

# Risk assessment



When do we assess risks?

Hazards and risks

Health and safety risks

Interpreting risk assessment data

Key skills in child care



'We use risk assessment to help manage both health and safety and children's welfare.'

## Introduction

Assisting with risk assessment is an important part of your role as a practitioner working with children and young people. We use risk assessment to help manage both health and safety and children's welfare. Your manager and other colleagues will have overall responsibility for risk assessments. However, they will rely on staff to help them to gather information and to recognise hazards and risks for employees, children and visitors.

This workbook will help you to understand the processes involved in risk assessment and the importance of keeping accurate records.

## When do we assess risks?

In our everyday lives we assess risks all the time. For example:

- As a pedestrian, we decide when it is safe to cross the road.
- As a motorist, we decide when it is safe to pull out at a junction.
- After a night out we decide whether it is safe to walk home, arrange a lift or use a taxi.
- We decide whether or not to smoke tobacco or take drugs.
- We decide whether to move a heavy object alone, or wait for help.



Make a note here of times when you have assessed risk, either at work or in your everyday life, during the past few days.

Adults are usually able to make their own judgements about the risk factors that affect their lives. However, in the childcare sector we look after children and young people who are vulnerable. We therefore have a responsibility to protect not only our own health and safety and that of our colleagues, but also the health and safety of children.



## Hazards and risks

In order to make risk assessments we have to recognise hazards and risks.

A **hazard** is defined as anything that has the potential to cause harm. A hazard may be a substance, a piece of equipment or a work procedure or, in the childcare sector, a child's condition.



Make a list of the possible hazards you might find in your workplace.

You may have included some of the following:

- toys and equipment
- chemical hazards, such as cleaning materials and disinfectants
- biological hazards, such as airborne and blood-borne infections
- handling and moving equipment and children
- unattended children
- security of entry points and exits
- drug and medication administration
- visual or hearing impairment of children.

**Risk** is defined as the chance or likelihood that harm will occur from the hazard. The likelihood is described as 'the expectancy of harm occurring'. It can range from 'never' to 'certain' and depends on a number of factors.

For example, the risk of someone tripping on a damaged floor surface will depend on:

- the extent of the damage
- the number of people walking over it
- the number of times they walk over it
- whether they are wearing sensible shoes
- the level of lighting.



**Control measures** are the measures or actions that are taken to remove or reduce the risk. Whenever possible, the risk should be removed. When it cannot be removed, measures must be taken to reduce the risk.

'By law, formal risk assessments must be carried out in every workplace.'

	Below are some hazards you might find in a childcare setting. Possible control measures have been completed for one of them. Try to complete the list with your own ideas.	
	<b>Hazard</b>	<b>Control measure</b>
	Sand thrown about	Constant supervision 'No throwing sand' rule
	Falling from a climbing frame	
	Broken or damaged toys or equipment	
	Choking on food	
	Poisoning by cleaning materials	
	Lifting equipment or children	
	Unattended children	
	Sickness or diarrhoea	

## Health and safety risks

Health and safety risk assessment aims to identify and manage hazards that may pose a threat to the health, safety and welfare of people or the delivery of child care. It involves:

- identifying a hazard
- assessing the likelihood of the hazard posing a risk
- estimating the severity of the consequences
- developing an action plan to eliminate the hazard or minimise its effect through control measures.

Risk assessment encourages managers and key staff to think about what could go wrong, so that they can control the situation before accidents or ill health occur.

By law, formal risk assessments must be carried out in every workplace. The risk assessors are usually specially trained, competent managers or supervisors who are familiar with the task being assessed and safety controls. They must also be up to date with relevant legal requirements.





There are a number of stages in carrying out a risk assessment. The people involved need to find answers to the following questions.

- **What are the hazards?**  
Look for the hazards. The workplace, the children and the activities carried out in the workplace need to be carefully examined.
- **Who is at risk?**  
Decide who might be harmed and how. Everyone or only certain people may be at risk. Some groups of people may need special consideration, as they may be more vulnerable to certain hazards.
- **What is the likelihood of injury or harm?**  
A hazard that is very likely to cause injury or harm will need remedying before one that is very unlikely to do so.
- **What are the consequences of injury or harm?**  
The consequences could range from 'trivial' to 'severe' or even fatal – for example, from a scratch to death. The most severe hazards need the most urgent attention. Decide whether the existing precautions are adequate or whether more should be done.

It is important to record your findings and to review your assessment and revise it if necessary. A review must always take place when situations change – such as the introduction of new equipment, a change in use of a room, or a child with a disability starting at your workplace. You must also audit control measures regularly to ensure that they are working correctly.



Find out who has overall responsibility for risk assessments in your workplace. Look at some completed risk assessment forms. From those records, make a note of:

- the hazards
- the risks
- the control measures that have been introduced to remove or reduce the risks.

To find out more about risk assessment in childcare settings, you can search the internet using some key words or phrases.



Search the internet and make a note of examples of the following:

- two types of training that you or a colleague could do to learn more about risk assessment
- two books or publications that your workplace could purchase about this topic
- two companies that offer risk assessment services in your region or area.

## Example risk assessment



Nikki works at Parkside After-School Club and has started to complete a risk assessment for the outdoor play area. She has used the key below to estimate the Risk (R) by multiplying (x) the Severity (S) by the Likelihood (L)  $S \times L = R$

Complete the risk assessment with more examples from your own workplace.

Hazard	Who is at risk?	Severity	Likelihood	Risk estimate = S x L	Controls needed
Entry/exit gates left open	Children	3	2	6	Outside gates locked Constant supervision
Hedging/plants	Children, adults	1	2	2	Cut back hedging regularly
Skipping ropes – tripping	Children	1	2	2	Regular supervision
Footballs – being hit, breakages	Children, adults	1	2	2	Provide sufficient space for games
Sunburn	Children, adults	2	2	4	Provide sun hats Parents/carers to put sun cream on children

### Hazard severity

- 3 Major
- 2 Serious
- 1 Slight

### Hazard likelihood

- 3 High = certain harm will occur
- 2 Medium = could occur frequently
- 1 Low = seldom occurs

# Interpreting risk assessment data

Once you have assessed the risks at work, you will need to produce a clear picture of what the scores mean. One way to do this is to group the data into categories: low, medium and high risk. In our example risk assessment, low risks are those which have scored 0–2, with medium risks scoring 3–6 and high risks 7–9.



In the table below, complete the column 'Number of risks identified' using the figures from the previous table. Then work out each figure as a fraction and a percentage of the overall number of risks.

	<b>Number of risks identified</b>	<b>Fraction</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Low risk (0–2)			
Medium risk (3–6)			
High risk (7–9)			



Using your figures for the percentage of children or adults in each risk category, construct a bar chart and a pie chart.

If you have access to a computer, try to construct these charts using ICT. If you have to construct the charts manually, you will need a pair of compasses and a ruler.

Which format do you think presents the figures most effectively?



This workbook will help with the following parts of your qualifications:

**NVQ in Children's Care, Learning and Development**

Unit 202: Help to keep children safe

Unit 205: Prepare and maintain environments to meet children's needs

Unit 302: Develop and maintain a healthy, safe and secure environment for children

Unit 306: Plan and organise environments for children and families

**Key skills**

Application of number: N2.1, N2.2 and N2.3

Information and communication technology: ICT2.1 and ICT2.3

**Skills for Life**

Adult numeracy level 2:

- Understanding and using mathematical information
- Calculating and manipulating mathematical information
- Interpreting results and communicating mathematical information

**Technical certificate**

Certificate in Children's Care, Learning and Development

