

Managing incidents

Assess

As soon as you become aware that something has happened, remain calm and stop the group so that you can quickly assess the situation.

Check whether anyone is in danger and that it is safe to approach the casualty, before finding out what has happened.

This will help you to determine what to do next without endangering the injured walker or anyone else in the group.

Protect

Protect yourself, the group and the injured walker from any danger. An injured walker may be able to get themselves into a more comfortable position.

If you are in doubt about any injuries, only move the walker if leaving them would cause more harm.

Speak with the group to make sure they are aware of possible risks, including getting cold while you wait for help. Explain what you need them to do to keep safe.

Contact emergency services if needed

Always carry a charged mobile phone in case of an emergency. If you need to, call for emergency services and/or help. Emergency call operators will talk you through managing a situation until help arrives.

- **In areas with road access:** call 999 and ask for an ambulance.
- **In remote areas:** call 999 and ask for the police, who will put you through to Mountain Rescue.
- **Areas with reduced phone signal:** try using Emergency SMS to text a message to 999. Remember to register in advance by texting 'Register' to 999.
- **Areas with no signal:** shout/signal for help or ask other group members to go to a location where a signal is available. The international distress signal is six whistle blasts/ torch flashes, repeated after a one-minute break.

Calling emergency services

If you need to call the emergency services, the information below will help them help you.

1 Location

Clearly state your location by giving a grid reference from your map or your phone app. We share our top tips on finding an accurate location at the bottom of this page.

2 Nature of Emergency

Explain the situation and the type of assistance needed. For example, if it's a medical emergency or if you require mountain rescue.

3 Casualty Details

If there is a casualty, provide their name, gender, age and details of their injuries.

4 Party Details

Let them know how many people are in your group.

5 Your Phone Number

This is helpful if the emergency services need to contact you for updates.

top tip

If you are able to access them, the following mobile apps or websites are useful to help you work out your location, using a grid reference system.

what3words

what3words is a system that has allocated a unique three-word address to every 3m square in the world, providing a precise location.

OS Maps

The online version of OS maps allows you to right-click on a location to view the grid reference. The OS Maps app also has this functionality.

Grid Reference Finder

The Grid Reference Finder website allows you to search for a location by address or postcode, or you can click on the map to pinpoint your desired location. The website then provides the grid reference, including 6-figure and 8-figure references.

Taking Action

First aid

Depending on the injury, you (or another walker) might have to give first aid treatment, if you feel confident to do so. In many incidents walkers may be able to administer their own first aid. If the emergency is more serious, you may need to do **a primary survey** and take action.

Remember to prevent infection by sanitising your hands, wearing gloves and disposing of any waste in a sealed plastic bag. And if more than one person is injured, look after those with the more serious conditions first.

Reassure

Always treat people with dignity and respect. Listen and give as much privacy as you can to anyone who is injured.

Explain the situation, what you are going to do next, and reassure everyone.

Remember that if an incident takes place, people might be distressed, embarrassed, anxious, or even angry - this can be a natural reaction to stress and pain.

Stay calm and try not to dismiss their feelings.

Work together

You don't have to handle an emergency on your own, so never be afraid to ask for help. Make use of the different skills and expertise in your group. For example, other walkers may be medically trained, be 'first aiders', or have good knowledge of the area to help direct the emergency services.

Try to keep the group together, but if you do need to split up to get help, work together in groups of at least three and be clear about how you will keep in touch.

top tip

“You are the most important person at an incident. Don't become a casualty yourself, have confidence and take control”

Alan, a First Aid Trainer

Following up

Looking after yourself

You may be shaken after an incident once the adrenaline has worn off. It is important to acknowledge this and understand that the impact may stay with you for a while.

You might find it useful to speak with others about your experience, both family and friends, or other walkers and Walk Leaders.

Following up with the group

After an incident, people may feel a little unsettled and need some reassurance. It's a good idea to have a follow-up chat to see how they are doing and offer a listening ear.

Reporting

When an incident happens, check if you need to report them to your group.

Learning from the incident

There will always be a different way of handling a situation. You may not have got everything right, but you may be surprised at how well you managed the situation. The important thing is that you took action and used your best judgement in the moment.

Reflecting on what happened and how you handled the incident is useful both for learning and closure. Sharing it with others can help you and them too. Some questions to ask yourself may be:

- What did I do well?
- What could I have done differently?
- How did I make the injured person feel?
- How did I make the group feel?
- How could I have been better prepared for the situation? Is there anything I'd like to do now to help me if something similar happened again?