HM Prison & Probation Service

Risk of Serious Harm Guidance 2020

Public Protection Group

October 2026 v3.4

Return to Contents

Version Control

Version	Change made by	Change	Date
1	PPG/Cindy Keehner	Initial Publication	July 2020
2	PPG/Cindy Keehner	Addition of section on Risk Practice and Desistance on page 21, to support staff understanding how to integrate practice to manage risk with practice to enhance desistance. The addition of need to ensure risk levels are not changed without a formal OASys completed. Content amended to 'Recording your rationale section' on p 31 and ''Reviewing the risk of harm section on p 44 with the sentence ''Do Not: Set or change a risk level without completing a formal OASys assessment.	March 2022
3.0	Cindy Keehner/ PPG	Addition of a section on assessing unconvicted behaviour and civil order on p 8.	October 2023
3.1	Cindy Keehner/ PPG	Reviewed hyperlinks within document.	February 2024

Return to Contents

3.2	Cindy Keehner/PPG	Inclusion of reference to the Scott Model on p. 8 Inclusion of link to Understanding Risk Predictor Tools-ARAI Guidance on p 9 and p. 63. Clarification and additions to step 1 of the four-step process including how to interpret the RSR and OSP scores, 'offence free time' and RSR and domestic abuse on p.19 to p. 22. Clarification that staff should take note of RSR scores over the average of 1.6% on p. 21. Replaced diagram on risk and protective factors with table on p. 25 Removal of reference to using ''risk levels correctly and not to inflate risk because of anxiety and access to resources'' on p. 32 Addition of ''current and potential'' victims to Step 3 in the Setting overall ROSH level on p. 33 Inclusion of the factors to consider	January 2026

Return to Contents

		for immediacy in p. 34 Changed Building Better Relationships to Building Choices on p 45 Change from OSP/C and OSP/I to OSP/DC and OSP/IIC (throughout the document).	
3.3	Cindy Keehner/PPG	Update to the ROSH guidance to align with the introduction of the updated reoffending predictors and overall review to remove duplications throughout sections.	March 2026
3.4	Cindy Keehner/PPG	Update to amend actuarial tools/predictor terminology to reoffending predictors for consistency.	October 2026

Return to Contents

Foreword

His Majesty's Prisons and Probation Service plays a vital role in protecting the public from people who have offended, and we cannot hope to do this effectively without understanding the risk presented by those we manage. Effective risk assessment and management is a clear priority within the HMPPS strategy. To that end we have developed this guidance to support our staff in working with the individuals under our supervision so that we can support them to lead law-abiding lives, whilst taking all necessary action to keep the public safe.

This guidance builds on the two previous documents published in 2009 and 2014. As you will see, we emphasise the importance of staff using the reoffending predictors developed by the Ministry of Justice alongside their own professional judgement, in order to make defensible decisions about risk. This guidance also addresses risk management alongside risk assessment, thereby inculcating the importance of taking action to manage risk. We also ask staff to consider the role that bias plays for all of us working in roles that expose us to the details of the most serious crimes.

Gordon Davison

Deputy Director, Public Protection Group

His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service

Return to Contents

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Professor Hazel Kemshall and De Montfort University, for the use of the Four Pillars approach to Risk Management and the Risk of Harm Guidance and Training Resource. We would also like to acknowledge and thank all those who contributed to the development of this guidance. Their input, help and co-operation has been invaluable.

- Mark Gunn, Cindy Keehner & Louise Hubbard - Public Protection Group
- Sam Denman, Heather Adam, Rob Whyman & Laura Donnelly – Effective Probation Practice Group
- The Offender Management in Custody team
- Dr Philip Howard & Martine Wauben – Data Science Hub
- Dr Rosie Travers – Evidence Based Practice Team
- Dr Karen Slade, Nottingham Trent University
- Professor Hazel Kemshall – De Montfort University
- Amy Beck – Probation Service, London Division Psychology Service
- HMPPS Equalities Team
- Jon Matthews – Probation Service Wales
- Martin Liddament – MoJ Digital and Technology: Content
- All those staff who have provided feedback on the content.

