

Chapter 2



Role of the Volunteer Walk Leader

2.1 The Role of the Volunteer Walk Leader

As a Walk Leader you are an important and crucial part of the success of a walking program or group. Your involvement in the program is greatly appreciated. Without people like you, this program could not exist.

A good walk leader is someone who:

- ❖ Is friendly and easy to talk with.
- ❖ Makes the walk feel like a fun social occasion.
- ❖ Is reliable and punctual.
- ❖ Is observant of people's wellbeing and hazards.
- ❖ Exhibits experience based competencies across a range of walks.
- ❖ Is enthusiastic.
- ❖ Has a warm approach/ is welcoming.
- ❖ Has knowledge of basic first aid procedures.
- ❖ Is familiar with the route (and alternatives).
- ❖ Fills in appropriate paperwork.
- ❖ Attends meetings and education/ update sessions.
- ❖ Informs the Program Co-ordinator immediately if any changes or problems occur.
- ❖ Incorporates health information from the *Find Thirty* and *Stay on Your Feet* Campaigns as appropriate.
- ❖ SMILES!

The following information will be provided to you through training, this manual and handouts. In summary, Walk Leaders should ideally know about:

- ❖ The aims and objectives of the overall program.
- ❖ Basic first aid and how to respond to incidents.
- ❖ Basic safety precautions related to walking.
- ❖ Identifying those individuals who may need to see their doctor before commencing the program.
- ❖ Warming up, stretching and cooling down activities.
- ❖ Map reading skills and compass use for 'bush' or 'trail' walking.
- ❖ The basic routine for every walk and the walk leader's role in this.
- ❖ General benefits of walking – health and social.
- ❖ Falls prevention for older people.
- ❖ The recommended pace and the amount of walking required for health benefit.
- ❖ Communicating with a wide variety of people.
- ❖ Local history and/ or points of interest on route (optional).
- ❖ The specifics of each route they take a group.

2.2 What Does a Walk Leader Do?

Before the Walk



Before you begin a walk, complete the Walk Leader Six Point Check:

Check 1 – **See your GP**

Encourage new participants to see their doctor before commencing their exercise program.

Check 2 – **Level of Activity**

Ask the participant about their current level of activity, or what activity has been recommended by their doctor.

Check 3 - **Information Flyer**

Hand out the information flyer to new participants and brief each person on your role, contact details, and their responsibilities.

Check 4 – **Walk Route**

Be aware of the hazards and dangers on the route. Walk the route yourself before taking your group. Look for toilets, water, points of interest. Obtain maps and information from the local Council.

Check 5 – **Attendance List**

Record names and numbers attending.
Record emergency contact details of new walkers.

Check 6 – **Clothing and Safety**

Remind walkers about correct clothing and footwear, to lock vehicles and take care of valuables.

As well as completing the six-point check list it is a good idea to do the following BEFORE the walk commences:

- ❖ Familiarise yourself with the walk and the map before you lead the walk. Be aware of local information that is not on the map that could impact on the walk e.g. wet ground conditions or extreme wind conditions during winter or extreme glare from sand on clear days. These affect clothing-accessories choice.
- ❖ Arrive in good time to welcome early arrivals and discuss any problems, suggesting alterations in walk if necessary.
- ❖ Introduce yourself – give your name and greet all walkers at the meeting point.
- ❖ Welcoming new participants and introduce them to other walkers.
- ❖ Ensure new walkers complete all registration papers, health questionnaire and /or Readiness for Physical Activity questionnaire.

- ❖ Distribute information as required eg. maps, next education talk, promotional flyers etc.
- ❖ Inform group of walk route, length of the walk, time, and social activity after walk etc.
- ❖ Ask walkers to notify the Walk Leader should they wish to leave the group during the walking.
- ❖ Don't cancel – if you can't be there arrange a substitute.
- ❖ Wear your walk leader t-shirt and identification swing tag.
- ❖ Inform people of what to expect.
- ❖ Check that all walkers feel well and are injury free before starting.
- ❖ If anyone is unwell or injured, recommend they do not to start the walk but visit their GP for a check up.

