

Leading a walk is not complicated but you have a much better chance of making sure everyone - including you - has a good time if you are well-prepared.

This guidance is written to help you plan a walk for a small group of friends, a walking group or any other small group, it is not written to set you up for leading a long or strenuous walk in challenging terrain.

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Why walk?

Regular walking is a brilliant way to get and stay healthier.

Walking in a group helps people make social links and get to know their neighbours and their neighbourhoods better.

Doctors say that a daily 30 minute walk will help to:

- reduce stress levels;
- lower the risk of heart disease and stroke;
- keep your weight down;
- reduce blood pressure and blood cholesterol;
- prevent and control type 2 diabetes;
- reduce the risk of some cancers;
- improve sleep;
- maintain bone density and reduce the risk of osteoporosis and fractures;
- improve balance and co-ordination;
- make you feel stronger, more energetic and more cheerful.



If someone claimed there was a drug that did all that we wouldn't believe it. But walking is a way to achieve it – and it's free!

What's so great about walking?

- it's suitable for all ages;
- it's free;
- it can be done just about anywhere;
- there is a very low risk of injury;
- it needs no special equipment;
- it reduces our carbon footprint – when we walk instead of drive.

Before the walk

There are several things to think about before you walk including:

Where will you walk?

A good walk route is likely to include beautiful or interesting things to look at, and will be safe and manageable for everyone who comes. Think about **how far** you want to make it and how easy or challenging. A route which takes 30 minutes at a brisk but comfortable pace would show people what a good daily walk is like. Choose a safe, clearly-defined meeting point.

Do you know the route and its possible hazards?

Make sure you're familiar with the **route**, and its hazards. Work out how accessible it is for people with mobility disabilities. Do a safety check a short time before the walk to make sure that nothing has changed recently on the route.

Do you need a helper - or more than one?

If you have more than ten people on the walk, or if some walkers are much fitter than others, an extra person at the back is essential. If you have more than 20 people on the walk then a helper in the middle is useful too. Brief them on what you want them to do.

How will you make sure people come?

The simple answer is to ask them along. If you want to widen the group to include people you don't know then you can spread the word effectively with posters and small hand-outs.

Word of mouth is very effective once you have run a successful walk or two and people start telling their friends. You can also collect email addresses and phone numbers from the people who come and contact them for the next one. But before the first walk you may find it helpful to do some publicity.

This may include:-

- putting up a poster and leaving small hand-outs in local shops, schools;
- doing an interview with local radio;
- writing an article or a letter for the local newspaper, community newsletter and parish magazine;
- advertising in your blog, on local websites and on twitter.



What equipment do you need?

- mobile phone (make sure it's charged up and that you have network coverage on your route);
- any paperwork you want to use;
- a small first aid kit.

If people ask what they need to bring or wear what might you tell them?

This may not be as stupid a question as it sounds. *You* know the route and they may not. For example it may be sensible to wear long trousers even in summer if there are likely to be nettles or brambles.

- a bottle of water;
- good shoes or boots;
- sunscreen and sunhat in summer;
- a waterproof jacket;
- long trousers – if there are likely to be prickly/stinging plants.

What would be useful to find out about the people who come?

Plan what **information** (if any) you want to collect from participants. Only ask them for information which will be useful to you and explain why you're asking.

How do you want to judge if the walk was a success?

There are lots of ways to do this, and it can really help you to make future walks even better. It's also worth asking the walkers themselves for suggested improvements - such as other routes or better times? Just observing people's behaviour and body language can tell you a lot, but you can also be more systematic about it.

How many people can you cope with?

Do you need to limit numbers or know more about the participants in advance? If so you may want to get people to book in advance. This can be off-putting, so if you have to do this explain why – safety, limited space etc. It may be a good idea to omit one crucial fact from the general publicity – like the exact start place or the exact time. If you are leading a small group it may be useful to know who is coming, especially if they are friends. If it becomes a regular group get people into the habit of letting you know whether they're coming or not.

Can people bring their dogs and/or their children?