Return to Contents

RISK OF SERIOUS HARM GUIDANCE (2020)

Contents

Objectives of the Guidance 7

The Purpose of Risk Assessment 7

Risk Assessment

The Underpinning Model of Risk Assessment 9

Screening for Risk of Serious Harm 12

The Four-Step Process 18

Reoffending Predictor Assessment 18

Professional Assessment 24

Immediacy 27

Setting the Overall Level 39

Risk Management Planning

Risk Management Planning 34

The Four Pillars 36

Supervision 37

Monitoring and Control 38

Interventions and Treatment 40

Victim Safety 40

Contingency Plans 42

Supplementary Material

The Dynamic Nature of Risk Assessment 43

Where Risk Management can go Wrong 46

Appendix 1 Bias in Risk Assessment 47

Appendix 2 Additional Notes 52

Desk Aides 55

Understanding Reoffending Predictors Technical Guidance 46

Return to Contents

Objectives of the Guidance

This guidance:

- reviews the 2009 and 2014 supplements, updating them into a single document;
- emphasises the importance of reoffending predictors;
- encourages staff to think about the impact of personal bias;
- provides guidance for writing risk management plans and
- provides visual summary documents for risk assessment in the field.

The guide to the four-step process of risk assessment will help staff make reflective, logical and informed decisions about risk and help them use best practice in assessments.

The risk management planning section follows the 'Four Pillars' approach. Many probation staff will be familiar with this from Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (SARA) and training materials on the Risk of Harm Guidance and Training Resource.

The guidance also draws together knowledge from recent Serious Further Offence and Domestic Homicide Reviews. It aims to promote greater consistency in the agency's approach to risk assessment and management.

Using this Guidance

This guidance includes links. Many will take you to other parts of this document, but some will take you to external locations. You can use an external link by clicking the link on more modern versions of Microsoft Word.

The purpose of risk assessment

Risk assessment analyses the **static and dynamic risk factors** relating to proven reoffending and risk of serious harm. It is a continuous and evolving process.

The criminal justice system has defined risk as:

The risk of reconviction – the probability that an individual will further offend and be brought to justice (convicted, cautioned etc.) for that offence.

The risk of serious harm – the probability that a future offence will be one of "serious harm".

The OASys risk assessment tool defines "serious harm" as: "an event which is life threatening and/or traumatic and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be "difficult or impossible".

Risk of serious harm has two important dimensions:

- the **relative likelihood** that an offence will occur and
- the **relative impact** or harm of the offence – what exactly might happen, to what or whom, under what circumstances, and why.

Some crimes (e.g. shoplifting) have relatively little impact or harm but, statistically, are the most common. Others (e.g. homicide) are rare but cause immeasurable harm.

Return to Contents

What Makes a Good Risk Assessment

A good risk assessment is **evidence based.** It uses statistical evidence, informed by research into risk factors for the type of offending, but is also individualised.

A good risk assessment is **fair**, taking into account factors that may mitigate risks as well as those that might increase it.

Avoiding bias is an important feature of a good risk assessment, and involves recognising any bias you hold, acknowledging it and taking steps to mitigate it.

A **solid rationale** is the centrepiece of good risk assessment. It explains why specific conclusions are drawn and makes logical sense based on the evidence.

Good risk assessments lead to taking action through **a risk management plan** that uses supportive and restrictive processes to reduce the risk and impact of further harm.

Why assess risk?

We assess risk to:

- identify those who may potentially cause serious harm;
- provide a framework for a plan to manage that risk and
- protect victims and potential victims.

Risk assessment also helps us make effective use of the Risk, Need and Responsivity principles[1]. This makes sure that interventions take account of the individual, their needs and are matched to the risks.

Less than 0.5% of the people on the HMPPS caseload go on to commit offences so serious that they meet the threshold for Serious Further Offence reviews. The less frequent an occurrence the more difficult it is to predict so we use evidence based tools as a starting point to predict which of the people we supervise will go on to seriously offend.

