

# ***WELCOME TO THE TEAM***



**What to expect when  
someone in your family  
volunteers with us**



TWEED VALLEY MOUNTAIN RESCUE TEAM IS A REGISTERED SCOTTISH CHARITY, NO: SCO09451.

# WHO IS THIS BOOKLET AIMED AT AND WHAT WILL IT COVER?

This booklet is for the family members of volunteers in Tweed Valley MRT, to let you know:

THEY'VE VOLUNTEERED – BUT WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?	4
WHAT WILL YOUR VOLUNTEER DEAL WITH?	6
HOW WILL YOUR VOLUNTEER BE CALLED OUT TO AN INCIDENT?	7
WORRIED THEY'RE NOT COPING?	8
SUPPORT FOR YOU AND/OR YOUR VOLUNTEER	9
MANAGING YOUR OWN WORRY AND FEAR	10
THE SAFE PERSON CONCEPT	11
WAYS TO CONNECT WITH OTHER FAMILIES	12
FAMILIES WITH MORE THAN ONE MOUNTAIN RESCUE VOLUNTEER	13
GET THE KIDS INVOLVED	14
WRITE IT DOWN	16
CONTACTS AND USEFUL LINKS	18

We encourage you to have a read, then sit down and chat about it with your volunteer and the rest of the family. It's a great way to make sure everyone's on board with what's involved, how they might feel and how to get used to it.

This booklet is based heavily on an equivalent version created by Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ)

following a research study they commissioned in 2017. FENZ agreed that Mountain Rescue teams in Scotland could use the booklet content amended to suit local circumstances. We wish to acknowledge our gratitude to FENZ for their support and willingness to share their research and materials.

This version updated January 2019 by Steve Penny, Wellbeing Officer, Scottish Mountain Rescue with input from Gill Moreton, Lifelines Scotland.



# WELCOME

Thank you for enabling your family member to volunteer with Tweed Valley Mountain Rescue Team (TVMRT).

Families have a central role in supporting the local mountain rescue team and that's something to be really proud of. However, being a family member of a volunteer can lead to some adjustments for you and your family.

Without people like your volunteer:

- *There wouldn't be a mountain rescue service that covers all of Scotland.*
- *Many more people would potentially be left in distress or lose their lives, every day.*

More than that, having a Mountain Rescue volunteer in the family connects you to a Scotland-wide community and support network of volunteers (and their families), all of whom have similar experiences, understand the sacrifices you're making and share the pride you feel in your volunteer rescuer's contribution to your community.

We also recognise that without your support, encouragement and sacrifices – sometimes on a daily basis – we wouldn't be able to provide our community and those in distress with the help they need in an emergency.

**From us all, thank you for joining our team.**





# THEY'VE VOLUNTEERED – BUT WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

## Your volunteer will be expected to:

- Respond to two to four call outs a month (based on 5 yr average to Dec 2018), stepping into potentially dangerous situations to help others.
- Attend regular training and help support events which help to raise funds for the team.
- Leave at a moment's notice when someone needs them.
- Put in a few extra hours each week to learn the skills they'll need to stay safe and save lives.
- Form strong bonds with the other members so they can make a great team that works together to keep people safe.

Your volunteer will be fully trained to keep themselves safe as they deal with whatever comes their way. They may be asked to respond in a wide range of emergency situations. The information below will give you a sense of what they may be dealing with when called out. Please note this is just a guide as each incident is different. The geography and location where incidents occur in relation to where your volunteer lives and works will impact on drive times.

For many, it's a new way of life, and the whole family is along for the ride. Schedules may need to change, commitments might get missed and family members may wonder whether or not their volunteer is safe.

This can be hard to get used to and can put pressure on families. But there are ways to manage this and have support in place for when things get stressful.

Headline incident types and associated info based on 130 incidents between Jan 2015 and July 2018 (3.5 years), just over 6000 person hours. Team membership currently 44.

Incident category	Average percentage of incidents of this type (note individual years can be different)	Average number of members involved (note influenced by time of day and overall duration of incident)	Average number of hours away from home per individual
Missing Persons (ie not lost)	33%	5-10	15-20
Mountain Biking (trail centre and hill tracks)	23%	10-15	2-3
Hillwalking (summer, winter and rural)	21%	15-20	4-5
Other various (range of work including false alarm calls, RTCs, stranded motorists etc)	12%	10-20	2-5
Equestrian (on hill)	5%	10-15	2-3
Civil Resilience	4%	25-30	5-8*
Working (at work accidents on hill/forests etc)	2%	10-15	4-5

\*5-8 hours each day, and 2-4 days



## WHAT WILL YOUR VOLUNTEER DEAL WITH?

Your volunteer will be fully trained to handle the various situations in which they'll find themselves. But that doesn't mean they won't find it physically and mentally challenging, even exhausting.

