



Law Society
of Northern Ireland



Solicitor Safety Toolkit

Safe at work, safe at home

Practical guidance to support solicitors in
Northern Ireland to manage personal safety

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Introduction

This toolkit provides practical guidance to support solicitors in Northern Ireland to manage personal safety risks at work, home and in other locations.

It outlines how to identify risks, respond to threats and access support if incidents occur. It is designed for use by firms, individual solicitors and support staff.



Context

The Law Society of Northern Ireland is concerned about the growing number of threats, harassment and intimidation incidents affecting members of the solicitor profession in the course of their duties. In response to this worrying trend, the Society has taken a number of steps to date to:

- Raise awareness of the risks faced by solicitors
- Work collaboratively with justice partners to ensure a coordinated approach through the Lawyer Safety Liaison Group
- Provide practical guidance and to support members
- Influence policy and legislative reform

Solicitors play a vital role in communities across Northern Ireland, upholding the rule of law, protecting rights and ensuring access to justice. No solicitor should face threats, harassment or intimidation for carrying out their professional role.

This toolkit provides practical guidance to help firms and solicitors to:

- Recognise and assess risks to personal safety
- Respond appropriately to threats and incidents
- Reduce risk across work and personal environments
- Report concerns and access support



Awareness and Risk Assessment

This guidance aims to help solicitors recognise and assess risks to personal safety across various work-related and personal environments in order to be able to put in place effective measures to manage and mitigate risks.

3.1. Identifying risks and threats

Being aware of and understanding potential risks is an essential first step in protecting personal safety. There are a number of scenarios in which a solicitor may face potential risks, such as:

- Identification with the causes of a client
- Aggressive, abusive or threatening behaviour from clients, opposing parties, third parties, or members of the public
- High profile or emotionally charged cases (particularly in areas such as family and criminal law)
- Unwanted or obsessive attention from clients
- Working alone or in isolated environments or unfamiliar locations
- Client home visits or external meetings
- Travelling to and from court and meetings
- Online harassment, digital abuse or targeting

Firms and individuals may wish to carry out regular risk assessments to assess the probability and potential impact of risk in different scenarios and contexts. Risk assessments can be an ongoing process and should be reviewed frequently to account for new information, changes in circumstances, or emerging threats. Employers should also consider their obligations under the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978¹.

3.2. Firm level risk assessment

Firm level risk assessments are important to consider the wider organisational environment, including for example, physical premises, protocols, staffing and technology.

Key areas to consider include:

Workplace environment and building security

- Entrance/exit controls, reception procedures (including sign-in and visitor management)
- CCTV coverage and alarm systems/checks
- Lighting
- Panic buttons

Staff safety measures

- Lone-worker policies
- De-escalation and risk management
- Clear incident reporting pathways
- Access to training

Client risk management

- Client screening processes
- Communication and appointment protocols

Digital and cyber security

- Protection of data and online presence
- Minimising sharing of personal information online

¹ Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978

External working environments

- Processes when visiting courts, prisons, external meetings, home visits etc.

Post incident support

- Debriefing and follow up processes
- Welfare support

All practices, including sole practitioners, may wish to consider organisational risks and controls. For sole practitioners, this may involve trusted contacts and external support rather than formal internal structures.

3.3. Individual risk assessment

Individual risk assessments focus on a particular client, meeting or other activity. Areas to consider include:

Client behaviour and background

- History of aggression, substance misuse, unmanaged mental health issues
- Fixation, harassment

Case-specific risk factors

- Sensitive subject matters
- Delivery of adverse news/outcomes

Environment and meeting location

- Office layout
- External venues - client homes, unfamiliar environments

Lone working considerations

- Timing
- Location
- Communication

Digital / communication risks

- Website
- Social Media
- Access to phone and necessary contacts

Control measures

- Practical arrangements
- Security precautions
- Communication measures

3.4. Risk rating framework

A structured risk rating such as that below can help to determine response measures:

- On a scale of 1-5, what is the likelihood of the risk occurring? 1 (rare) to 5 (almost certain)
- On a scale of 1-5, what would the impact be if the risk occurred? 1 (minor distress) to 5 (serious injury/trauma)
- Overall risk score – likelihood x impact
 - o Low – 1-5
 - o Medium – 6-12
 - o High – 15-25

Following assessment, determine whether to:

- Proceed as planned
- Proceed with modifications
- Escalate for review or assistance
- Do not proceed due to unacceptable risk



3.5. Understanding and assessing threats

Important questions to consider when assessing a threat include:

- Where does the threat originate, and what is known about the individual or source?
- What is/may be the objective or motivation of the threat?
- How credible is the risk?
- Who or what is being targeted?
- What may have triggered the threat?
- What stage is the threat currently at, and are there any indications of escalation?
- What external factors might amplify/reduce the risk?
- What are the potential consequences of the threat?

3.6. Early warning indicators of escalation

The below behaviours may indicate increasing risk and should prompt reassessment:

- Fixation on an individual solicitor or staff member
- Increasing frequency or intensity of contact
- Boundary crossing behaviour
- Threatening, intimidating or warning language
- Hostility following adverse outcomes
- Online targeting or harassment



Responding to Risks and Threats

Once a risk or threat has been identified, consideration should be given to putting a plan in place to mitigate, manage and respond appropriately.

