



Safe working when confronted with an unexpected situation

An EUGANGS practitioner case study by James Lawlor and Chris Clacken

Safe working is a core component of the EUGANGS programme. Trainers provide students with information and examples of safe working practice, but frequently students themselves bring expertise in this area. In this case study, James and Chris respond to an assignment scenario, deploying former knowledge about safe working, along with what they have learned from trainers and fellow students. The responses reflect the different emphases students can place on personal safety and relationship building – getting the balance right is a central issue dealt with in the programme.

Unexpected situation scenario

Imagine that you are a detached youth worker. While out walking alone within the community you encounter a group of young people. You are called across by members of the group with whom you have previously engaged and then recognise two other youths known as gang members. You do not have any previous relationship with the two gang members. What actions would you take and why?

James's response

Before approaching the group I would take the time to quickly dial 112 into my phone in case it was needed for an emergency response. 112 is GPS-tracked (whereas 999 is not) so it can guide the emergency services to you without the need for you to speak to them. This is a good way of summoning help without any gang member becoming suspicious about your actions and before any situation gets out of hand.

I would analyse the environment as I was approaching the group and if I was in a community where I was well known and there were shops in the area, I would make an excuse to pop into the shop (perhaps saying "let me just get some fags and I will be over to you") and let the shop-keeper know what I was doing and ask him to inform the police if anything went wrong.

I would also consider whether the known gang members were posing a risk to the people I knew and whether, if I thought they were, I could introduce measures to assist them in leaving the situation.

I would run through the 3 step guide to risk assessment in my head:

1. Identify the hazards (mood; drug/alcohol use; weapons; environment)
2. Decide who/what might be in danger (general public; shop-keepers; children; property), the likelihood of the danger occurring and the impact it may have
3. Evaluate the risk and decide on a controlled measure ('risk' versus 'reward').

I would approach in a confident and friendly manner but not making direct eye contact with the gang members who are unknown to me. Throughout the conversation with the people known to me I would be analysing the mood and posture of the gang members.

Chris's response

If I were to approach a group of people whom I recognise, who are with known gang members, I would approach them for a number of reasons. I would not want them to assume because they are with known gang members that I would look down or disrespect them, I would want to demonstrate that as a professional that I can be approached. It could be that the two youths want advice on how to get out of the gang and would want to speak to someone who is unbiased. I would assume because I recognise the group, that we have previously had positive engagements and that they would in fact vouch for my credibility which is why they called over to me.

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