[1]Gov UK – Offending Behaviour Programmes and Interventions https://www.gov.uk/guidance/offending-behaviour-programmes-and-interventions

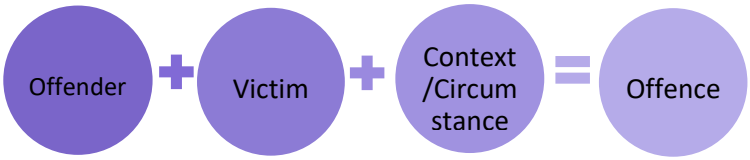
Return to Contents

The underpinning model of risk assessment

Offender + Victim + Context/Circumstances = Offence

Research evidence tells us that risk is[2]:

- multifactorial;
- influenced by the interaction of risk factors and protective factors that make someone more or less likely to cause serious harm to others and
- involves interaction between the offender, potential victims and the circumstances and context within which the offending can take place.



The most accurate risk assessments combine the best of reoffending predictors with structured, evidence based professional judgement[3].

One size does not fit all.

Scott Model (1977) can be a helpful way to breakdown and structure thinking. You must assess risk of serious harm by considering the individual. Consider:

- the person;
- their circumstances and context;
- their offending and
- their risk/protective factors.

Look at circumstances that indicate risk and those that act as protective factors. Risk management strategies can then be tailored for each individual.

---

[2] See: "*Factors at play in the perpetration of violence against women, violence against children and sexual orientation violence* "
https://www.humanconsultancy.com/assets/understanding-perpetration/understanding-perpetration.html
Craig, L. Beech, A. Cortoni, F. (2013) What Works in Assessing Risk in Sexual and Violent Offenders. In Craig, L Dixon, L. and Gannon, T. *What Works in Offender Rehabilitation*, Wiley Blackwell.
Kemshall, H. et al (2015) What works in work with violent offenders: An overview. European Union, SOMEC project,
https://www.dora.dmu.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/2086/12145/Kemshall_et_al_What_Works_in_Work_Overview_2015.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
McLean and Beak (2012) *Factors associated with serious or persistent violent offending: Findings from a rapid evidence assessment* National Policing Improvement Agency
Webster, C., Haque, Q. and Hucker, S. (2014) *Violence Risk Assessment and Management* 2nd Edition Wiley Blackwell.
[3]The Risk Assessment Tools Evaluation Directory (RATED) (2017) Risk Management Authority Scotland at: http://rated.rmascotland.gov.uk/

Return to Contents

Description of reoffending predictors assessment

Reoffending predictors use statistical or machine learning algorithms to combine data on multiple risk factors into an estimate of the probability of a specific outcome.

HMPPS has used reoffending predictors since the early 1990s to estimate the likelihood of proven reoffending, using data on criminal history, age and birth sex, dynamic factors such as, personal relationships, substance misuse, thinking skills and attitudes.

Proven reoffending means someone committing a reoffence within 2 years from the start of a community order, suspended sentence, release on licence, or point of assessment, for which they subsequently receive a sanction.

To develop the ARAIs, MOJ analysts identified which factors in people's lives were present more often in people who reoffended, than people who did not reoffend. We call these 'risk factors'.

These are weighted in relation to how much they impact certain types of reoffending, for example alcohol is a strong risk factor in violent reoffences.

Each ARAI uses a mathematical algorithm to add up all the weightings and turns this into a percentage of the likelihood of the type of future offending covered by that ARAI, for example how likely violent re-offending is predicted by the Violent Reoffending Predictor and sexual reoffending is predicted by the Sexual Reoffending Predictor (SRP).

We know that these predictors are valid because they have been created and then tested on large samples of individuals serving custodial and community sentences, who are followed-up for two years in the community after release or sentence to identify their proven reoffending status.

However, these instruments can only be based on sanction history and cannot identify how risk factors affect an individual or tell us how to address and manage the risks.

All ARAIs are scored through answering relevant questions about risk factors within the Offender Assessment System (OASys).