They could be carrying heavy gear, out in difficult conditions, responding to medical emergencies and searching for missing people, all done under huge pressure to save lives and ease distress – and on occasions they will be doing it without enough sleep. **All this needs a great deal of physical and mental stamina.**

This means, they'll often need to catch up. They might need an extra nap here and there, or they might head to bed early if they've had a call out the night before.

They might also be more tired and irritable than usual, given what they've been doing – so try not to take it personally if they are.

As well as the physical challenges, some situations can put extra pressure on your volunteer. Some emergency call outs involve extraordinarily difficult circumstances, particularly when severe injury or loss of life is involved.

And because your volunteer is supporting the local community, they may find themselves attending a call out that involves someone they know.



## HOW WILL YOUR VOLUNTEER BE CALLED OUT TO AN INCIDENT?

### Meet the callout alert

Your volunteer will receive alerts to tell them when they need to respond to an emergency. It's a sound you'll come to know well, and it can go off anywhere at any time – be it halfway through dinner, when you just sat down to watch a movie, while you're at the supermarket or in the middle of the night.

This can be frustrating, but try to remember that the alert going off could be bad news for someone in your community, because it means they're in need of help. However annoying it can be when the alert goes off and your volunteer leaps up and heads out the

door, that sound means someone's in trouble (often serious and in a remote location) – and your volunteer is one of the few people who is trained to help them out. They could even be on their way to save someone's life.



### Schedule callout breaks

While it might be a new permanent member of the family, that doesn't mean you can't tell the callout alerts to be quiet once in a while. By talking to your volunteer you should be able to agree to some regular downtime when you can be guaranteed you won't be hearing the sound of the alerts. This is expected and no volunteer is expected to be available all of the time – in fact there will be many times when other things (family and work) must come first.

But planning breaks like this leaves you free for a date night, a family outing or just some peace and quiet together.

And if something important is interrupted by the alert, it doesn't mean the moment is lost – consider having an agreement with your volunteer that any conversation that gets cut short will be finished later, once you're both in a position to pick it up again.



## WORRIED THEY'RE NOT COPING?

Being a Mountain Rescue volunteer can be mentally and physically stressful, and sometimes any volunteer can struggle to cope. It's important to keep an eye out for signs of psychological upset and seek help if you see them.

Signs of heightened stress after a call out are to be expected and your volunteer may appear wired, tired or a bit flat in the days after a call out.

If they don't last long, they're part of a normal stress response – but if they continue for some length of time, they could be a sign that your volunteer needs a bit of extra help.

Everyone's different, and may need to be supported in different ways. Some volunteers will come home and share the details of what they've been doing, including things they've found stressful or upsetting, while others might prefer to keep it separate from life at home. You'll know your volunteer and should be able to judge if they're working things out on their own (which is fine) or bottling things up (which can be less helpful).

You can find out more by visiting the Lifelines Scotland website [www.lifelinesscotland.org](http://www.lifelinesscotland.org)

You're not expected to play the role of a counsellor. The best thing you can do, in the first instance, is to listen if they want to talk and acknowledge their feelings.

### Signs and symptoms of stress and anxiety can include:

- Worrying more than usual
- Seeming tired or irritable, even if there hasn't been a late night
- Trouble sleeping at night
- Muscle tension or restlessness

### Signs of low mood or depression can include:

- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Dramatic changes in sleeping or eating patterns
- Anger, sadness or frustration, particularly after a call out
- Losing interest in things they used to enjoy

If your volunteer is going through any of the above, discuss this with them and encourage them to consider seeking additional support. The next page may help.

## SUPPORT FOR YOU AND/OR YOUR VOLUNTEER

There are a number of places you or your volunteer can turn to for support:

### GP/NHS

Usually the first port of call for most people if they're having a tough time, either physically or mentally.

### The Team Leader or other team member

They will be able to connect you and/or your volunteer to the support systems that are available to Mountain Rescue (eg Police Scotland Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)).

### Lifelines Scotland

You will find useful information to help at [www.lifelinesscotland.org](http://www.lifelinesscotland.org)

### EAP Services (will include counselling opportunities when appropriate)

Confidential advice and counselling is available to all personnel and their immediate families at no cost – you will be provided with this contact number and username/password when your volunteer joins. There is space later in this booklet to write these down. You will also have a wallet card and fridge magnet.