On the walk:



- ❖ **Warm up** – commence the walk at a slower pace for 5-10 minutes.
- ❖ **Stretching Exercises** – conduct stretching exercises after a few minutes of gentle walking. (*See pages 35-40 for stretching and balance exercises*).
- ❖ Pace the walk at a speed for the whole group.
- ❖ Remind people of rest areas.
- ❖ Position yourself amongst the group to observe those who may have problems. Don't march off too far ahead of your group.
- ❖ Be friendly and approachable, chat along the way.
- ❖ Encourage people to appropriately progress their walking speed and/or distance.
- ❖ Remind people that they should be breathing a little faster but still able to hold a conversation, feel a little warmer and their heart rate should increase.
- ❖ Observe for signs of distress and inform walkers to stop exercising immediately if they experience:
 - **Sickness or dizziness**
 - **Excessive sweating**
 - **Excessive fatigue**
 - **Unsteadiness**
 - **Chest pain, discomfort or chest heaviness or tightness**
 - **Muscle strain or cramp**
 - **Significant breathlessness**
- ❖ Carry a First Aid Kit and mobile phone.
- ❖ Above all don't forget to enjoy yourself!



At the end of the walk:

- ❖ The walk needs a definite ending.
- ❖ Encourage walkers to finish with a few gentle stretches. (*See pages 35-40 for stretching and balance exercises*).
- ❖ Check that all walkers have returned.
- ❖ Check that all walkers feel well.
- ❖ Thank people for attending, ask them to register for the next walk and suggest they bring a friend or family member.
- ❖ Invite everyone to have a drink at the coffee shop.
- ❖ Mention the date and time of the next walk.
- ❖ Allow time for questions and an informal chat.
- ❖ Keep all records to hand onto the Program Coordinator.

Evaluation:

It can be useful to record how well you think the walk went. The following points can be a good way to this:

- ❖ Record the number of walkers in the group.
- ❖ Encourage people to give feedback about the walk; jot down a few suggestions to improve the walk.
- ❖ Give feedback to Volunteer Walk Leader Coordinator or Manager.



Substitute Leader:

If you are unable to take your walk please try to arrange a substitute leader. Make sure that this person is a trained walk leader and not just a fill in.

When a new walker joins the group

First impressions can be a vital deciding factor for people to continue in a walking program:

- ❖ Always be observant and seek out new participants to make them feel welcome and introduce them to other walkers.
- ❖ Ensure that they complete the Readiness for Physical Activity Questionnaire prior to the walk and that they understand that they walk at their own risk if they choose to participate.
- ❖ Give each participant a handout pack.

Highlight to the new walker the importance of the following:



- ❖ Walk within your own capabilities at a comfortable pace. Remember, it's not a competition.
- ❖ Drink plenty of water before, during and after walking, especially in summer.
- ❖ If outside wear a hat, sunscreen and appropriate loose, comfortable clothing.
- ❖ Wear appropriate well fitting shoes.
- ❖ Explain the warm up, stretching and cool down components of the walk.
- ❖ Encourage them to have fun, meet new people and invite them to a group coffee at the end if part of the program.

2.3 Health and Safety

Health Information



- ❖ Take appropriate safety precautions so that participants are not at risk at any time.
- ❖ Lead the group in warm up, stretches and cool down, explaining why these are important (*See pages 35-40 for stretching and balance exercises*).
- ❖ Provide incidental health information from the *Find Thirty* and *Stay on Your Feet* Campaign as required.
- ❖ Encourage walkers to attend health information session and to bring a friend.
- ❖ Explain the importance of comfortable footwear and clothing and sun protection for outdoor walks, hat, sunscreen, sunglasses.
- ❖ Drink water - encourage walkers to drink plenty of water before, during and after the walk, suggest they bring their own water bottles.
- ❖ Medication - ensure walkers with certain medical conditions (i.e. asthma, diabetes) bring along appropriate medication.

