



How to Evaluate It
How to Manage It

Inside

What is Formal Risk Assessment?	3
When to do Risk Assessments	4
Benefits of Doing Risk Assessments	5
Identifying Potential Risks.....	6
Analyzing Potential Risks	8
Consequence Scale	10
Likelihood Scale	11
What More Can We Do.....	12
Making a Decision	13

This handbook describes activities you can do and questions you may want to ask yourself and others when doing a Formal Risk Assessment. It guides you through the attached form on which you can write the steps you take in the assessment to better explain it to others.

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Formal risk assessment

Informal Risk Assessment is already a hidden component in all of your planning. It is hidden in your intake or application process and is a part of any functional assessments. You intuitively see what could go wrong when assessing and planning and make efforts to minimize risk of harm to the individual, other people, property and the environment.

Risk assessment is also part of the general safety policies and procedures that all service providers have. Although we have come a long way from the days of control and protect, without at least informal risk assessment and risk management you would not be able to help individuals achieve full and inclusive lifestyles.

All service providers have intake or application forms and many have functional assessment forms as well. Many assessment tools have been developed by others and are readily available. For example, if planning a move from one home situation to another, you might consider the *Transition Planning Protocol* in the Best Practices section of the PDD Central website (www.pdd.org/central).

On the other hand, **Formal Risk Assessment** is the systematic identification, analysis and evaluation of risk. It leads to formal efforts to manage risk and the development of plans to respond to potential incidents should they occur. Formal Risk Assessment takes what we do naturally and informally and organizes it in a very clear and explicit way to ensure it is well measured and managed.

When to do risk assessments

Formal risk assessments are advisable:

- ⇒ For individuals with complex behavioural needs, serious illness or additional disabilities (long term or temporary) that increase the risks of harm and place them, other people and even the organization as a whole in jeopardy.
- ⇒ For situations where the consequences would be catastrophic or major to the individual, the support staff or the organization as a whole.
- ⇒ When you are not sure you can provide the necessary supports safely and effectively.
- ⇒ When a person with complex needs applies for support or when a person you are already supporting undergoes a major change in health or behavioural status.
- ⇒ When you are planning a change of environment or supports that will require more independence of the individual.
- ⇒ When a serious, unanticipated situation or behaviour of concern becomes an anticipated situation or behaviour of concern according to CET Standards.

Why do assessments?

Doing formal risk assessments in the situations mentioned previously will enable you:

- ⇒ To develop better solutions.
- ⇒ To be more confident that you are making good decisions.
- ⇒ To be proactive in meeting an individual's need.
- ⇒ To help you communicate better to everyone involved - from the individual, family/guardians and direct support staff through to agency management and the funder (PDD) by indicating how and why you provide certain supports and services in higher risk situations.
- ⇒ To improve staff confidence in implementing whatever course of action you take.

What is most important is the process, the brainstorming by everyone who can contribute, from managers to front-line staff and sometimes the individual and family or guardian. Use flip charts or blackboards and encourage everyone to participate. The more ideas you can stir up, the more likely you are to discover all potential risks and also to find the best solutions.

The next 10 pages will guide you through the Risk Assessment Form that came with this handbook. Each chapter covers one page of the form.

Identifying Potential Risks

Page 1, Risk Assessment Form



Picture your best-case scenario – what would you like to achieve? In a sentence or two, state what the situation looks like if all goes well. Who would be there? What would happen? Where and how?

For example, after a mental health hospital admission, a best outcome for an individual might be: “Bill will return home and resume his life with roommates, his work and his recreation activities.”

After a series of incidents that lead to a diagnosis of probable dementia, another best-case scenario might be: “Susan will live in her current home and maintain her recreation and social life for as long as she can.”

For a person with complex needs who is new to your service, the best outcomes might be: “Jamie and his roommates will get along and successfully share their home with existing supports.”

List what could place your best-case scenario at risk. The causes of risk are either things people might do or things that might happen to them. List these in simple general sentences on Page 1 of the form. Examples include such actions as “He might wander away” or “He might attempt to harm himself” or situations such as “The dog in her new

Risk Analysis Guide

home may be a problem” or “Sam, her co-worker, may attempt to harm her”.