4.1. Safety in specific settings

Risks and threats can vary depending on the setting and sector in which solicitors operate. The below information is designed to help you recognise situations where your safety may be at risk across different settings, and to provide tips/suggestions on steps that can be taken to maintain vigilance, and to minimise/eradicate the level of risk involved.

Office

Within the office environment, personal safety risks can arise in a number of scenarios, including for example, from aggressive visitors and confrontational/aggrieved clients.

Both employers and employees have responsibilities to create and maintain a safe workplace.

- Identify a safe code word to use when there is an immediate risk and set out a list of questions to go through when the code word is used
- Provide information/training to staff around, e.g. dealing with difficult clients, and emergency procedures
- Make sure staff are aware of any policy, security protocols, and available safety measures
- Check what information is available publicly and online – minimise or remove personal details of staff (including work location) online when there are risks
- Ensure clear reporting process and channels for concerns or incidents, with an identified point of contact
- Promote a workplace culture where personal safety is taken seriously and concerns are addressed promptly

To ensure the personal safety of employees at work, employers could:

- Put in place and regularly review a workplace policy on personal safety
- Conduct risk assessments to identify risks and put in place mitigation measures
- Review and/or implement security measures such as access controls, CCTV, panic buttons/alarms and emergency protocols
- Consider visit management procedures for members of the public, clients
- and other third parties to avoid unauthorised or unwarranted access

Employees also play a critical role in maintaining a safe workplace. Steps employees may wish to take include:

- Follow office safety protocols and procedures
- Remain vigilant and be aware of surroundings
- Be mindful of who enters the office – consider taking pre-booked appointments only
- Be aware of locations of panic alarm/ buttons, entry/exit routes, and security systems
- In meetings with high-risk clients, sit close to the door, maintain a clear exit route/ strategy, carry your mobile phone or panic alarm
- Inform colleagues about working location (e.g. in office, home, court etc.) and keep diary up to date with details (where at least one other colleague will have access)
- Report any suspicious activity or incidents to identified point of contact promptly and follow reporting procedures

Courts/tribunals

- Dependent on client risk profile, and nature of case, try to attend court/tribunal with another colleague where possible, and share any relevant information in advance (such as arrival time etc.)
- Familiarise yourself with NICTS Venue Safety Guidance, which can be accessed on the following link: www.justice-ni.gov.uk/topics/nicts-venue-safety-guidance
- Stay in publicly accessible areas when possible
- Stay aware of surroundings – monitor who is nearby
- Be aware of emergency procedures, exit routes etc
- Report any perceived risks, concerns and incidents to court security staff

Client home visits

- Gather as much information about the client and location in advance

- Consider other alternatives for visit such as in a public place
- Try to bring a colleague or avoid doing visits on your own where possible
- Consider undertaking consultations remotely where high-risk has been identified
- Record details of visit in diary, including name, location, and duration
- Inform a colleague of your destination, expected visit duration and contact details and notify them when you have left the consultation
- Ensure your phone is fully charged and has emergency contacts saved
- Have a reliable means of transport for getting to and from the location
- On arrival, assess the environment to identify potential hazards and exit route
- Trust your instincts – if the location or situation feels unsafe, do not proceed

Travel and transport safety

- Make travel plans in advance, being aware of your route, travel times, and potential delays. Identify alternative routes and modes of transport in case of risk
- Share travel details with another colleague, family member or friend, including method of transport, arrival time, duration, and estimated return time and let them know when you return
- Keep your phone charged (carry a charger or battery pack as a back-up) and ensure emergency numbers are saved and easy to access
- Use well lit car parks and avoid isolated areas where possible. Use reverse parking as this facilitates a quicker escape method
- Scan your vehicle's surroundings before getting in or out. Have keys readily accessible to avoid rummaging in pockets/bags before entering car. Lock doors immediately after entering the car

- If approached while in car, speak through a slightly open window only if necessary
- Consider installing safety devices within your car such as motion detected cameras
- Wait for buses, trains or taxis in visible, well-lit, staffed locations where possible
- Consider using tracking apps where another person has access to your location
- Use only reputable/official taxi providers
- On buses/trains, sit near the driver or other passengers. If you feel unsafe, move to another area/carriage, inform driver/conductor, exit where possible
- Avoid travelling alone if you feel you are facing risk

Home

- Consider installing security devices, such as alarm system, ring doorbell, or CCTV
- Ensure all doors/windows are secured and kept locked, including additional bolts/chains etc, where necessary
- Consider installing motion activated lights and use timer switches to switch on your home lighting when away from home
- Keep blinds/curtains closed at night
- Avoid sharing your home address or routine publicly (including on social media)

Neighbourhood

- Be aware of neighbourhood, including areas to avoid
- Stick to public paths, and well-lit areas and routes
- If you face a risk while out in neighbourhood, call for help or get to a safe location (which could be the nearest busy place, such as a shop)
- Make trusted neighbours aware of concerns/risks
- Build community connections, including joining neighbourhood watch groups
- Consider carrying a personal alarm

Social spaces

- Share details of plans in advance with family member, friend, or colleague
- Monitor who is around you and be aware of any changes in atmosphere or risks
- Make others aware of any risks
- Have a safe route and transport home arranged in advance
- Consider carrying a personal alarm

Technology

You should make use of free technological features on your smartphone, smartwatch, or other similar devices.

