



# Operation Portum Creating Safe Spaces in Retail

**NATIONAL BUSINESS  
CRIME CENTRE**

Reducing crime through partnership and prevention



Due to the national focus around the safety of women and girls there is an appetite from the business community to create safer spaces for their employees, customers and people in the community that feel vulnerable.

It was identified that no formal safe spaces scheme existed primarily within the retail sector, however, many retailers were keen to provide this support.

Operation Portum is a initiative aimed at providing provision to vulnerable people in retail settings by offering basic support or referring to appropriate agencies.

Experience to date shows that in many instances safe spaces are used by people who feel vulnerable; so want somewhere to wait while they contact family or friends, or need somewhere to briefly charge their phone.

## Aim

The main aim is to create as many safe spaces in the retail footprint as possible. Each business will own and manage their scheme in a way that suits their business and in line with their values and processes.

Operation PORTUM is an overarching scheme that businesses can sign up to and support with the objective to collectively increase safe spaces in retail premises. It does not negate businesses supporting other, local initiatives.

## Framework

This document offers guidance and provides a systematic process to assist businesses in the planning, creating and implementation of a safe spaces scheme within their business.

Due to the bespoke nature of businesses and a requirement to tailor the scheme to fit existing policies and processes, a 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate. This document does not seek to replicate or replace an internal business risk assessment or business case, but outlines factors to consider developing a scheme.

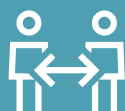
No expertise or specialist training is required; the response should provide basic support or a referral to a relevant support network or organisation.



Planning



Staff  
Training



Physical  
'safe space'



Response



Record and  
Review



## Planning

Before you launch your safe spaces scheme you need to be clear and realistic about what you want to achieve and how you are going to deliver it. It will be different for each business.

**Why are you launching a safe spaces scheme?** Is it to better protect your staff or is to support the public, or both?

**Be clear in your approach:** Is the scheme 'External' i.e. publicised to members of the public as a safe space, or 'Internal' which wouldn't provide external publicity to members of the public but staff are trained to deal with a safe spaces scenario?

**Set clear expectations and parameters:** What is your definition of a safe spaces scenario? What is expected from your staff i.e. the Do's and Don't's.

**What is your approach?** 'Proactive' e.g. staff trained and actively look to identify vulnerable people of safe spaces scenarios and offer support, or 'Reactive' with staff only dealing with a safe spaces scenario if one arises.

**Who owns/manages the risk?** Local store or Head Office? Store assistant or manager?

**Specific vulnerability?** Are you focussing on one particular area, safeguarding or abuse e.g. Ask ANI - domestic abuse in pharmacies, or is your scheme non-descript and deals with general vulnerability?



**Insurance:** Will it cover you to do this? Do you need to review or consult your insurer?

**Manage risk:** There are a number of factors that need to be considered when planning your safe spaces scheme. This includes (but not limited to) customer demographics, location of store, store opening hours (i.e. late night or 24 hours could pose more risk), resources, brand reputation...

**Partners:** Prior to the launch of your safe spaces scheme you should consider liaising with Local Authority community safety partnerships, charities, and local policing.



## Staff Training

Your staff are at the heart of the safe spaces scheme. Have you provided them with what they need to stay safe and deal with a safe spaces scenario confidently and professionally?

**Are your staff aware that your business runs a safe spaces scheme?** How will you ensure your staff are aware of the safe spaces scheme and are kept updated?

**Have you provided training?** Will this be provided internally or externally? Does this training align with existing training?

**Does your training give staff the knowledge, skills and confidence to deal with a safe spaces scenario?** Can your staff identify a safe spaces scenario?

**Have you trained the correct staff?** Consider new staff, high turnover of staff and include part time/seasonal/agency staff. In addition, consider including franchisees and additional business services within the safe spaces e.g. car washes, dry cleaners, chemists etc.

**What level of training to you give?** Does everybody get the same level of training or is it bespoke to their role? How will you deliver the training e.g. in person or remotely?



**Designated staff member:** Do you designate a specific staff member to deal with safe spaces scenarios? Consider additional training and resilience if they are off work.

**Consider additional training for staff,** e.g. first aid, trauma informed support, crisis management.

**Consider additional vetting/checks on staff.** Your staff may be supporting vulnerable people in vulnerable situations.



## Physical 'Safe Space'

Think about the suitability and practicality of the physical safe space you intend to use. Is this consistent across your estate or will it vary from store to store?

**Where is the physical safe space within the premises?** Do you have a designated safe space e.g. a room or is there a section of the shop floor that is suitable?

