

Orienteering Deployer Safety Guidelines



For all deployers of orienteering activity, coaching, instructing sessions in outdoor centres, schools, clubs and squads

This document is offered as a **guide**. Each deployer should produce their own standard operating procedures taking these Guidelines into account, together with any specific requirements from their own organisation, such as educational visits, staffing, the use of minibuses etc. Policies should be in writing and all leaders and helpers must be fully aware of what they are and how to implement them if necessary.

The Purpose of these Guidelines

The intention of these guidelines is to assist the formulation of policies that will promote the safe delivery of orienteering:

- *In enjoyable and appropriate ways*
- *With links to the Sport of Orienteering locally, regionally, nationally and internationally*
- *To the requirements of schools and outdoor centres.*

What is Orienteering?

At competitive levels Orienteering is a running sport (solo or relay) using maps made to International Orienteering Federation standards. In the United Kingdom British Orienteering's rules govern the equipment used and the conditions of competition. The British Orienteering Coaching Scheme trains individuals to coach relevant skills and knowledge in progressively graded environments matched to the levels of experience age and aptitude of the participants.

Important points to be considered:

1. Orienteering is not a 'stop gap' activity. It requires suitably qualified delivery, properly structured planning, organisation and appropriate briefing of the activity together which also covers participants behaviour and the limitations of the area and potential hazards.
2. The deployer in charge should be qualified and competent at a level relevant to the venue and to the conditions prevailing.
3. The activity must be planned with due consideration for the ability and preparedness of the group. Orienteering skills required by the session may need to be taught or revised before the participants set off.
4. At all levels a qualified First Aider and appropriate accident response kit should be on hand and there should be access to a phone NB check mobile reception before using an area.
5. The emergency procedures in place must be relevant to the situation.
(terrain, location, participants, weather etc.).
6. It is not good practice to send inexperienced participants out on a long course. It is often preferable to opt for a series of short out-and-back 'star' exercises or loops over distances of 500 to 1,000 metres (or even less). To ensure that the competence, morale and safety of the participants can be monitored and that they get plenty of chances to practice and receive feedback.
7. Staffing ratios in the next section of this document are offered only as general guidance. It is the duty of the deployer to ensure that the group is adequately equipped and supervised. The staffing ratio should be sufficient to enable meaningful help to be given to participants who have difficulties. Younger children, beginners and those with different or special needs, for example, require extra supervision.
8. An extra adult, or adult participant nominated to assist, should be with any group in case of emergencies.
9. There should always be a responsible person at the 'start' and 'finish' points for the activity whilst participants are out. In most sessions the 'start' and 'finish' should be the same location.
10. Safety for orienteering is best assessed by considering carefully the nature of the area to be used. In the next section, the approximate grading A to D can only be indications. **It is emphasized that a risk assessment must be carried out before the activity.**

GUIDELINES ON APPROPRIATE AREAS FOR ORIENTEERING

Note that the grading of areas can, at best, only be a guide to how ‘safe’ an area is.

The grading below should therefore be considered to represent the area being used by the deployer – not necessarily the whole of the mapped area. A small section of a larger Grade C area can be designated as a Grade B+ area with an appropriate risk assessment and the careful use of taping, signage, patrolling adults, or appropriate adult shadowing or accompany participants.

The risk involved in an area is therefore likely to be determined more by good planning, adequate staffing and clear briefings than by the specific nature of the area. Nothing replaces the preparation of sensible risk analyses and an understanding of the nature of the risks involved in each activity or event.

Grading of areas can only therefore be a guide. The responsibility for minimising the risk to an acceptable level in all activities remains with the deployer. The deployer must also recognise the limits of their knowledge and experience particularly noting the ‘Recommended Qualifications’ listed below.

