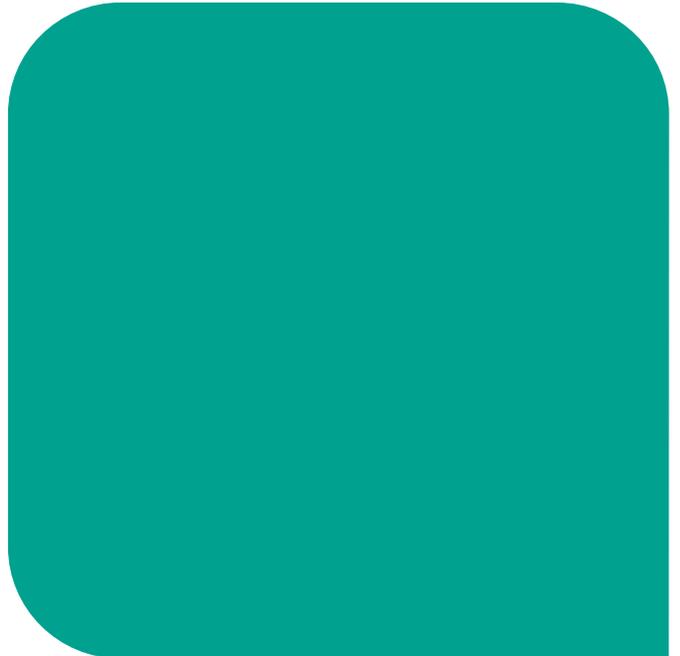




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# Protecting adults at risk: Good practice guide



## Risk assessment

*'The emphasis must be on sensible risk appraisal, not striving to avoid all risk, whatever the price, but instead seeking a proper balance and being willing to tolerate manageable or acceptable risks as the price appropriately to be paid in order to achieve some other good – in particular to achieve the vital good of the elderly or vulnerable person's happiness. What good is it making someone safer if it merely makes them miserable?'*

Lord Justice Munby (14)

There are multiple ways of assessing risk and each partner organisation working to safeguard adults may use a different method. This will depend on what they are measuring – for example, risk to a person's health, risk of a criminal offence being committed (with the police) or, if there is an already recognised specific risk assessment format (in the case of domestic violence). It is therefore difficult to formalise a single risk assessment in relation to safeguarding adults, although in any risk assessment model there are key principles and common components, which are outlined below.

A risk assessment is included in the [Resources section](#) of this guidance as an example of good practice.

### Key principles

Assessing the risk to vulnerable people against their right to make choices about how to live their life is difficult, and in any given situation different people will have different views on striking the right balance. This means that agreement on the degree of risk in every situation may not be possible. However, professionals should have a common understanding of the principles they are working to, the legal structures in place, and the documentation that can help and that they need to complete. It can be helpful to bear in mind the following key principles:

Risk work should be person-centred and empowering.

The Mental Capacity Act asserts people's right to make decisions, even unwise ones, if they have the capacity to do so. The Mental Capacity Act and the code of practice and Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards that accompany it, are all key legal considerations in evaluating risk.

Government guidance is that 'people have the right to live their lives to the full as long as that does not stop others from doing the same' (15).

Risk assessments should always consider the benefits of the proposed action on the adult at risk and weigh these against any risks.

The person's strengths should always be considered when evaluating risk.

Multi-agency working is important in assessing and managing risk, but should always take place within a person-centred framework that avoids blanket restrictions.

Organisations should model a positive approach to risk-taking that supports employees to enable people to live the life they want, rather than a defensive approach that focuses too much on risk to the organisation.

Decisions on risk should be reasonable, proportionate, accountable and defensible, and rooted in evidence-based practice and partnership working.

The case of Cardiff Council vs Peggy Ross is included in the **Resources section** of this guidance as a good example of the challenges in balancing risk and choice.

## Risk assessment: Factors to consider

This section looks at the mechanics of risk assessment in safeguarding adult cases. Any safeguarding adults at risk assessment should be designed to help determine:

the circumstances of the adult at risk in terms of safeguarding procedures

the severity and scope of the current risks to the adult, rating these in a systematic way

the capacity of the adult at risk to evaluate and make choices about these risks

the potential risks to the adult if safeguarding actions are not put in place

the urgency and focus of what these actions might be

if safeguarding interventions are working or not (and measuring this).

Encouraging the adult at risk of harm to quantify the risks is central to the process – unless this action would place them at more risk at that time. Mental capacity and ensuring compliance with the relevant code of practice also underpin risk evaluation. It is often necessary to strike the right balance between enabling a person to have choice and control while lessening the risks of harm, exploitation or mistreatment that some choices could lead to.

As partners in the adult safeguarding process, difficult judgements have to be made to determine this balance. A good risk assessment tool should aid such judgements by providing a clear, standardised framework for assessing risk as part of the adult safeguarding process.

Any agency with concerns regarding domestic abuse, stalking, harassment and 'honour'-based violence should complete a Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse - Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment (CAADA-DASH) Risk Identification Checklist. Cases identified as high risk should be referred to the local MARAC.

Relevant forms, agency toolkits and further information about the MARAC can be obtained from the **Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA)** website.

## Key stages for the completion or review of risk

### Alert stage

A risk assessment should be carried out as part of initial enquiries when the presenting risks indicate safeguarding concerns. There should be a continuous

assessment of the severity of impact and the likelihood of harm for any action throughout the safeguarding risk assessment process. This will help to calculate risks and weigh these against the benefits of the action. As information is often limited at the alert stage, this may not be a complete assessment. However, a risk assessment will help to determine if the adult safeguarding process is the most appropriate response and if any immediate action is required prior to the strategy meeting.

### **Strategy meeting/discussion**

The risk assessment may be added to and revised on the basis of new information. The assessment should be used to inform any interim protection plan put in place to safeguard the adult(s) at risk.

### **The investigation**

Information gathered at this stage of the process will indicate whether the person is at risk of significant harm now and in the future. The risk assessment should also include more evaluation of risk and must include the person's own views, wherever possible, so that the case conference has a full picture to base risk decisions on.

### **The case conference**

The nature of the risk – and whether it has previously occurred – should be specified at the conference. The conference should also state the likelihood of the risk escalating and/or reoccurring now or in the near future and the severity of the impact on the person if the harm occurs. Any discussions about risk should be person-centred, and involve multi-disciplinary approaches.

### **Review**

The effectiveness of the protection plan should inform the risk assessment. It should be revised to reflect any new risks identified, risks now removed or risks reduced. There should be ongoing discussions with the person and their carers if appropriate, about their perception of the risks. Comparing one risk assessment with another will provide evidence of the effectiveness of the safeguarding intervention.