You need to decide this in advance and make it clear through your advertising. If you are going to welcome them – you'll need to check the route with them in mind. If dogs are likely to be part of the group find out if there are any parts of the route covered by local authority rules about dogs (there are often rules about dogs in parks or on beaches) and consider the likelihood of problems if cattle may be grazing on any field your route crosses. In either case the accompanying adult is responsible for their child/dog, and it may be a good idea to remind them of this gently but clearly.



Communication in general

- talk to the whole group;
- make eye contact with participants;
- use inclusive language (avoid racism/sexism) and anything derogatory about people with disabilities;
- make sure you can be easily seen and heard (check this regularly with the group);
- ask for questions and feedback;
- adopt a confident physical stance;
- keep your voice loud and clear but vary the pitch and tone.

At the start of the walk

- arrive before the start time so that people know they are in the right place at the right time;
- welcome everyone;
- introduce yourself and other leaders;
- get to know the group a bit – ask questions and invite input;
- make a register of walkers or at least do a head count and write the number down;
- introduce the route - length / likely time / terrain and gradients / difficulty;
- outline any hazards you may meet and ask people - without being over-fussy - to help look after each other on the walk. It is a good idea to be explicit about asking the group to be safety conscious;
- stress that people should walk at their own pace and not leave the group without telling one of the leaders;
- if it's a guided walk suggest things for people to look out for between stops;
- mention any monitoring / evaluation you may want to do;
- start off not more than 5 minutes after the advertised time. If you wait longer it annoys the punctual people and gives the impression that any future walk will start late.

During the walk

- be observant and continue to point out hazards;
- manage the pace to suit everyone. A good test of whether the walk is fast enough to be really good exercise is that you feel your heart rate is raised but you can still talk without puffing too much or becoming breathless. It may help to aim for the pace you would walk if you were a bit late for something;
- make sure all walkers are OK - look out for signs of distress. You may need to reduce the pace;
- check regularly that everyone is still with you.

At the end of the walk

- check all walkers have returned;
- congratulate everyone;
- have some healthy refreshments / social time if appropriate;



- evaluate the walk in some way;
- encourage walkers to join in other future events (if any) and to bring a friend.

Afterwards

- **note** down the number of people who came and anything else you want to record about them for funders / media / future planning;
- work out **how successful** the walk was and what - if anything - you would like to do differently; Did you achieve what you wanted:
 - Raise enough money?
 - Publicise the route / place?
 - Teach people something?
 - Help people make new contacts?
 - Promote your organisation?
 - Were the practical arrangements OK?
 - Did you manage not to lose anyone?
 - Did they say they would come again?
- create another round of publicity to trumpet your success and raise interest for your next walk;
- **thank** helpers and anyone who gave you special permission to do something (e.g. landowners);
- **plan** your **next walk**?

Meeting point

Choose a place which is big enough for a group to assemble (and mill about) safely. If there's some shade or shelter available all the better. If people are going to drive to the start point, think about where they will be able to leave their cars safely.

It's horrible standing and waiting for people and not being sure whether they may be assembling somewhere else. If it's possible for people to misunderstand instructions for where the meeting point is – some of them will. So make sure you use a totally unambiguous description for the exact meeting place. Don't rely on showing it on a map on a poster or flyer. Many people can't read maps especially of places that they know well.

Safety check

This is just a matter of walking the route and taking a logical approach to thinking about what the possible risks are and how to minimise them. If you think anything poses a serious risk, change your route.

People do tend to take less responsibility for their own safety if they are on an organised walk than if they are on their own so you must do a bit of thinking for them. Don't treat them like children but do take care of them and encourage them to help each other if necessary.

Use the checklist on the next page to carry out a safety check.