To help make your walk a safe one:



- ❖ Advise walkers to stay within the group but to walk at an appropriate pace.
- ❖ Encourage walkers to pair up with people who walk at a similar pace.
- ❖ Allocate a front and back marker for the walk.
- ❖ Explain to the group the role of the leader and safety precautions taken and those which the walkers should take.
- ❖ Discuss risk factors for falls and how to prevent them.

- ❖ Advise participants that they take part in the walks “**at their own risk**”.



2.4 Risk Management

Extracted from "Risky Business – A Club Guide to Risk Management" from the Club Development Series (No.13), Department of Sport and Recreation.

With Australian sport and recreation organisations facing the increasing risk of litigation, many organisations are recognising the need to provide protection for their volunteers, members and participants.

2.4.1 What is risk?

The Australian/New Zealand Standard for Risk Management (AS/NZS 4360) defines risk as:

“The chance of something happening that will have an impact upon objectives. Risk is measured in terms of the likelihood of something happening and the consequences if it does.”

2.4.2 What is risk management?

The Australian/New Zealand Standard for Risk Management (AS/NZS 4360) defines risk management as:

“The culture, processes and structures that are directed towards the effective management of potential opportunities and adverse effects.”

2.4.3 Benefits of risk management

Identifying potential risk(s) and creating a risk management policy for your club, group or event can have a number of benefits. These can include:

- Good business and management practices.
- Assistance with strategic planning.
- Reducing unexpected and costly surprises.
- More effective and efficient allocation of resources.

2.4.4 Why do we need risk management?

- Helps you to clearly define insurance needs.
- Compliance with regulatory requirements.
- Assists in preparation for auditing.
- Lessening risk may encourage more people to participate in your activity.
- Better results from projects and programs.
- Better information for decision making.
- Balancing opportunity and risk.

2.4.5 When do we need to manage the risk?

ALL THE TIME

Risk management is an ongoing process applied to all aspects of your activities. Any new project, event or competition should have a risk assessment completed.

Risk management is a five step process. The five steps are:

1. Establishing the context.
2. Identify the risk(s).
3. Assess the risk(s).
4. Treat the risk(s).
5. Ongoing monitoring and review.

Below is a sample table of how to assess the activities your walking group will be undertaking and how you can measure potential risks and identify strategies to overcome these.



<p>1. PROJECT</p> <p>Describe the activity/function</p>	<p>Weekly walking group meeting at local park</p>
<p>2. THE RISK</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What can happen? - How can it happen? 	<p>A broken footpath causing a group member to trip and sprain ankle.</p> <p>The hazardous part of the path is hard to see and therefore avoid, or make the group aware of the potential danger.</p>
<p>3. CONTROLS</p> <p>What controls will be used in this activity?</p>	<p>Walk in areas where paths are well-maintained and any faults easily seen.</p> <p>Advise group members of hazards of uneven/broken footpaths and how to avoid them.</p> <p>Advise group members to wear sturdy, supportive shoes to minimise risk of falling.</p>
<p>4. LIKELIHOOD</p> <p>What is the likelihood of the event occurring?</p>	<p>Unlikely (the event could occur at some time).</p>
<p>5. CONSEQUENCES</p> <p>What would the consequences be?</p>	<p>Minor - First aid treatment may be required.</p>
<p>6. LEVEL OF RISK</p> <p>What is the level of risk?</p>	<p>Low – managed by routine procedures.</p>

The above information is intended as an introduction only to the issue of Risk Management. To obtain further information about Risk Management or if you would like a guide to planning your own Risk Management Strategy please contact the Department of Sport and Recreation on telephone (08) 9387 9700 or via the website: www.dsr.wa.gov.au

2.5 What is Duty of Care?

An individual, group or organisation, undertaking an activity, has a duty in law to make certain that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure the safety, health and well being of others likely to be affected by the activity.

