



BRITISH ORIENTEERING

RISK ASSESSMENT FOR ORIENTEERING

Orienteering is a difficult sport to supervise - you cannot just send a group out and keep your fingers crossed! Particularly where children are concerned, you should do a risk assessment before any session of teaching, coaching or training.

Risk assessments are about identifying the hazards - things that might go wrong - evaluating the likelihood of a particular event occurring and then adapting the plan and/or safety precautions accordingly.

A FEW THINGS THAT COULD GO WRONG - (These are examples not an exhaustive list!)

Students could:	Likely Causes:	Possible Actions:
Get tired, wet and cold with a risk of hypothermia; or alternatively get hot, dehydrated and exhausted. Both situations can be life threatening.	Deteriorating weather in open moorland. Poor clothing. Courses too ambitious. Too long a day. No protection from the sun. Not enough to drink.	Take spare kit, drink etc. Avoid open areas in adverse weather; if you have to use them plan short exercises where you can maintain regular contact with the students. Provide shelter.
Get lost, panic, make poor decisions. Have an accident.	Map disintegrating. Lost map. Running off the map. Running too fast. Course too hard. Controls hidden or controls not there. No safety procedure. Area has no clear boundaries etc.	Careful course planning. Cover maps. Draw up courses in the dry. Use Tyvek control cards. Personally check control sites. Place assistant at point where students are likely to make a major error.
Do something silly before they leave giving themselves little chance of getting round the course.	Not listening to instructions. Copying controls down wrongly. Not using a waterproof pen. Forgetting compass / whistle etc.	Check understanding, kit and maps etc. before start. Build up the amount of responsibility handed over to members of group gradually.
Have a medical condition which <i>you</i> don't know about. Asthma, diabetes, epilepsy.....	No medication. No medical forms. Too shy to tell you etc.	Medical forms filled in. Ensure staff have good first aid skills and equipment.
Have to cross busy roads with major traffic hazards	Poorly planned course.	Have an assistant at the road crossing.

You could experience any of these yourself. In addition, you or your assistant could put the controls in the wrong place, forget to put one out - or collect some in before the last people have visited them, you could even drive off and leave someone behind in the forest!

So, to re-emphasise: orienteering is unlike supervising any other sport because for the majority of the time students are out of your sight, off in the woods on their own. ***It is vital that you get into the habit of doing a risk assessment before each session.***

THE ASSESSMENT OF RISK

Brainstorm the potential hazards for your session. Score each one according to the level of risk. ***A scale of 1- 3 may be helpful here:***

1. Not a major problem.
2. Slightly more of a problem than usual.
3. Real problem with this exercise in this area.

Now decide what you should do, for risks assessed on the scale as level:

1. No need to worry.
2. Take normal precautions for orienteering exercises.*
3. Take special precautions for this exercise or go elsewhere or do something different.

* It is worth remembering that risk assessments carried out by inexperienced people are unreliable simply because they are not aware of the potential hazards or the possible easy solutions. If in doubt, consult a more experienced instructor / coach, your local orienteering club may be able to put you in touch with someone who can advise you.

USEFUL TIPS-

- Always visit an area before you take a group there. Check the control sites.
- Plan courses thoughtfully and allow yourself plenty of time to put controls out.
- Write safety instructions with phone numbers on all the maps or control cards.
- Check for understanding with your students. Check that they have a whistle and compass and know how to use them.
- Know your students' medical details, normal behaviour, responsibility level etc.
- Err on the safe side.
- Plan exercises which are easy to control until you are certain that your group is capable of acting sensibly and sticking to the safety procedures you have set up.
- Take spare kit along with you.
- Have a check system, even if you are not using control cards, for who went out when and with whom.
- Make sure there is always a responsible adult at base so that members of the group can come for help at any time.
- Brief your helpers very carefully. If they are inexperienced, consider doing a dress rehearsal before the session. Don't ask them to do more than they are capable of!
- Allow plenty of time for exercises, especially in winter when it gets dark early.
- Know where the nearest telephone is. Take a road map in the car or minibus.
- Be flexible about how much you will achieve in your session. Things usually take longer than you expect.