**Is the safe space appropriate for the user and their vulnerability?** This may vary or change depending on the user.

**Can you adapt the safe space depending on the circumstances?** Do you have the ability to adjust the setting according to the circumstances?

**Balance the privacy of the user against the safety and security of staff.** The privacy of the user will differ in importance depending on the scenario.

**Is there line of sight/communication with other staff members?** It is good practice to ensure you can be monitored by other staff members for confidence and security when dealing with a safe space scenario.

**Are there accessible exit routes?** Having an exit route is important to ensure you and the user feel like you have space and the option to leave if circumstances change.



**Is the safe space covered by data protection compliant CCTV?** This may be monitored by a central control room for live supervision or you may need to view the CCTV footage as part of review.

**Do you have access to a first aid kit/ defibrillator?** Minor first aid may be the response required for a safe space scenario. Anything more serious should be referred to professionals such as a doctor or ambulance.

**Is there adequate lighting?** Basics such as good lighting will enable you to see and effectively communicate with the user.

**Does the safe space have a phone line/ internet connection?** In order to assist the user to make a call to a family member or friend, or make a referral to another agency, an internet connection or access to a phone is key.

**Is there anything contained within the space that could be used to cause harm?** It is advisable to use a space that is uncluttered and free from unnecessary objects within reach of the user.



## Response

The actual act of dealing with and responding to a vulnerable person. Making sure your staff behave safely and professionally and support the user the best they can. It is important to remain realistic and manage the expectations of the user.

**Is there a clear and simple process for staff to refer the user to the appropriate agency if necessary?** Consider contact details of emergency services, authorities, charities and support organisations.

**Consider the chain of command in response to a safe spaces scenario:** CCTV, manager, designated safe spaces staff, Security Operations Centre, Body Worn Video etc.

**Conduct a dynamic risk assessment:** Use the information you have to assess the situation. Be prepared for the unexpected and for things to change. Always think 'safety first'.

**Do you need any contingency plans when dealing with safe spaces?**

E.g. additional cover or leniency for roles conducted by safe spaces staff members.

**Consider the diversity** (cultural, racial, religious, age, sex/gender, sexual orientation, disability) of the user and the staff dealing. You may need to adapt your response accordingly, e.g. responses to a young person may be different to an elderly person and may require different processes to protect your staff.

**Escalation:** Do your staff know how to escalate an incident to get additional support?



**Follow your business code of ethics/ expectations of behaviour.** The way your staff behave in a safe spaces scenario should be in line with the minimum standards set by your business.

**Consider utilising SIA accredited staff if you have them?** They have basic training around vulnerability and undergo periodic vetting checks.

**Is the safe spaces area going to be pre-checked prior to the user entering and again after a safe spaces scenario?** Consider personal belongings and high value items.

**If staff have Body Worn Video, consider using it if appropriate for the circumstance.** It will give a true account of the events.

**Do staff have the ability to raise an alarm/ phone for assistance?** In the majority of cases this maybe all that is needed to assist a user.

**Does the staff member feel safe, comfortable and appropriately trained/ resourced to respond?** If not, have an exit strategy.

**Be prepared for the possibility somebody may attempt to misuse the scheme** Have a plan to respond e.g. a repeat user to stay warm.



## Record and Review

Ensure you have a process for recording/auditing the use of the scheme and use that information to review and learn.

**Are you recording details about the use of the scheme?** Do you need them? Have you got their permission? Consider Data Protection and GDPR.

**Consider the confidentiality and wishes of the user when offering support and recording details.** The scenario may involve a personal matter or be of sensitive nature.

**Consider recording and sharing information to appropriate agencies in the interest of safeguarding the user.** You will need to exercise your discretion and keep the users welfare at the forefront of any decisions.

**Consider setting formal and periodic review points of the scheme.** Seek feedback from different people within the process.

**What is working well?** Give praise and recognition where appropriate and share best practice.



**What is not working so well?** Be prepared to make changes if necessary. Can any lessons be learnt and shared to improve the scheme?

**Feedback to Head Office to enable a wider oversight of the scheme?** You may only be aware of local feedback where as Head Office will have a holistic perspective.

**Additional/ongoing support for staff:** Consider regular welfare checks on safe spaces staff to ensure their continued wellbeing. People react and deal with things differently.



Operation Portum

## Creating Safe Spaces in Retail

is supported by...



## NATIONAL BUSINESS CRIME CENTRE

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An explanatory video and further information are available please contact the **National Business Crime Centre**

[nbcc.police.uk/partnerships/safe-spaces](https://nbcc.police.uk/partnerships/safe-spaces)

or

[contact@nbcc.police.uk](mailto:contact@nbcc.police.uk)