Type of Area	Characteristics of Area	Minimum Recommended Qualification for the leader	Suggested Staffing Ratio	Some Safety Issues
A - Small & enclosed areas such as school or outdoor centre grounds	Small and “simple” areas with very clear boundaries, good access, plenty of handrail features such as paths or fences and small enough as to allow supervision of the participants at frequent intervals. An absence of all such hazards as busy traffic, crags, fast or deep water.	Leaders should have a competent understanding of orienteering, of basic course planning and of how to introduce the sport through sequenced progressive exercises. This competence may best be obtained by attending a short National Governing Body course designed for parents, teachers, centre instructors or others interested in beginning coaching e.g. Introducing Orienteering eLearning course, Introducing Orienteering for Secondary Schools eLearning course, Teaching Orienteering Part 1 course, the British Orienteering Introduction to Coaching workshops (from 2017), Post 2008 Level 1 Coach Award in Orienteering or having been successfully assessed under the previous British Orienteering Coaching Award Scheme at Level 1. SOA Level 5	1 to 15 at centres. 1 to 30 in school grounds although ideally one qualified leader to 20 with at least one other adult to monitor the activity and assist skill development.	Taking part in pairs can increase confidence and perceptions of safety for beginners or the young. Emphasise that pairs must stay together.
B - “Other” local areas such as parks, small woods or clearly defined small sections of a larger wood	Areas with clear boundaries, good access, plenty of handrail features such as paths or fences and small enough for supervision	Attendance at Teaching Orienteering Parts 1 and 2 courses or Post 2008 Level 1 Coach Award in Orienteering qualification. British Orienteering Instructor / pre-2008 Level 2 coach qualification. British Orienteering Instructor Qualification. SOA Level 5	One qualified Instructor to 15 with at least one other adult to assist	Taking part in pairs can increase confidence and perceptions of safety for beginners or the young. Staff should be prepared to travel quickly around the area when

	<p>of participants at regular intervals.</p> <p>When using a small part of a larger mapped area the boundaries must be clearly defined with tape, signage or patrolling adult helpers.</p> <p>An absence of obvious hazards such as busy traffic, crags, fast or deep water</p>		Similar ratios should be adhered to at Club activities.	<p>necessary – for instance by running or cycling.</p> <p>Boundaries and appropriate relocation strategies should be made known to the participants. If any boundaries are hard to define, the use of marshals at points causing concern is recommended.</p>
B+ - Training on areas which are neither complex nor exposed which are a small defined section of a larger Grade C area can be designed as a Grade B+ area	Small defined areas include easier forests or country parks and sites with clear boundaries and ready access for assistance or for emergency vehicles.	<p>Post 2008 Level 1 Coach Award in Orienteering qualification.</p> <p>British Orienteering Instructor / pre-2008 Level 2 coach qualification. British Orienteering Instructor Qualification. SOA Level 5</p>	1 to 12 with at least one other adult to assist.	Boundaries and appropriate relocation strategies must be made known to the participants. Boundaries must be always patrolled by an appropriate adult, or an appropriate adult must shadow or accompany participants
C - Training on other areas which are neither complex nor exposed	Appropriate areas include easier forests or country parks and sites with clear boundaries and ready access for assistance or for emergency vehicles.	The Orienteering Coach Qualification. Level 2 Orienteering Coach Certificate or pre 2008 British Orienteering Coach Level Three / formerly Club Coach qualifications. SOA Level 7	1 to 12 with at least one other adult to assist.	The on-site risk assessment requires an experienced, licensed orienteering coach.
D - Training on more demanding areas	Complex, exposed or mountainous areas should be avoided except where sufficient staffing expertise is present.	Pre 2008 British Orienteering Level 4/Regional Coach award or higher, L3 Coach Certificate (post 2008) or a British Orienteering Club Coach / Level 3 or Level 2 Certificate Coach (post 2008) or the Orienteering Coach Qualification or SOA Level 7 who has attended the Safety Workshop on Coaching in Remote / Exposed Terrain.	1 to 12 with at least 2 adult staff.	The on-site risk assessment requires an experienced, licensed orienteering coach.
First Aid Certificate	<p>British Orienteering coaches & Instructors are required to have an up to date first aid certificate in order to be considered to be ‘licensed’.</p> <p>Coaches & Instructors should risk assess the nature of the area being used and the speed and ease of access for emergency vehicles in order to determine the level of 1st Aid training required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grade A, B and B+ areas = Emergency 1st Aid training • Grade C larger orienteering club areas = one day 1st Aid training • Grade D exposed or more remote areas = two days outdoor 1st Aid training 			

PREPARING FOR A SESSION

There is no substitute for good pre-session planning and preparation. Session Planning Forms can guide this and provide a record that it has been properly done.

Aim – This may well be to induct or develop participants in the sport of orienteering, using safe and controlled environments where they can learn relevant map-use skills. More detailed objectives for the session may need to be thought out.

Orienteering Techniques – Ensuring that participants have been taught at least the basic techniques of orienteering, before they set out, is an important key to safety. An analysis can identify techniques likely to be needed for the session which is planned. The “Step System” gives guidance as to how orienteering techniques relate to colour coded courses at events.

Planning - Appropriate course planning is crucial to safe and appropriate orienteering. It is a procedure to be learnt, not left to chance. An understanding of concepts such as “decision points”, “handrails”, and “catching features” and how to incorporate them into a course is needed.

Information - Before the session starts the following information should be known: the type of group, numbers and standard of participants, ages, duration of session, and other relevant details (such as the weather forecast and any local hazards).