2.5.1 Your responsibility in providing Duty of Care

Your Duty of Care extends to events and circumstances that are 'reasonably foreseeable'. For example a meteor hitting someone is not 'reasonably foreseeable' but what about walking on a damaged footpath? Could this prove to be a potential hazard that a group member may trip on and hurt themselves?

In the case of a Walk Leader your Duty of Care will need to be considered:

- Before the walk.
- During the walk.
- After the walk.

Be aware that a walking group will naturally split into three groups a slower pace, a middle paced and a faster paced group.

As a Walk Leader your duty of care is outlined in point 2.2 "What does a walker leader do?"

2.5.2 What will happen if something goes wrong?

Even with the best planning mishaps do occur. Fortunately most will be minor and easily resolved. However, if someone has suffered personal injury or loss on a walk and is contemplating taking legal action, these are the hurdles they will have to overcome first before the matter can progress further:

- That a Duty of Care existed (advice, action, activities).
- They have to prove that you were negligent. Hurting themselves isn't enough proof to show that you didn't do what you were supposed to do.
- More importantly they have to be able to prove that it was failure on your part that *directly* contributed to them hurting themselves. For example, if someone tripped over a broken footpath because you chose to walk in a poorly lit area, it is not the same as someone tripping on a footpath, because they were running backwards to show off in front of their friends at the time.

- Furthermore, they have to prove that your negligence was actually significant to their injury. Someone with lifelong chronic back pain would have a hard time proving that tripping over during the walk made a big difference to their condition.

2.6 Legal Protection for the Volunteer

On 1st January 2003 the Volunteers (Protection from Liability) Act 2002 was proclaimed and it outlined the following relating to the activities that volunteers undertake:

- Someone who is volunteering for an organisation and operates in good faith when doing community work and within the organisation's guidelines has some protection from liability.
- The intent is that the liability will transfer to the community organisation with which they are involved.

2.6.1 What does that mean for me?

This means that volunteers cannot be sued for something they did or failed to do, if they are acting within the scope of the work and directions given to them by the community organisation. Liability will be transferred to the community organisation that they work for.

2.6.2 Where can I get some advice?

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|
| ❖ Department of Sport and Recreation | Telephone: 9387 9700 |
| ❖ Insurance Commission of WA | Telephone: 9264 3333 |
| ❖ Your local Council | |

2.7 How can you include People with Disabilities as part of your walk



* Information provided by Disability Services Commission

People with disabilities, like everyone else, may want and expect to participate with their friends, families or carers. Below are various points you may want to consider as a walk leader if one of the members of your group has a disability.

- Know who will participate beforehand:
 - *What are their needs? If you are unsure, check with them or their carer.*

- Walk the course beforehand so you are aware of available facilities, potential obstacles and suitable alternatives.
- Potential obstacles may include:
 - *Overhanging branches, glare, reflective surfaces, noisy environments.*
 - *Trip hazards – uneven surfaces, berries, twigs, steps.*
- Steep gradients, no steeper than 1:14.
- Beware of narrow pathways and aisles.
- If it is an indoor walk, is the floor surface firm and non-slip to allow wheelchair users ease of access.

If possible, incorporate the following considerations into your walk route. Not only will it make it possible for a person with a disability to be part of your walk, it can be of benefit to the whole group.

- Continuous accessible paths of travel at least 1000mm (1200mm preferred) wide.
- Rest stops, eating, shade, unisex accessible toilets.
- Routes that are well lit, clearly signposted and protected from the weather.
- Routes with Ground Surface Tactile Indicators, colour contrasted edges, steps and changes in levels.

Communicating with a person with a disability is no different to any one else. In general terms:

- Smile.
- Listen to the person.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Watch for a person's body language.
- Speak clearly and naturally.
- Wait for a response to questions.
- See the person not the disability.
- Avoid 'jargon'.
- Do not talk down to anyone.
- If you are unsure what has been said, ask the person to repeat it.

To obtain further information on including people with disabilities in physical activity please refer to the Disability Services Commission website: www.dsc.wa.gov.au or call (08) 9426 9200.