**Introduction to completing Risk Assessments**

As Social Workers we are expected to assess risk, making recommendations that are balanced and proportionate, to safeguard and promote the needs of the children and families we work with. Arguably, all social work assessments are assessments of risk, however where there is a specific identifiable risk, then a focused Risk Assessment should be undertaken.

It is important to remember that Risk Assessments do not guarantee safety however a risk assessment can be a useful tool in the management of risk.

**Purpose**

The purpose of any Risk Assessment should be to reduce harm, or the risk of harm, and evidence that measures are in place to minimise perceived risks. Remember that the purpose of the assessment is not just to identify the level of risk, but also to consider how this risk could be managed in the best interests of the child.

A good indicator of future risk is past behaviour, and consequently there will be times where we are worried about the risk that an adult may pose to a child/young person because of their past behaviour, for example if they have a conviction for a crime against a child.

**Circumstances when a Risk Assessment should be completed**

Practitioner discretion should be applied however the following circumstances may indicate that an adult poses a risk to children and a risk assessment should be undertaken.

* Where an assessment by another agency e.g. Police or Probation has identified that the adult is a Person Posing a Risk or Potential Risk to Children.
* Where the adult has a conviction, caution or reprimand for an offence which indicates they may pose a risk to children.
* Where a Finding of Fact has identified the adult as a perpetrator of an offence or behaviour which indicates that they may pose a risk to children.
* Where a person has made an admission of guilt in relation to violent offences or offences against children.
* Where there is a clear pattern of harmful behaviour or offending that indicates the adult may pose a risk to children.
* Where substance misuse is present that indicates a risk to children.
* Where domestic abuse is present that indicates a risk to children.

**Conducting a Risk Assessment**

Risk can be defined as, ‘the possibility of beneficial and harmful outcomes, and the likelihood of their occurrence in a stated timescale’. Risk Assessments aim to consider a situation, event or decision and identify where risks fall on the dimensions of ‘likely or unlikely’ and ‘harmful or beneficial’. The aim of risk management is to devise strategies that will help move risk from the likely and harmful category to the unlikely and/or beneficial categories. Risks cannot necessarily be eliminated, but they can be managed and reduced.

Risk factors can commonly be divided into two groups:

* Static factors: Those which are based in the individual’s history and background and cannot be changed.
* Dynamic factors: Those which can change through treatment, intervention, or the passage of time for example external factors like drug use, or internal factors like attitude and beliefs.

We cannot change static factors but what we can assess is the perpetrators attitude to their behaviour/offences, evidence of sustained change and timeframe/circumstance of behaviour. A robust risk assessment will draw on historic information, factual information, any assessments completed by other agencies, interviews with the adult concerned and any other involved adults. Consideration should be given throughout the assessment to the impact on the child of any decisions that may be made, and the child should be spoken to as part of the assessment.

Risk Assessments, like any Assessment, should not be completed in isolation, multiagency partners should contribute to the Assessment and the strengths should be drawn upon and developed.

**Analysis**

The assessor should retain a ‘respectful uncertainty’ when analysing the information. Information at all stages of the assessment should be triangulated to increase the validity and reliability of the presented information.

When forming an analysis, the Risk Assessment should consider both the likelihood of imminent and future risk, should nothing change. It should consider any protective factors that can be built upon and be clear about how any protective factors mitigate against the risk. It is important to note strengths within a family, however these should not be considered protective factors if they do not protect against the risk. The Assessment should also highlight work to be completed and the perpetrators attitude to completing the work, to mitigate against the risk, thinking about the cycle of change and supporting motivation to bring about change.

Finally, the analysis should draw upon the impact on the child and the projected impact if the risk continues without mitigation.