In situations such as travel to unfamiliar places, or new supported employment opportunities, it is helpful to recognize how much you cannot predict and manage in advance – if there is “potential for surprise,” note it now.

This is not the time for detail – just get the big picture of what actions can cause risk. Detailed assessment comes next.

(Why not avoid risk altogether?)

Take calculated risks.
That is quite different
from being rash.
~ *George S Patton*

It seems to me that people have vast
potential. Most people can do
extraordinary things if they have the
confidence or take the risks. Yet most
people don't. They sit in front of the telly
and treat life as if it goes on forever.

~ *Philip Adams*

“Don't be afraid to
take a big step if one is
indicated; you can't cross
a chasm in two small
jumps.”

~ *David Lloyd George*

And the day came
when the risk to remain
tight in a bud was more
painful than the risk it
took to blossom.

~ *Anais Nin*

Analyzing the Risk

Page 2, Risk Assessment Form



Complete a separate Page 2 for each cause you have identified. The form has three Page 2s.

What can happen? How can it happen? Where and when? If it did happen, what are the potential consequences?

Although physical harm to the individual, other people and the environment are easily foreseen, don't forget that relationships can be harmed and opportunities to participate in recreation activities can be lost. Sometimes different causes of risk will have the same consequences. It doesn't matter too much as long as all of the potential consequences are listed.

In many cases you will have existing measures that help to manage this situation:

- ⇒ by having eliminated the potential occurrence completely or decreasing the likelihood of it occurring;
- ⇒ by having taken precautionary steps that limit the consequences;
- ⇒ by having established plans for what to do when the situation occurs that limit the consequences.

Risk Analysis Guide

Some of these will be generic or agency-wide policies and practices that apply in this situation and help you to manage this concern. You might also have existing support plans in place for this person. List them all.

Rating the Risk

Use the Likelihood and Consequence scales to rate the urgency and importance of each potential consequence. You can find the scales on Page 10 of this booklet and on the last page of the form. They provide detailed descriptions of terms such as “Unlikely” or “Catastrophic”.

Likelihood means probability; i.e. what are the odds that something will happen or how frequently it is “likely” to happen. As you can see from the chart, likelihood can be expressed in words or in numbers based on what we know.

Consequences means the outcomes or impacts you can expect should the risk come to pass. Some consequences can be quantified, but many cannot.

Plot your initial ratings on the Risk Rating Table (see Page 11 of this handbook or Page 2 of the form) to “measure” the risk. If the risk area is rated as low or moderate, then you can just use your existing policies, procedures and support plans to manage this risk and probably don’t need to develop new or different activities.

Don’t panic if the risk is rated as High or Extreme. Page 3 of the form will help you to begin thinking about what else you might do to lower the risk rating to a tolerable level.

Risk Analysis Guide

Consequence Scale

Level	Consequence	Description
5	Catastrophic	The consequences would be extensive and irreversible – including death or permanent extensive disability to the individual or support worker. For the Service Provider this equates to a lawsuit that threatens the organization’s viability both financially and politically.
4	Major	The consequences would threaten continued effective provision of services and require top-level intervention. For the individual this could include serious but not permanent injury/disability; loss of home; imprisonment. For support staff this could include extended lost-time injuries and/or wholesale staff resignation. For the Service Provider this could include lawsuits and property and/or monetary loss with very high consequences for
3	Moderate	The consequences would not threaten the provision of services, but would mean significant management review and intervention. For the individual this could include major soft tissue injury or minor fractures; arrest or conflict with the law; loss of employment or other valued activity; social isolation from family and friends. For support staff this could include lost-time injury and increased staff turnover. For the Service Provider this could include extensive repairs or replacement of property; some monetary loss; damage
2	Minor	The consequences would threaten the efficiency or effectiveness of some services, but would be dealt with at the front line. For the individual this could include nuisance injuries, inconvenience or delay of desired activities; negative attention and/or disrepute; straining of relationships with family and friendships; running out of funds. For the support staff this could include stress from additional support demands and unmet needs of others.
1	Insignificant	The consequences are dealt with by routine operations. Consequences can be largely ignored or are self resolving without additional programming or costs.

