

Loddon Valley Ramblers Walk Leaders Guidelines

(Extracted from the National Ramblers Walk Leader Handbook)

These Guidelines set out the Ramblers' eight guiding principles to lead safe, enjoyable, and welcoming walks.



Principle 1

Teamwork

These guidelines are designed to assist walk leaders, but it is also important to recognise that **everyone** must play a part to make sure that LVR walks are enjoyable, welcoming, and as safe as possible.

There is a wealth of knowledge and experience within the Loddon Valley Ramblers to help you with:

- Local knowledge and experience: Buddying up with experienced walk leaders can be helpful in sharing local knowledge and tips to help make your walks safer and enjoyable for everyone taking part.
- Local training: Sharing local resources and material to develop your skills.
- Planning: The group has a library of routes that they have already graded and assessed for risks, so you can make the most of the work that's already been done to plan walks in advance.

- **Sharing information with walkers:** Advertising your walk and providing key information to those who are interested in coming along. This will help people choose the right walk for them and prepare for it, in accordance with their level of fitness.

Walk Leaders Responsibilities

As a walk leader there are certain things you must do:

 Plan and assess the risks in advance We have example risk assessments according to walk difficulty to help you get started.	 Adapt plans to local circumstances Adopt or adapt our resources in a way that works for you to manage any specific considerations for your walk.
 Share your plan with walkers You can do this in your welcome briefing at the start of the walk before setting off.	 Make changes if you need to Stay alert to your surroundings and walkers and take a dynamic approach on the day.

Walkers Responsibilities

(also see **Loddon Valley Ramblers Guidance for Walkers document**)

Regardless of whether you are a new walker or you already have a great deal of experience, all walkers should try to make sure they:

- **Choose the appropriate walk:** The walk should be within your abilities and if you are unsure whether it is, then you should get in touch with the walking group or the walk leader to find out more information.
- **Wear appropriate clothes:** By checking the weather forecast, you can make sure you wear appropriate clothing and footwear.
- **Follow the leaders guidance:** It's important walkers follow any instructions shared by you, the walk leader.
- **Respect the countryside:** All walkers should follow the Countryside Code.

Principle 2

We lead within our capabilities.

There's a difference between feeling confident and being competent, and you should never intentionally over-reach yourself. Lead walks that are right for your level of experience. If you're just

starting out, or want to start leading more challenging walks, build your skills and knowledge through training and help from more experienced walk leaders.

Principle 3

We plan walks in advance

As a walk leader, it's a vital part of your role to plan and consider the risks on your walk – helping everyone to keep safe and have a great experience.

Good planning will help you to determine:

- How long the walk is likely to take.
- When and where you can take rest stops.
- Alternative routes if you need to cut a walk short or have time to extend it.
- Any specific hazards and the adjustments you can make to manage the risk.
- Points of interest you can highlight to people along the way. Plan your route in advance.
- Any additional information that would be helpful to share with walkers beforehand.

When planning a walk, undertaking a recce is strongly recommended. It will help you work out how much time you will need, identify places of interest and good rest stops, as well as spot potential risks and accessibility issues.

If a recce isn't possible, you can plan using maps, guidebooks, existing routes, and blogs. You can also speak to people who know the area and build on their knowledge to plan and foresee any opportunities or challenges. It's important to have a good understanding of the terrain to make sure your planning is proportionate.

Assess risks

As a walk leader, you must always plan and assess the risks in advance. Decide the grade of the walk you are leading and refer to the corresponding Ramblers' risk assessment. These outline common hazards and the steps you can take to manage the potential risks, proportionate to the type of walk you're leading. Remember to share your plan and any important information with walkers before setting off too.

Check the conditions!

Always review your plans again on the day of the walk – and don't be afraid to make changes if you need to. The weather plays an important role on a walk. Check the forecast before heading out and prepare for how different weather conditions might affect your plans.

Principle 4

Help walkers come prepared

By sharing information, you can help walkers know what to expect and what is expected of them to help keep everyone safe. Help walkers choose the right walk for them. When advertising your walk, include as much information as you can about the route, terrain, pace, and whether any particular kit is needed. For example, you might remind walkers to bring gaiters for a particularly muddy walk. Let walkers know how to contact you if they have any questions before the walk.

It is good practice to include ascent in feet, or a description of the terrain, so that Walkers have a good understanding of how hilly a particular walk may be.

Principle 5

Manage the group size

There's not a one-size-fits-all solution when deciding on the number of walkers you're comfortable to lead. Ask for help from a backmarker or friend.

For larger groups, Loddon Valley Ramblers require you to get support from a co-leader or a backmarker. These roles can simply be taken on by an experienced member of the group who is happy to lend a hand on the day. The Ramblers suggested ratio of leaders to walkers are:

Walking grade	Ratio of leaders to walkers
Ramblers Wellbeing Walks	1:10
Easy and Easy Access	1:10
Leisurely and Moderate	1:8
Strenuous	1:6

There will certainly be a sufficient number of leaders on any given LVR walk whose presence will ensure that we meet these ratios.

Principle 6

We prepare for emergencies

The benefits of walking far outweigh the risks – but sometimes accidents can happen, and it pays to be prepared. Loddon Valley Ramblers request walkers to carry In Case of Emergency information – this might be on a card, key fob or on their smartphone.

Be prepared to deal with accidents

Accidents can happen on any walk, and as a walk leader you will need to react and manage the situation, if it arises. This may involve looking after a casualty, making sure the rest of the group are comfortable and calling for help.

Loddon Valley Ramblers request that Leaders should ideally attend an official first aid course.

Principle 7

We pack the right kit

A walk leader should be prepared for the conditions on the day. It is helpful to think ahead and ask yourself if the group may require extra layers, food or water at any stage in the day – this is especially important if things don't go to plan. You can always ask the group to help carry some items if there's a lot to carry. Loddon Valley Ramblers have effective mechanisms to contact members at short notice before a walk.

Contact nickjohnson@hotmail.co.uk and ask him to send out a group email and update the LVR Facebook page to communicate exceptional requirements or changes

Principle 8

We're flexible and adaptable

On the day of your walk, it is important to stay alert and make changes if you need to. Stay alert to the group and the conditions. Keep an eye on the group, the weather, the terrain and the time. Continuously assessing risk in this way means you can adapt your plans if the conditions change. By walking within the group, chatting with people and keeping in touch with how they are doing, you will have a good sense of what the group needs and anything you can do to help them get the most from the walk. When we only lead from the front it can be hard to know what's happening behind us, gauge team spirit or notice when people are struggling. As a matter of principle:

- Plan regular breaks.
- Set a pace that suits everyone and make sure you never leave anyone behind by going too fast.
- Keep the group together and never lose sight of your back marker.
- Taking regular breaks that give enough time for everyone to recharge (without getting too cold). This helps reduce the risk of fatigue and injury.
- Change approach and plans if necessary, it's best to be cautious because safety is paramount.

For more information refer to “The Walk Leader Handbook” and the “Walk Leader Checklist” produced by the Ramblers and available at: <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking-hub/resources-walk-leaders>