

RISK ASSESSMENT

The words hazard and risk as used in this guide are defined as follows:

Hazard – anything that can cause harm (e.g. electricity, chemicals, uneven surfaces)

Risk – the chance, high or low, that somebody will be harmed by the hazard.

Over the last few years, as seen by numerous TV adverts, the need to assess risks covering all areas of life has become a major issue. Failure to assess risks can result in accidents, which may lead to legal action. Social Care has been no different, and has perhaps been more concerned because the assessment of risk is always related to vulnerable people.

However, risk assessment in Social Care is not new, and staff have made informal judgements for their users since services began. **The change in recent years has been based on a need to show first that a risk judgement has been made, and secondly that it is based on good information and that this is recorded in the care file.**

THE ELEMENTS OF RISK.

The first element of risk assessment is the environment in which an activity is to happen. For Domiciliary care, the environment will be the clients' home, and will therefore vary immensely.

It is the responsibility of **ALL** to ensure that the care they give is provided as safely as possible. This should take into consideration the wishes of the Service User. If the risk assessment indicates that there may be a hazard or risk that cannot be minimized adequately, then safety should not be compromised.

Your ability to carry out a particular task must also be considered, and may include you seeking support, advice or additional training.

5 STEPS OF RISK ASSESSMENT

1. Look for the Hazards
2. Decide who might be harmed, and how.
3. Evaluate the risks and decide whether the existing precautions are adequate or whether more should be done
4. Record your findings.
5. Review your assessment and revise it if necessary.

In controlling risks, apply the principles below, if possible in the following order:

- Try a less risky option.
- Prevent access to the hazard (e.g. by guarding)
- Organise work to reduce exposure to the hazard
- Use personal protective clothing / equipment

If there is any significant change or new hazard, add to the assessment to take account of this.

An example of risk assessment in an ordinary home environment is below:

1. The Activity is vacuuming a room
2. The Nature of the hazard is yourself or the Service User tripping over the cable
3. The action to reduce the risk is using the nearest power socket, and forewarning the Service User on the whereabouts of the cable.
4. The risk may be increased if the Service User has short term memory loss. This higher risk would then need to be reduced by changing sockets more frequently.
5. Record in the care plan folder the hazard identified, and the steps needed to reduce the risk.

In the event of an accident, the record will be a critical part of any investigation.

FURTHER READING

Homes are for living in (1989) DH Social Services Inspectorate

Five steps to Risk Assessment (1998) Health & Safety Executive, Sheffield.

Risk Assessment in Social Care and Social Work (1999) P. Parsloe

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