organisation's policies and procedures. • Code of conduct for all participants, where possible co-written by participant, coaches and volunteers. 	

Description of risk	Likelihood (1-5)	Severity (1-5)	Risk (H, M, L)	Mitigation activities/ controls	Person responsible
<i>(continued)</i> Participant behaves inappropriately to staff, volunteers, participants or members of the public				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training should be provided on the organisation's complaint policy. • Participant is asked to take time out of the session or leave (as appropriate). Refer to managers to determine follow up with participant. • Ensure the safety of staff, volunteers, participants, and the public, and provide an opportunity for discussion group or one to one if distressed. • Complete incident form. 	
Wearing unsuitable clothing for the activity				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear guidance available to participants before the session about what to wear and what to bring. • Where possible additional kit should be available to borrow or consider alternatives such as taking part in indoor activities in socks/barefoot. 	
Unable to contact a member of staff out of office hours				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Session leaders are aware of the relevant organisational procedures. 	

Description of risk	Likelihood (1-5)	Severity (1-5)	Risk (H, M, L)	Mitigation activities/ controls	Person responsible
<i>(continued)</i> Unable to contact a member of staff out of office hours				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants and volunteers have a named point of contact. Extreme cases to be referred to the emergency services. 	
Complaint made against a member of staff, volunteer or participant				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training should be provided on the organisation's complaint policy. 	

Key

High risk (H)

Moderate risk (H)

Low risk (H)