Risk Analysis Guide

Likelihood Scale

Level	Likelihood	Description
5	Almost Certain	Event is expected to occur (e.g. has occurred regularly in the past) – 95% probability.
4	Likely	Event will probably occur (e.g. has occurred several times or more) – 75% probability
3	Possible	Event might possibly occur at some time (e.g. the event has occurred) – 50% probability
2	Unlikely	Event could occur at some time but is unlikely (e.g. the event has not yet occurred) – 10% probability
1	Rare	Event may occur only in exceptional circumstances (e.g. you have heard of this occurring elsewhere) – Less than 5% probability

Risk Rating Table

Likelihood	Consequences				
	Insignificant 1	Minor 2	Moderate 3	Major 4	Catastrophic 5
5 (Almost Certain)	L	M	H	E	E
4 (Likely)	L	M	H	H	E
3 (Possible)	L	M	M	H	E
2 (Unlikely)	L	L	M	H	H
1 (Rare)	L	L	M	M	H

E – Extreme Risk – Immediate Action – Senior management involved
 H – High Risk – Management responsibility should be specified
 M – Moderate Risk – Manage by specific monitoring or response
 L – Low Risk – Manage by routine process

What More Can We Do?

Page 3, Risk Assessment Form



Now comes the hard part. **Try to list all of the new or different things you could do to manage this situation:**

- ⇒ by decreasing the likelihood of it occurring;
- ⇒ by taking precautionary steps that limit the consequences;
- ⇒ by establishing plans for what to do when the situation occurs that limit the consequences.

Be creative – this doesn't mean you will do these things – they may be impractical, or costly or both. These new measures may have unintended consequences that are more a hindrance than a help.

Now might also be a good time to review current measures (including emergency measures) to see if they need tweaking to cover this new situation.

You might consider consulting the Personal Development Team, DTHR Home Care or whoever you think might have an insight you haven't seen. Connect with other service providers if you think they may have faced this problem before. By organizing yourself to this point, you have already made it easier to explain your situation and will get better advice.

Once you have a final list, use the Risk Rating Table to see if these new measures will make the risk tolerable.

Benefits



Page 4, Risk Assessment Form

Benefits

An important part of deciding how much risk is tolerable and how much you are willing to do to manage the risk is taking the time to remember the benefits in achieving the ideal situation (or your best try) given what the individual wants out of life and how you see yourself as a service provider. There are benefits to the individual, of course, but also those that accrue to you when you are successful. After all this risk analysis, we need a positive consequence analysis too.

Risks in Not Proceeding

Now is also a good time to consider any risks you take if you don't commit to a plan. Doing nothing has consequences too. Whatever decision that is made has consequences – both to the individual and the organization.

Making a Decision / Creating an Action Plan

Page 5, Risk Assessment Form

Hopefully, after all this analysis you will know what decision to make. If you cannot decide yourself or if some of the new measures you propose are beyond what you can decide on your own, you are now in a good position to approach decision makers such as:

- ⇒ the individual and his/her family/guardian to get informed consent for this risk;
- ⇒ senior management in your organization to get their agreement to implement any changes to the environment, procedures or support plans;
- ⇒ PDD as a funder (the Community Supports Coordinator or the Contract Manager) to advocate for proposed changes in funding.

Creating an Action Plan

Given that most of those responsible for implementing the new measures will be at the meeting and decision makers prefer more detail in how the new measures will be implemented draw up your action plan NOW outlining WHO, WILL DO WHAT, WHEN. Include:

- ⇒ Delivering the final Risk Analysis Document
- ⇒ Ensuring necessary approvals or edits by

Risk Analysis Guide

management

- ⇒ Creating a communication plan that includes both the current and agreed upon additional measures
- ⇒ Setting a date to follow up the implementation of the plan and develop a long term monitoring plan

Communication Plan

Once a decision is made and new plans are developed you can use this Risk Analysis Form in a new way. You can use it to tell everyone the plan. Take all of the current and agreed upon additional measures and write them down in plain language so that everyone will understand how you will manage the potential risks – before, during and after (should it occur). Share this plan with everyone who supports the individual.

