

Risk Formulation

A concept emerging out of the field of psychology, it is highly applicable to supporting the structuring and evaluation of complex risk assessment information, enabling reasoned risk decisions. As a process it is best conducted in a facilitated group setting bringing together all those people who have a contribution to make regarding a specific risk situation (e.g. a positive risk-taking decision).

- What is risk formulation?
 - Developing the ‘why’ questions that help us to disentangle the complex information about a person’s experiences
 - Developing a hypothesis from assessment information and testing that hypothesis, being open to change your initial ways of thinking as new information and connections of information come to light
 - It is about identifying thoughts and intent; the signs, factors and emotions that may contribute to elevating the risk in specific situations, and balancing these with the protective factors that may diminish or mitigate the risk
 - It involves using a longitudinal process of how a person’s history may influence the here and now... with an emphasis on hope
 - It is identifying and interpreting individual cycles or patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviours (including maintenance cycles).
- Considerations in developing the analysis:
 - Letting go of preconceived fears or ideas about the person
 - Developing an understanding of what elevates or diminishes risks in a person’s life, balancing the psychological, social and medical
 - Shared communication with others, particularly the service user
 - Flexibility of the concept; there is not one rigid way of arriving at a hypothesis; it requires practitioners to be open not opinionated, and genuinely collaborative rather than focused on me/my/mine
 - It can be developed pictorially or diagrammatically if that best suits the person, the staff member, or the situation
 - It is not about being right or wrong, it is about the dynamic changing nature of what we are working with, and it takes time
 - It is not a tick-box exercise, it is about broader understanding (i.e. two people with a learning disability

- are entirely different!)
 - It can help to challenge those moments when staff 'feel stuck' with the historical presentation of the individual.
- One method often used by Psychologists for structuring the more complex process of risk and the wider experiences of someone's life is formulation structured as the 5 P's (i.e. this is one way of analyzing and managing complex information, but not the only way):

Presenting (seen/experienced) problems > **Predisposing** (susceptibility) factors > **Precipitating** (causes/triggers) factors > **Perpetuating** (maintaining) factors > **Protective** (positive attributes or conditions) factors.

1. In your business, practice or life experience, identify a current or recent risk issue. Analyze the information you have available using a 5P's perspective; what are the:

- Presenting problems.....
- Predisposing factors.....
- Precipitating factors.....
- Perpetuating factors.....
- Protective factors.....

2. In your team (business or practice) construct an agenda that will guide the facilitation of risk formulation meetings.

- Who will be best placed to facilitate the discussion(s)?
- What would be the most reasonable timing for each discussion (set in advance to ensure focus)?
- What is your interpretation of:
 - 'Why questions'.....
 - 'Hypotheses'.....
 - 'Patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviours'.....