

APPENDIX 5 (a)

ASSESSMENT, RISK ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT

This appendix summarises the principles, content and practice of assessment, risk assessment and risk management. Each agency will have risk assessment policies and procedures in place and these should be taken into account in practice.

Assessment

An assessment is a structured, in-depth assessment of a person's needs. It provides a structured framework to record information gathered from a variety of sources to provide evidence for professional judgements, to facilitate analysis, decision making and planning.

Value base

The following principles apply to good practice in assessment:

- Listening to views of people about their needs and wishes for care
- Empowering service users to make decisions about their care and level of acceptable risk, and providing choices
- Ensuring people that are being assessed have every opportunity to consent to the assessment process, its outcomes & plans, or that their interests are represented when informed consent is not possible
- Promoting individual health and well being
- Promoting independence and care at home as far as is feasible and desired
- Recognising and supporting the contribution of family and other carers and ensuring their contribution and needs are considered either as part of the assessment of the cared for person, or as a separate carers assessment.
- Valuing the contribution of different professionals and supporting them to meet the needs of people who use services and their carers

Irrespective of where work settings, assessment:

- Is a core professional skill
- Provides an in depth analysis of the situation
- Makes the process of assessment transparent for the service user
- Increases accountability

Staff managing the process can match the depth of the assessment to the complexity of the situation.

Definition of risk

Risk is the likelihood of an event happening with potentially harmful or beneficial outcomes for self and others. Possible behaviours include suicide, self harm, neglect, aggression & violence with an additional range of other positive or negative service user experiences.

Risk assessment

Risk assessment is about identifying the types of benefits and harms which may occur in particular circumstances and their likelihood. Risk assessment can be defined as:

- the systematic collection of information to try to determine level of risk
- decision making processes to determine uncertain outcome
- the possibility of beneficial and harmful outcomes and the likelihood of their occurrence in a stated timescale.

These are the elements of good risk assessment include:

- Seeking the views of all interested parties including the views of the adult in need of support/protection (involve advocacy if indicated)
- Collecting full information concerning the adult in need of support/protection
- Being specific about the range of factors which affect the likelihood or probability of certain kinds of outcomes.
- Identifying dynamic factors which may increase or decrease risk (e.g. fluctuating health, accommodation difficulties, access to formal or informal support network, staffing levels in care homes)
- Identifying historical factors which may indicate increased or decreased risk (e.g. past events, patterns of behaviour)
- Identifying situational/environmental triggers which may increase risk (e.g. substance use, presence or absence of particular people, challenging behaviour, stressors for carer)
- Sharing information regarding risk in multi-agency setting
- Ensuring clear communication and understanding
- Seeking multi agency agreement and record and dissent
- Moving on from risk assessment to risk management.

Collecting necessary data

It is essential to take account of all relevant information, whatever its source. Sources may include:

- relatives, friends & carers
- housing, police, social work, CJS
- neighbours, members of the public

Too often it has been proved that information indicating an increased risk existed but had not been communicated and acted upon

Prime indicators

There are a number of prime indicators which have to be considered in any risk assessment. These include:

- Previous history – violence, self harm
- Substance misuse

- Communication of intent / access
- Instability of home environment / accommodation
- Dissatisfaction with family relationships
- Chaotic lifestyles
- Lack of activity / interest/ employment
- Current state of health – mental, physical
- Other stress factors - financial

Analysing data

The collection of information is only a part of any assessment process. The activity which forms the foundation of any assessment, including risk assessment, is analysis.

The analysis of the available information includes:

- Specific description of risk
- Statement of who is at risk
- Possible consequences of taking / not taking action
- Timescale for the risk
- Strengths of person
- Conditions under which risk is greater
- Review date / when circumstances change(d)
- Actions to minimise hazards & enhance strength

Risk management

A life without risk would be a life without meaning or interest. Risk is an essential and unavoidable part of everyday life. It involves choice and risk management should help promote the dignity and rights of the individual.

The complete avoidance of any harm would not maximise benefit to the individual and would be overly restrictive. The purpose of risk management is to balance risk and benefit to optimise the quality of life of people.

Due to the complex balance between avoidance of harm and maximising benefit, having a risk management plan in place does not guarantee elimination of harmful outcomes. However effective risk management is based on good practice and defensible decision making. An effective risk management process will help to ensure accountability, clarity and support for staff involved in the risk decision.

Basic Principles for the Assessment and Management of Risk

The following basic principles can be applied to effective risk assessment and management:

- Risk is dynamic, constantly changing in response to altered circumstances.
- Risk can be minimised, but not eliminated.
- Identification of risk carries a duty to do something about it, that is manage the risk (risk management).
- Confidentiality is a right, but may be breached in exceptional circumstances when people are deemed to be at serious risk of harm.

What is risk management?

Risk management includes all the activity connected with a plan that uses the information gained from the assessment process to implement, control and learn from risk decisions

These key elements of an effective risk management process include the need to:

- fully record the decision making process and the reasoning behind it
- involve all interested parties, including the adult at risk
- make risk management decisions through a multi-agency group where possible (usually at case conference)
- identify area(s) of risk
- systematically address each risk in turn and agree if action needs to be taken and if so what action is required and by whom
- decide which risks are acceptable and/or provide benefits for the individual and identify action to minimise harm
- list potential positive and negative outcomes
- identify the benefits of each decision to the individual and consider the justification of any restrictions on freedom - balance the outcomes
- implement the risk decision
- agree a risk management or protection plan, which includes a contingency plan for certain occurrences
- agree a monitoring group (core group) and frequency of meetings
- agree a review timescale
- agree a communication strategy with all interested parties
- monitor the plan and allow for changing circumstances
- review and make changes to the risk management plan as required.

The risk management or protection plan

A risk management or protection plan should include clear statements on:

- who has been consulted
- who is responsible for planning and implementation
- the steps that will be taken to minimise possible hazards and harms
- the steps to be taken to enhance possible benefits
- the steps to be taken to enhance strengths
- what actions have been agreed, who is to carry out these actions and when
- the desired outcome of each action
- the consequences of taking no action
- agreed timescales
- the details of any contingency plan - the points at which exceptional intervention would be indicated and how this will happen
- the milestones for measuring success or failure
- arrangements for record keeping

The Risk Management Process

Risk assessment and management are not single activities but form part of a continuous process. The dynamic nature of risk means that it is crucial that assessments and plans are reviewed and updated using the following process:

- Assess and plan
- Implement
- Monitor
- Review

Defensible decision making

A defensible decision is a decision which will be judged to be acceptable, even if risk and harm has subsequently occurred. It is important to demonstrate that assessors/agencies:

- have used best available knowledge, assessments & information;
- have taken all reasonable steps; and
- can account for their decisions, choices and courses of action chosen.

Risk or dilemma

A dilemma exists when there are no harm free options and it is necessary to make a decision immediately. In such circumstances, analysis is also important.

Tayside Form

The Scottish Executive Joint Improvement Team (JIT) commissioned an Adult Protection Shared Learning Initiative with two areas – Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership and the three Tayside health and social care partnerships (Angus, Dundee and Perth & Kinross). This commission led to the development of risk assessment and protection plan form which has been implemented across Tayside. The form is included as Appendix 5b.