

Definitions: are we all talking about the same thing?

Note: there are a number of definitions of risk, risk assessment and risk management in the wider risk literature. They all have similar meanings but may differ slightly in the emphasis they place on specific concepts, particularly the positive potential of people and the role of prediction in practice. If you adhere to different definitions it is important that you reflect on what the meaning is for you and debate it with other colleagues who may hold a different perspective, or indeed the more user-friendly and engaging concept of safety.

Risk is the likelihood of an event happening with potentially harmful or beneficial outcomes for self and others. It is a combination of the chance that something might happen and the impact or consequence associated with the event. (Possible behaviours include suicide, self-harm, neglect, aggression and violence, with an additional range of other positive or negative service user experiences.)

- a) How does this definition reflect or differ from one you adhere to, in your practice, your business, or your life experiences?
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- b) What do you identify as the key messages being communicated by this definition?
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- c) Identify and reflect on one example of your work or life experience which illustrates the application of this definition of risk in practice.
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Risk assessment is the gathering of information through processes of communication, investigation, observation and persistence, and the analysis of potential outcomes of identified behaviours. It is about identifying specific risk factors of relevance to an individual, and the circumstances in which they may occur. It is also about counterbalancing the negativity of risk factors with the presence of *protective factors*, that is, the qualities or resources in and around a person that help to reduce or mitigate potential risk. This process requires linking historical information to current circumstances in order to anticipate possible future change. Risk assessment should be distinguished separately from risk screening, which is an initial process of determining which risks require more detailed and thorough processes of assessment.

- a) Reflect on this definition and draw out the detailed key components it is communicating.
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b) What are the most frequent risk factors you have to consider in your practice, business or life experiences of risk?

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c) What are 'protective factors' in your experience? List key examples of protective factors.

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Risk management is the statement of plans and the allocation of responsibilities for translating collective decisions into real actions. It is the activity of exercising a duty of care where risks are identified. It entails a broad range of responses linked closely to the wider process of care planning. The activities may involve preventative, responsive and supportive measures to diminish the potential negative consequences of risk and to promote potential benefits of taking appropriate risks. These will occasionally involve more restrictive measures and crisis responses where the identified risks have an increased potential for harmful outcomes. It should also clearly identify the dates for reviewing the assessment and the management plans.

a) Reflect on this definition and draw out the detailed key components it is communicating.

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b) What do you identify as the key elements of the relationship between risk assessment and risk management?

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c) Identify one example of preventative risk management, and one example of reactive risk management from your experience.

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Positive risk-taking is weighing up the potential benefits and harms of exercising one choice of action over another. It involves identifying the potential risks involved (ie. good risk assessment) and developing plans and actions (ie. good risk management) that reflect the positive potentials and stated priorities of the service user (ie. a strengths approach). It also involves using 'available' resources and supports to achieve the desired outcomes, and to minimize the potential harmful outcomes.

a) How do you go about taking risks in your personal life?

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b) Listen to the two MP3 audio resources in this module, and reflect on the application of this definition into your practice, business or life experiences.