Organisation – This includes tasks to be done before the session starts. Mobile phone reception should be checked. Control markers may need to be put out, maps pre-marked, control descriptions written, compasses, whistles, first aid kit and any other equipment collected together. Safety briefing sheets should be prepared.

EQUIPMENT FOR VARIOUS LEVELS OF ACTIVITY

1. **The orienteering map:** This should be of an appropriate standard for the participants, up to date and suitably weather proofed either printed on waterproof paper, in a map bag or by lamination (clip boards or neck worn map cases are generally unsuitable for orienteering). Maps should be correctly marked using purple/red start triangle and control circles of the correct size. Having a map each is better than sharing maps. Appropriately skilled and experienced mapmakers may be contacted through British Orienteering.
2. **Compasses:** Research has shown that children as young as 7 can use compasses for map orientation. Compasses are essential when the use of a safety bearing is required. It is preferable that all participants have a compass each.
3. **Whistles:** For any activity away from an outdoor centre or school, consider issuing a plastic whistle to all participants. They need to know that whistles are only to be used in a real emergency. Participants should know the accepted emergency signal (6 short blasts – rest – repeat until help arrives). **A whistle should be carried for all training and competition.**

4. **Watch:** It can be very helpful to have a wrist watch each or, if in pairs, one between two.
5. **First Aid Kit:** Should be kept at an appropriate point near to the action, along with other accident response resources (such as a mobile phone, where reception is known to be available). All participants and helpers should know the location of this accident response kit. Properly completed consent/medical forms should be readily available in respect of each person taking part.
6. **Clothing:** Participants in orienteering must wear appropriate clothing including full leg cover (not shorts, although these may be permitted on school / outdoor centre grounds and parks where there is no hazardous undergrowth). This is a standard rule of the sport to protect against cuts from the likes of brambles & branches . Activities in cold weather or poor conditions require layered clothing with a windproof and/or waterproof shell garment. Bad weather might require the activity to be cancelled. Footwear should be appropriate for the weather and terrain.

Equipment should not be carried on strings round the neck because of a risk of catching the string – for example in a tree.
7. **Control markers:** Even around centres and school grounds it is preferable that orienteering control markers and punches are used so that participants become familiar with their use. Needle punches may be used or electronic computerised punching in some situations. The three-sided orange and white nylon markers are available in various sizes. They should be used in any area that does not have a proper permanent orienteering course. Any markers should be easy to see and clearly recognisable. Whichever markers are used, all participants must be made aware of what they are looking for. Don't damage trees by permanently fixing markers to them.
8. **Participants' details:** A responsible person should record details of all the participants, including their names, ages and addresses, contacts to be used in the event of an emergency, the number of people in the group, the date and time of the session, the leaders, the location, a copy of the courses, the cut off time and estimated time of return.

BRIEFING THE PARTICIPANTS

A pre-session explanation may be needed to ensure that participants understand as many of the following points as are relevant:

- The purpose of the exercise and how to perform the key orienteering skills required
- The need for an equipment check
- The location of the “Start” and “Finish”
- The cut off time and the importance of reporting back by that time regardless of course completion.
- The area to be used - including its boundaries (e.g. stay in the forest), dangerous areas (e.g. crags), out of bounds sections (e.g. private property)
- What to do if lost e.g. use a safety bearing/whistle.
- First Aid and emergency procedures e.g. what to do if you find someone who is lost or injured.
- Specific hazards e.g. hazards to eyes near low branches, the risks of crossing slippery rock, or of steep descents at speed.
- The importance of caring for the environment.
- The need for ethical behaviour.

THE NEED FOR INSURANCE

All orienteering activities need to be covered by liability insurance, for protection against claims for damages, negligence etc. All activities conducted by British Orienteering staff or other representatives, and all activities registered with British Orienteering, are automatically covered by British Orienteering insurance. British Orienteering members can register any event, coaching or training session through their club fixtures secretary. Liability cover may also be provided through the school, local authority, UK Coaching, or the Institute for Outdoor Learning. If in doubt, register your activity through your club Fixtures Secretary with British Orienteering.

British Orienteering insurance and other liability insurances do not provide personal accident cover. It is a standard condition of British Orienteering events that participants take part at their own risk.

Schools, Outdoor Centre Organisers, Youth Groups or others who feel that commercial non-British Orienteering Personal accident cover for participants might be advisable should suggest this to participants or to their parents well in advance of the activity.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

All orienteering events & activities must be carried out with caring of the environment in mind. Control sites or posts that are frequently used ought to be moved from time to time to reduce foot erosion.

Published by British Orienteering, 20/03/25