On iPhone:

- Open Health app
- Click on your profile (top right-hand corner)
- Select Medical ID
- Fill in the Emergency Contacts section
- Under the Emergency Access tab, enable 'show when locked'
- When unlocking your phone, the emergency button will appear, with the ability to call your Medical ID quickly

On other android devices, steps vary by brand. Some will have a personal safety app, while others will have 'safety and emergency' within settings where you can enter emergency information, and be able to access this from your home screen.

Smartwatches often have safety features enabling you easily call emergency contacts and/or provide them with notification of your location.

You can also share your live location on WhatsApp with selected users via chat:

- Select the plus or paperclip option
- Select location
- Set share period

Responding to Immediate Danger

If you find yourself in a difficult situation or immediate danger:

- Seek immediate help by contacting emergency services on **999**
- Seek help from nearby individuals
- Remain calm and focus on practical actions, such as removing yourself from the situation to a safe location using a planned exit route or the nearest available exit
- Use protective equipment, such as panic alarms
- Avoid direct confrontation and maintain a distance between yourself and aggressor if possible



Reporting

The priority of reporting will depend on the severity of the risk or situation:

- If there is immediate danger, call the police on 999
- If there is no immediate danger, report the incident to the police as soon as possible on 101, or via their online form: www.psnl.police.uk/report
- When making a report to the PSNI, you should state:

“The call (or report) I am making is as a result of me being a member of the legal profession (or someone connected to a member of the legal profession) and the matter to hand is as a direct result of me being connected to the legal profession.”

- Once an incident is reported to the PSNI that relates to a threat or incident towards a solicitor while undertaking professional duties, the report will be flagged by call handlers to the internal PSNI Solicitor Safety Liaison Officer to oversee and coordinate the appropriate response. It is therefore vital to use the above wording to trigger this process.
- When you have reported an incident to the PSNI, you should ask for and note the incident number. This will be important when seeking updates relating to the status of the incident reported and/or if there are further incidents
- Make appropriate colleague(s) or other individual(s) aware
- Follow employer’s incident reporting procedure
- Contact the Law Society confidentially by completing the following Solicitor Safety Incident Report Form - [Solicitor Safety Incident Report Form](#)

Fill out form. All reports will be followed up promptly and will be treated with complete confidentiality. Law Society staff are unable to provide psychological support or legal advice in respect of individual cases but can signpost members to appropriate support and guidance



Recording and Evidence

Recording accurate details of risks and situations is vital.

- Write down important details such as date, time, location, parties involved, description of behaviour/language used, witnesses, actions taken, outcomes etc
- Keep a record of all incidents in a timeline to show sequence of events, if relevant
- Where appropriate, take photos, videos of perpetrators, licence plates etc. or if not appropriate, write down details of perpetrator including name (if known), gender, age profile, nationality/ethnicity and physical description
- Take screenshots of and/or keep a record of text messages and phone calls and ensure these are backed up on phone storage
- Record details during or immediately after phone call such as words used, details of discussion, as well as exact time and duration



Support and Signposting

We understand that incidents affecting your safety or wellbeing whether involving clients, colleagues, or members of the public can be distressing and may have a lasting emotional impact. You do not have to manage this alone. If you feel it would be helpful to talk to someone, confidential emotional support is available.

LawCare

The mental health charity for the legal sector, offers a safe, non judgemental space to speak with trained volunteers who all have experience of the pressures faced by legal professionals.

You can contact:

- LawCare by phone on 0800 279 6888 available Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm
- Email at: support@lawcare.org.uk
- Live chat service at: www.lawcare.org.uk

Ongoing peer support may also be available. LawCare's peer supporters have first-hand experience of working in the legal sector and may have been through difficult times themselves in their personal or professional lives. They can offer ongoing one-to-one support.

Many solicitors find it helpful to speak with someone who understands the realities of legal practice but is unconnected with their personal circumstances. This can be arranged through LawCare if you feel it would be beneficial.

Seeking support is always a personal choice. Any contact you make with LawCare is strictly confidential, and the Law Society will not be informed.

Additional support can be found in the following areas:

Suzy Lamplugh Trust

- Personal Safety Advice - [Personal Safety & Lone Working advice and information](#)
- People Safe SOS app - [Peoplesafe Personal Safety App | Suzy Lamplugh Trust / SOS App | Personal Safety App & SOS Alarm | Peoplesafe](#)

National Stalking Helpline

- 0808 802 0300
- [National Stalking Helpline details and advice](#)

LSNI's Wellbeing Toolkit

- [Wellbeing Toolkit | The Law Society of Northern Ireland](#)





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