

**SAFETY GUIDELINES**  
**on**  
**ORIENTEERING ACTIVITIES AND TRAINING**  
**for Squads, Clubs, Outdoor Centres,**  
**Organisations and Schools**



**Making use of this guidance**

This document is offered as a guide. Each organisation or individual using orienteering regularly with groups should produce their own safety policy taking these Guidelines into account, together with any specific requirements from their own managers, governors or local authorities, such as rules on 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.

**This document**

*This document should be read as complementary to the British Orienteering Rules and Guidelines, which cover such matters as safety at orienteering club races or “events”. Also relevant to these issues is the guidance on risk assessment provided as part of the British Orienteering Coaching Award Scheme.*

**The Purpose of these Guidelines**

*The intention of these guidelines is to assist the formulation of policies that will*

- *Promote safe orienteering – often to young people*
- *In challenging, enjoyable and appropriate ways*
- *With links to the Sport of Orienteering locally, regionally, nationally and internationally*
- *And 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 Award 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 before orienteering activity commences:**

- 1 Orienteering is not a 'stop gap' activity. It requires properly structured planning, organisation and appropriate briefing of participants with regard to behaviour, the limitations of the area and potential hazards.
- 2 The coach or leader 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.
- 5 The emergency procedures in place must be relevant to the situation (terrain, location, participants, weather etc.).
- 6 It is not normally good practice to send participants out on a long course. It is often preferable to opt for a series of short out-and-back exercises or loops over distances of 500 to 2,000 metres (or even less) so that the competence, morale and safety of the participants can be monitored.
- 7 Staffing ratios in the next section of this document are offered only as general guidance. It is the duty of the leader 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 disabilities or special needs, for example, require extra supervision.
- 8 There should always be a responsible person at the "Start" and "Finish" points for the activity whilst participants are out. **An extra adult, without a specific coaching commitment, should be with any group in case of emergencies.**
- 9 Safety for orienteering is best assessed by considering carefully the nature of the area to be used. In the next section, the approximate gradings A to D can only be indications. **It is emphasized that a risk assessment should be carried out before the activity.**

## **GRADED GUIDANCE ON APPROPRIATE AREAS FOR ORIENTEERING** **With pointers to recommended qualifications, staffing ratios & safety issues**

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

For example many Grade B and C areas can be used in a way which makes their use effective as a Grade A area; for instance by the definition and use of clear boundaries. The Gradings below should therefore be considered to represent the area being used by the coach – not necessarily the whole of the mapped area. 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 coach.

A coach must also recognise the limits of their knowledge and experience particularly noting the 'Recommended Qualifications' listed below.

**A. Private “safe” 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 so small as to allow supervision of the participants at frequent intervals. An absence of all such hazards as busy traffic, crags, fast or deep water**

**Recommended Qualifications** - 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. An appropriate certificate would be the British Orienteering Teaching Orienteering courses or British Orienteering Coach Level 1 course, preferably with assessment.

**Suggested staffing ratios** - 1 to 12. In school grounds, one qualified leader to 20 with at least one other competent leader to monitor the activity and assist skill development. Similar ratios should be adhered to at Club activities or on “simple” areas.

**Some safety issues** - If the activity concerned is a trip to a Club Orienteering Event with an organised group then it is especially important to give them advice about a cut off time at which they should “retire” if they have not completed the course. Emphasize that all starters in an event or activity must report to the Finish.

**B. “Other” local areas and small woods**

**Recommended Qualification** – British Orienteering Coach Level Two certificate.

**Suggested staffing ratios** - 1 to 12. In school grounds, one qualified leader to 20 with at least one other competent leader to monitor the activity and assist skill development. Similar ratios should be adhered to at Club

activities or on “simple” areas.

**Some safety issues** - 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 necessary – for instance by running or cycling. Boundaries and appropriate relocation strategies should be made known to the participants. Where boundaries are hard to define, the use of marshals at points causing concern is recommended.

### **C. Training on other areas which are neither complex nor exposed**

Appropriate areas include easier forests or easier country parks and sites with clear boundaries and ready access for assistance or for emergency vehicles.

**Recommended Qualification** – British Orienteering Coach Level Three certificate.

**Suggested staffing ratios** - 1 to 12 for experienced competent participants; 1 to 12 with at least 2 competent staff for a less experienced group.

### **D. Training on more demanding areas**

Complex, exposed or mountainous areas should be avoided except where sufficient staffing expertise is present.

**Recommended Qualification** – British Orienteering Coach Level Four certificate.

**Suggested staffing ratios** - 1 to 12 with at least 2 competent staff.

## **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.

**Skills analysis** – Ensuring that participants have been taught at least the basic skills of orienteering, before they set out, is an important key to safety. An analysis can identify skills likely to be needed for the session which is planned. The skills of the sport are spelt out in the “Step System” for teaching.

**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. 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 to International Orienteering Federation standards, up to date and suitably weather proofed either in a plastic bag or by lamination (clip boards or neck worn map cases are generally unsuitable for orienteering). 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. However this recommendation needs to be balanced against the costs of obtaining and maintaining a good stock of suitable compasses – and against the time needed to issue, collect, check and store them.
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 (leaders may need to explain what could constitute such an emergency). They ought to know the accepted emergency signal (6 short blasts – rest – repeat until help arrives). **A whistle should be carried for all serious training and competition.** Leaders of less experienced groups need to balance against this recommendation that playing with the whistles or frivolous use can be a real possibility and they might decide not to issue them but to insist on paired participation and close monitoring by staff instead.
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). This is a standard rule of the sport to protect against cuts from brambles, branches and so on. 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 sturdy with a good tread on the sole.

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 proper orienteering control markers and punches are used so that participants become familiar with their use. Needle punches may be used or possibly 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, whether nylon ones, permanent posts or other types, should be easy to see and clearly recognisable. Whichever markers are used, all participants must be made aware of what they are looking for. It is undesirable to damage trees by permanently fixing markers to them.
  
8. **Participants' details** A responsible person should retain 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
- 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
- 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.
- Specific hazards e.g. dangers to eyes near low branches, the risks of crossing slippery rock, or of steep descents at speed.
- First aid and emergency procedures.
- The relevance of the Country Code
- 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 association fixtures secretary. Liability cover may also be provided through the school, local authority, sportscoachUK, 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**

Whilst orienteering is no more damaging to the environment than other human activities and less than many, all activities should be carried out with the conservation 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.

*On all issues raised above, British Orienteering can give advice or training. British Orienteering has a scheme of having centres registered as accredited Orienteering Centres.*

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