Safety Checklist

		Yes	No	If yes, what will you do to reduce the likelihood of any harm / problem? We've filled in some as examples.
1	Are there any uneven areas of pavement or other rough surfaces?			Warn the walkers. Consider changing the route?
2	Are there surfaces which are slippery or muddy when wet?			Warn the walkers. Consider changing the route?
3	Are there places where you must walk along (or cross) fast or dangerous roads?			Warn the walkers, have an extra helper stationed there - or better still change the route.
4	Is the path inaccessible to buggies, wheelchairs or walking aids? (narrow places may be a barrier as well as rough surfaces, steps, gates and stiles)			Make sure you warn people about the limitations of the route - if any - on your publicity material.
5	Are there any moderate or steep slopes? Gradients are a particular issue – both along and across the path for people in wheelchairs. Use common sense and if you think gradients might be a problem mention them.			Make sure you warn people about the limitations of the route - if any - on your publicity material, and at the start of the walk.
6	Are there prickly or stinging plants (brambles / nettles / gorse / blackthorn) overhanging the path?			Warn the walkers or if possible arrange for the plants to be cut back before the walk.
7	Are the paths too narrow for 2 or 3 people to walk beside each other?			Long stretches of single file can be boring. Consider changing the route?
8	Is there a lack of seats for the less fit walkers to rest if necessary?			
9	If walking in summer is there a danger of sunstroke because of lack of shade on long stretches of the route or at the meeting point?			
10	Are there any other potential hazards such as steep drops or cattle?			
11	Are there any parts of the route which are shared with cyclists?			
12	Is there a lack of public toilets?			
13	<i>Add your own</i>			
14	<i>Add your own</i>			



Helpers

The helpers' job is to help you as the leader to make sure everyone enjoys the walk. This may involve chatting, or keeping quiet, motivating people to hurry along, or urging them to take it easy. Without being over-cautious, they should be looking out for hazards and helping the other walkers avoid them.

The 'back marker' should keep people company at the back of the walk and make sure that no one gets left behind. They may need to be patient but should also encourage slower walkers to move along. If you have another helper they should stay around the middle of the group and be prepared to help and encourage wherever needed.

All helpers should aim to make sure everyone feels included.

Although you will be aiming to keep together make sure that you and the helpers all have each other's mobile phone numbers, just in case you get split up.

Paperwork

There is no need to take anything but you may want to consider taking:

- paper and pen to make a list of the walkers who join you, or at least to jot down the total number. This will also make it possible to note down walkers' contact details in case you want to organise another walk and want to phone or email this group;
- a reminder of any questions you want to ask them at the end of the walk;
- a map of your route and its surrounding area (to answer questions / show alternatives to the route / show how it relates to other routes).

Discovering more about your walkers

This can be a very brief 'introducing ourselves' session with a group you don't know, and can give openings for conversations between the walkers during the walk. But don't ask for more information than you need, and explain why you want to know. Asking for a show of hands is quick and simple.

If you are trying to foster local friendliness or to popularise a route amongst local people you might ask where people are from. "Hands up if you live within a mile of the start ... between a mile and 5 miles away? ... further than that?"

If you want to know which methods of publicity work best you might ask how they found out about the walk. "Hands up who heard about this walk from the radio ... from the local newspaper ... from the village website?"

If you're thinking about local transport issues, or trying to lower carbon footprints you might ask how they got to the start point.



How did it go?

It's important to find out how well the walk went so that you can improve it next time, so that you get a bit of instant reward and to get some good quotes to use when you're talking about it to other potential participants, supporters and the media.

People's body language and comments will tell you a lot but if you want to get more precise and objective feedback try out some of the following techniques:

- ask open questions (ones which can't be answered just 'Yes' or 'No');
- have an informal chat with the walkers at the end;
- get a friend or colleague to come along and give you their honest opinion.

Walking with children

Walking is a great habit to develop in children and families may get a lot of pleasure from joining one of your walks. However, unaccompanied children should not be taken on the walks. This is to ensure that you are not subject to the complex safety requirements which cover running activities for children, and also protects children from potential harm.

Walking with dogs

Dogs can be a great inclusion in a walk and can hugely help the motivation and commitment of their owners. But it's vital that they don't irritate people other than their owners. For the safety and comfort of all the walkers you should make sure that the dog is kept on a lead at all times and that the owner:

- is prepared and able to keep control of the dog at all times;
- has dog poo bags and is prepared to use them;
- keeps to any regulations about dogs on the route.