### Insurance cover

All volunteers in Mountain Rescue Teams in Scotland are covered by insurances which help provide assistance following accident or death in service – the team will provide details of the relevant insurance covers.

### Benevolent Fund

Please ask the team for details.

There are a range of other support resources available both nationally and in the local area and a list of some of these is included in the booklet along with space to add others you may find helpful to YOU. Please feel free to discuss any of these with us.



## MANAGING YOUR OWN WORRY AND FEAR

**A member of your family has volunteered to undertake some of the most dangerous tasks in your community – who wouldn't be worried about that? It's totally normal to be concerned for the safety of your loved one.**

This is especially true when an emergency requires their complete focus and attention – which means they won't be free to let you know that they're okay. This can make it extra tough for the family members left at home.

But it's important to remember that your volunteer is fully trained to deal with the situations they'll find themselves in. And that training isn't just focussed on saving lives and resolving crises – it's focussed on keeping themselves safe, too.

There can be other sources of stress, too. As a partner, you may find yourself feeling envious – as your volunteer spends a great deal of time with the team, the passion your volunteer develops for the role and the time it takes away from your relationship and family.

If you do find yourself worrying and it's affecting your ability to go about your day, there are a few things you can try:

- *Focus on the outcome of what your volunteer is achieving. Try to think about the victim and their family, who need help. This isn't always easy, as the situation may inconvenience you, especially when you have your own family to look after.*
- *Get support from other volunteer families. When someone in your family volunteers for mountain rescue, you become part of an extended family. Other volunteer families know about the worries and inconvenience, which makes the community that surrounds your volunteer's team a great place to turn if you need advice or support.*
- *Write it down. At the back of this booklet, you'll find a Cons and Pros checklist designed to help manage your feelings of worry and frustration. Sometimes it helps to write it down – just complete a set of boxes each time you're frustrated by a call out. For more information, turn to page 16.*

## THE SAFE PERSON CONCEPT

**The safe person concept underpins everything people who volunteer with mountain rescue teams do. It's about thinking and acting safely while carrying out their duties as a rescuer, and is designed to help them make the right decision in any situation.**

Volunteers are trained to understand that it is NEVER okay to enter a situation where the risk level is very high. And your volunteer won't ever risk their safety for lives or property that are obviously not able to be saved. They'll risk their safety only in a highly calculated manner, to protect saveable lives – calculating and mitigating the risks as they proceed.

All of this means that while they're on a call out, your volunteer isn't just focussed on saving lives – they're also focussed on making sure they get home safe to their family.

When your volunteer is on a call out, keep the Safe Person Concept in mind. Remember that:

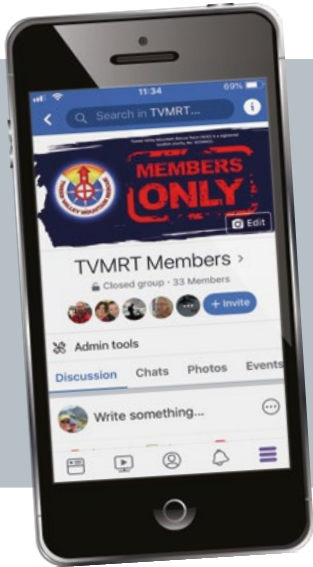
- *They're well trained to keep themselves safe, even as they're doing what they can to help other people.*
- *Even though they're out helping the community, their number one priority is still getting home safe at the end of the call out.*



## WAYS TO CONNECT WITH OTHER FAMILIES

No one understands what it's like to have a mountain rescue volunteer in the family as well as other families who are in the same situation.

Because of this, many people find the time they get to spend around other volunteer families to be really worthwhile.



There are lots of ways to connect with other volunteer families – here are just a few of the most common:

- *Team social events involving the families.*
- *Attend opportunities for new families, where they can meet the team and have a look around the base.*
- *Look for opportunities to get involved in some parts of the team.*
- *Start a families' Facebook group (or similar) to connect with others. (This might even be used to update families during prolonged incidents).*

## FAMILIES WITH MORE THAN ONE MOUNTAIN RESCUE VOLUNTEER

Some families have a long history with mountain rescue – they may have had parents or even grandparents who volunteered, which makes mountain rescue part of a family tradition.

You may find you become invested in the team just as deeply as your volunteer, and decide you want to volunteer yourself. This can raise concerns about working together in a dangerous situation, and how you see this working both practically and emotionally – working alongside a loved one on a call-out can also mean seeing them in danger. It can create practical challenges, such as who'll look after the kids if you're both on a call out.

