



Doula UK
Positive birth.
Supporting families.

Doula UK Lone Worker and Personal Safety Guidance

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to ensure that lone workers are safe from harm while on doula business as far as is reasonably possible and practical. It is up to the individual doula to carry out a risk assessment to mitigate the risks of lone working. This guide aims to raise awareness of safety issues relating to lone working and virtual support and offers guidance for best practice.

This guide applies to all Doula UK members, doula trainers, doula mentors and other Doula UK volunteers.

2. Definition

Lone working applies to anyone who works away from the physical presence of colleagues, without close or direct supervision.

Examples include:

- Doulas working alone virtually (including online) or in a client's home
- Doulas working outside normal 'office' hours on their own
- Doulas visiting domestic and commercial premises without a colleague.

3. Doula UK Lone Worker and Personal Safety objectives:

To identify lone working situations and enable doulas in such situations to assess the risk and take suitable precautionary measures.

To support doulas to identify a safe system of work which may include:

- Recording and relaying the whereabouts of doulas
- Recording and relaying when working starts and ends
- Keeping information confidential but so that it does not jeopardise the doula's safety
- Following an agreed system for locating doulas who deviate from the expected movement pattern
- Minimising the occurrence and risks of lone working.

4. Your personal responsibilities

Responsibilities for your personal safety are as follows:

- Doulas take personal responsibility for their own safety and well-being and make this a priority of practice
- Until a relationship with client/s has developed (i.e. after interview stage) doulas should ensure that lone working and all possible vulnerable situations are avoided for as far as reasonably practical
- Emergency procedures should be put in place so that individual doulas working alone know how to obtain assistance
- Arrangements should be in place so that someone else is aware of the doula's whereabouts at all times, including when lone working starts and finishes.

Lone working doulas are advised to:

- Consider their own personal safety at all times
- Take reasonable steps to ensure their own safety and;
- Inform their colleagues/mentor of any incidences or safety concerns.

All lone working doulas need to take personal responsibility for the health and safety of themselves and of others who may be affected by their acts or omissions at work.

It is very important that no lone working Doula puts themselves in danger or is required to do something that they feel is a danger or risk to themselves or others.

If in any doubt about a lone working situation, leave the situation straight away, wait for others to accompany you or delay your visit, online support or situation. Never let others, regardless of their seniority, put you in a situation in which you feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

5. General guidance for doulas, doula trainers, mentors and other volunteers.

It is recommended that lone working doulas:

- Carry mobile phones when out on visits to all appointments
- Keep their diaries up-to-date with details of appointments, ensuring their whereabouts are known
- Ensure that a friend/ family member is aware of the movements for the day and what time they are expected home after their last appointment
- Maintain contact with their buddy/mentor/colleague by arrangement, particularly if carrying out home visits out of hours
- Text/ email their buddy/mentor/colleague when they arrive at a birth, if involved with a transfer
- and on the doula's arrival home.

Travel

Travelling to and from families' homes, to antenatal appointments, births, postnatal visits to support families and travelling to Doula UK events and appointments creates areas of potential risk to personal safety. To reduce this it is recommended that doula/trainers/ practitioners and volunteers:

- Ensure someone knows and can easily determine their whereabouts and expected time of return home
- Try to use the same known travel routes where possible avoid an isolated areas
- Carry out your antenatal/postnatal work during daylight hours where ever possible and carry a torch for travelling after dusk
- When preparing for travel at night make sure you carry equipment in your car if you breakdown
- (such as warm clothes, blankets, snacks etc.)

- Carry the minimum of valuable personal belongings when travelling
- Always stay alert and get help as quickly as possible if concerns about safety develop
- Consider personal safety of yourself and others when driving if you've been awake for a long period
- If travelling on foot try to walk with someone else and be as visible as possible
- If travelling by public transport sit near the driver to be able to raise any concerns about personal safety
- If travelling by car keep the doors locked when you are in the car. Park your car in a well-lit area.
- Have car keys ready when returning to your car, to avoid having to fumble for them. If you are
- worried and feel threatened, do not leave the car unless it is absolutely necessary; drive to a police station or garage forecourt to seek help
- Always take a common sense approach and pay attention to your gut feeling.

Home Visits

Being a lone working doula in a family home can create potential danger to your personal safety. It is recommended that lone working doulas:

- Arrange initial visit in a neutral, public place
- Be assertive about any personal safety issues arriving in a home for (example asking for a dog to be kept in another room during your visit)
- Read the signs as early as possible. If a potentially dangerous situation develops, you should leave as quickly as possible. Do not attempt to referee a domestic conflict situation. Contacting the relevant emergency services if necessary
- Consider if there are any child protection implications – you can find guidance on this here: <https://www.gov.uk/report-child-abuse> (Doula UK guidance document to follow at a later date)
- Discuss an incident immediately with your buddy/mentor/colleague and seek support and guidance for your own needs.

Virtual Support and Online Safety

- Create a contract/agreement for any new families you agree to support with clear information of the support you will give, regardless of whether you are offering free or paid for support.
- Speak to the person on the phone or over a video call to help you confirm their identity and authenticity.
- Provide your own certification and Doula UK profile page as evidence of your validity to

- role model a trusting relationship.
- If you receive an enquiry which you suspect may be fake, speak to a doula colleague, doula mentor or the Doula Support Network.
- Do not give out your private address or private details to the families you support.
- Before accepting friends / followers on facebook and social media check their profiles carefully.

Places of work

Where doulas are on premises where someone other than the doula has control they should still follow where practical the guidelines outlined in this document.

Working outside of normal hours

A lot of doula work is done outside of normal office hours, so it is necessary for the doula to identify the degree of risk and judge whether it is safe practice.

Risk assessment is the overall process of performing a systematic written or physical risk analysis and risk evaluation in order to identify methods to control the severity of the risk.

A risk assessment should be undertaken prior to any lone working situation by the doula.

Recommended reading on the risk assessment process can be found at www.HSE.GOV.uk/risk

6. Reporting and recording

Lone working doulas should discuss/report any current or potential situation about their work which they feel is/could be a threat to their personal safety so that the Doula may seek support and signposting.

It is vital that any incidences are reported to Doula UK, so that we are aware of the facts and so that in the future we are able to support doulas and reduce the potential risks. Doula UK will aim to follow up and review these reports so that more doulas are able to risk assess thoroughly, and reduce their lone working risks.

7. Questions for personal practice reflection

Please spend a few moments to reflect on your personal safety as a doula.

- What do you do you now to ensure your personal safety?
- Have you been in a situation where you have felt unsafe? If so what did you do?
- Where do you interview clients?

- Do you invite potential clients into your home?
- Would you attend an interview just from an invitation via email?
- Do you have mobile phone signal when you are in a lone working situation?
- Who, if anyone, do you/could you inform on arrival to and from births?
- Do you have a shared calendar so someone else is aware of where you are?
- Do you have roadside recovery?
- How do you get home after a birth of many hours?
- What plans do you have in place for travelling in bad weather, potentially alone?
- Who, within DUK, would you report an incident to?
- Would you know how to support and signpost a doula who was requesting help in regards to personal safety and lone working?

If you need any support or ideas, please contact your mentor, or email admin@doula.org.uk and your message will be forwarded to the appropriate person.

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