



# Exploring risk assessment

to maximise safety and reduce future risk to adults with care and support needs

## What is risk assessment?

**Risk assessment is the process of working with an adult to maximise safety and to reduce future risk.**

Risk assessment should support positive risk management and promote empowerment and control.

It is an integral part of safeguarding, and staff need to adopt a flexible solution-focused approach to mitigating risk. To do this, measures should be reviewed regularly in response to the level and nature of the risk.

## Mental capacity and risk assessment

When an adult lacks capacity for a specific decision, they must be supported by a representative or advocate. Risk assessments should conform to Mental Capacity Act (MCA) principals i.e., risk measures should be recognised, necessary, and proportionate.

Risk assessment measures must be:

- in the adult's best interests;
- necessary to prevent harm to the person;
- proportional to the likelihood and seriousness of harm.

***"What good is it making someone safer if it merely makes them miserable?"***

– Mr Justice Munby

## Duty of care

Duty of care is a legal obligation to act in the best interests of others; not act or fail to act in a way that results in harm; and act within professional competence.

Staff have a duty of care to the people they support, colleagues, their employer, themselves, and the public. The duty of care does not mean that staff must protect adults from all possibility of harm, but that their actions are proportionate and reasonable.

## Positive benefits of risk-taking

Despite the potentially negative outcomes of risk-taking, such as exposure to danger, loss, threat, damage or injury, there can also be positive benefits, such as increased independence, enhanced quality of life and improved wellbeing.

The potential benefits of taking risk should be identified and weighed up against potential harm.

## Multi-agency approaches

Cases involving significant risks often require a multi-agency approach, underpinned by clear and timely information-sharing and shared risk-assessing resulting in multi-agency risk management plans. These should be proportionate and focused on preventing, reducing, or eliminating the future risk of harm.



## Steps to completing a risk assessment

When completing a risk assessment, you should:

- seek the outcomes desired by the adult, or for those who lack capacity, which are in their best interest;
- identify what is causing the risk;
- assess the risk(s) and the steps needed to minimise the risk(s);
- develop a risk assessment plan which reduces the risk to an 'acceptable level', including a contingency plan;
- make a record of the risk assessment plan and share with those involved in the adult's care;
- review the risk assessment plan at regular intervals and if risks change (a specified staff member should be identified for this review).

You may wish to refer to our [Complex Needs Toolkit](#) for risk assessment formats.

## Recording information about risk

It is vital that risks are recorded accurately. Staff must differentiate between direct evidence; anecdotal or hearsay evidence; and opinion. You should avoid opinion-based statements that are not backed by evidence.

Ensure that dates of incidents/risks are given, so it is clear if the risk is current or historical. It is important that all information is recorded correctly as this may affect future decision-making. The level of detail recorded should be accurate, thorough, and proportionate to the risk of the potential harm.

## Risks to others and safeguarding referrals

There may be identified risks that involve the adult, which may also have an implication for others. If the identified risks may relate to another adult who has care and support needs, it is important that these are considered and raised with Adult Social Care.

If there is abuse or neglect, or the suspicion of abuse or neglect towards the adult, or another adult with care and support needs, this must be [reported as a safeguarding concern online](#).

If the risk may negatively impact on children living with, or in contact with the adult, information must [be shared with Children's Services](#) by raising a concern online.

In an emergency where somebody's life is at risk, or there is immediate risk of injury or serious harm, the relevant emergency service should be contacted.

## Risk assessment in relation to self-neglect

Where risks specifically relate to self-neglect, you should refer to [our learning resources about self-neglect](#), including the Sussex Self-Neglect Procedure.

## Closing cases where risk remains

Some adults may choose to live with risk and may decline support from agencies. In these instances, assessing and managing risk can be challenging for staff. Best practice requires:

- ensuring all avenues for contacting the adult have been explored, even if this means contacting them on a repeat basis, or via other agencies known to the adult;
- accurate, comprehensive, and clear recording in risk assessments;
- escalation if risk elevates;
- management oversight to consider any other avenues to support;
- signposting to other resources, which may be accepted by the adult.

If risk remains high despite multi-agency risk assessment and planning, and all available options to support have been explored, consider a referral to the [Multi-Agency Risk Management \(MARM\) subgroup](#).