Volunteering as a parent sets an example for your children that promotes selflessness – which means they may decide to volunteer themselves when they're old enough, continuing the tradition into the next generation.

You may need to think about how you would feel if your children decide to volunteer themselves.





# GET THE KIDS INVOLVED

**Most kids already understand that mountain rescuers can play a vital role in the community and are really proud of their volunteer.**

They might show this differently depending on their age and stage but here are a few ways you can get your children involved in the volunteer life:

## Preparing them ahead of time

- Introduce them to the callout alert system, and make sure you let them know what it means – that when it goes off, it's the sound of someone calling for help.
- Take them on a tour of the base and vehicles.



- Talk them through what happens when the alert goes off, and the role you/your volunteer plays in that process. If they're old enough to understand, let them know what the calls might involve and how long you / your volunteer might be away.
- Explain the Safe Person concept to the kids so that they know the training isn't just to help them save lives – it's also to help volunteers keep themselves safe.
- Think of a routine way to say goodbye when you / they have to race out the door – and a way to welcome them home when they return.
- Agree how much you / your volunteer is likely to want to talk about the call once you / they are home.

## During a call out

- Let them know what you know, e.g. when the volunteer was called out, where they are and when you think they might be home.
- If they are worried, let them know that's OK but remind them about the Safe Person concept so they know that the whole team has trained to take care of themselves and their team as well as doing their rescue work.
- Keep things as normal as possible.

## After a call out

- Follow through on the routines you agreed ahead of time, e.g. on how do they welcome their volunteer home.
- Depending on what you've agreed (and what is age appropriate) let them know a bit about the call.
- Help them understand that you / the volunteer might be tired and so need a nap at an unusual time.
- Kids often blame themselves for a change in a loved one's behaviour or mood. If you/the volunteer is upset or stressed after a call out, let them know that things will be OK and reassure them that it is not their fault.





# WRITE IT DOWN

The Cons and Pros checklist was developed as a tool to help you put your volunteer's role in the team and the stress it can place on your family life in perspective.

Sometimes it helps to write down what's good and bad about a situation, and over time it can create a picture of how your concerns relate to your volunteer's achievements.

## How to use it

If your volunteer is on a call out and you're worried, frustrated or otherwise stressed, complete a box in the Cons column by jotting down exactly how you feel and why.

Afterwards, when your volunteer gets home, complete the Pros box next to it by writing down what your volunteer achieved – who they helped and what support they provided.

Over time, you'll start to see a picture emerging – one that places your worries and frustrations in the context of the greater good your volunteer is serving. This can help you focus on why your volunteer has made this commitment – and why the stresses that come with it are worth it.

Date:.....

Cons:.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Pros:.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Date:.....

Cons:.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Pros:.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Date:.....

Cons:.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Pros:.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Date:.....

Cons:.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Pros:.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Date:.....

Cons:.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Pros:.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Date:.....

Cons:.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Pros:.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

# EMERGENCY CONTACT SHEET

There's always someone you can call in an emergency, whether it's someone from your volunteer's team, a friend or a family member.

Below, you'll find space to note down those important numbers.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

## OTHER USEFUL WEBSITES, APPS, AND CONTACT NUMBERS

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

# NATIONAL AND LOCAL SUPPORT

Below are a list of websites for other sources of both local and national support.

## PREPARATION AND AWARENESS

<http://lifelinesscotland.org/>

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/>

<https://www.samh.org.uk/about-mental-health>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/>

(Based England and Wales but useful website)

## STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

<https://www.seemescotland.org/>

## SELF-HELP/ GUIDANCE

*Visit your GP*

*Police Scotland Employee Assistance Programme:*

Web:..... Username:..... Password:.....

<http://lifelinesscotland.org/>

<http://www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk/staying-healthy/stress-busters/doing-well-booklets/>

<http://www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk/staying-healthy/stress-busters/living-life-telephone-cbt/>

<https://www.selfhelpguides.ntw.nhs.uk/forthvalley/>

<https://www.headspace.com/>

<http://breathingspace.scot/>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/>

(Based England and Wales but useful website)

## RECOVERY

<https://www.scottishrecovery.net/resources/>

## OTHER

<https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/>





[www.tweedvalleymrt.org.uk](http://www.tweedvalleymrt.org.uk)

Tweed Valley Mountain Rescue Team  
St John Base, High Street, Melrose, The Scottish Borders TD6 9RY

DESIGNED BY [WWW.SANGSTERDESIGN.CO.UK](http://WWW.SANGSTERDESIGN.CO.UK)