Each of the non-sexual reoffending predictors have:

- a brief version, using static factors which is helpful when we have not been able to undertake an interview or need to make a quick decision
- an extended version which uses static and dynamic factors to provide a more individualised picture of the likelihood of reoffending

The Sexual Reoffending Predictor only uses static factors and has no extended/ dynamic version.

What are static factors?

For the purposes of calculating ARAIs, static risk factors are characteristics or circumstances which cannot be deliberately changed over the course of a sentence such as:

  - Age at the point of conviction

Return to Contents

- Offence category
- Length and breadth of criminal history

Legal Gender is also a factor in the static version of the tool (except SRP which is for men only). [4]

Static risk factors typically have the strongest association with proven reoffending.

What are dynamic risk factors?

Dynamic risk factors are also known as criminogenic needs, (i.e. factors which are linked to offending but are amenable to change), such as:

- Accommodation,
- Employment,
- Substance Misuse
- Thinking and Behaviour, such as temper control
- Attitudes
- Use of weapons

The extended/ dynamic versions of the tools use this additional information when it is available, because it provides a more individualised picture of someone and therefore makes their risk score more accurate.

Further information on reoffending predictors can be found here.

Description of structured professional risk assessment

Structured professional risk assessment uses the analysis of the lifestyle, behaviour and offending of an individual to make a judgement about the level of risk they present. Structured assessment tools encourage consistency between practitioners. They ensure all sources of information are considered and the focus is on factors known to have an impact on the type of risk. Examples include the Offender Assessment System (OASys) and the Spousal Abuse Risk Assessment (SARA). These tools help structure your thinking, ensuring you consider evidence-based risk factors and circumstances related to offending in your assessment.

Structured professional assessment tools aim to provide greater consistency but have some limitations as assessors may rate given individuals differently. People can be susceptible to forms of bias and differences in local cultures around risk assessment. These issues raise concern about effectiveness and fairness, including the impact on protected characteristics. However, if the tools are used with integrity and in line with guidance, they allow assessors to consider the relevance of each risk factor for an individual and the interplay between those factors, to formulate an individualised risk assessment, management plan and sentence plan, the central purpose of assessment.

[4] We recognise that gender can be changed, however reoffending predictors use the legal gender at the time of calculation.

Return to Contents

Screening for Risk of Serious Harm

Find Good Sources of Information

Use Professional Curiosity to gather information

Being professionally curious is a process of questioning and seeking verification for the information you are given rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value.

Use a variety of sources

Base your risk assessment on different sources of information. Make sure that the sources are analysed and questioned wherever possible. Always try to get to the original source and ensure you have sufficient information to make an assessment.

Verify

Make every effort to verify information and document any limitations you see. Decide how much weight to place upon information. Consider the credibility and motivation of the source and whether the information is relevant to the assessment.

Understand the person you assess

Build a deep understanding of the individual's behaviour and their decisions to offend.

For further information on Making sense of information, examples of information sources, and how to assess credibility click here.

Decide who is at risk and the nature of that risk

Be clear about who and what you are assessing

"The risk of serious harm is the likelihood of a life-threatening and/or traumatic event. Recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible."

Where there is evidence of an offence or behaviour that meets the threshold of harm you need to assess:

- 'What specific risk does the individual present and to whom?'
- 'What were the circumstances or factors linked to the harm and are they present now or if not - could they be present again in the future.

This will help you be clear about the actions needed to manage the risk to those you have identified.

Be aware of potential escalation[5]

Think wider than the index offence. Consider the evidence of all other behaviours. Be aware of the possibility of risk at all times, including those who may not have previously committed seriously harmful offences. Indicators of risk include:

- possession or use of weapons;
- evidence of attitudes that support the use of violence in relationships;
- attitudes supportive of the use of serious violence;
- callousness;

[5] Adapted from Risk of Harm Guidance and Training Resource (Kemshall 2011)

Return to Contents

- disclosures (fantasy or fears of further offending);
- attitudes supportive of extremism and/or hate crime;
- attitudes supportive of contact sexual offending or breakdown in internal barriers to such offending;
- high / increased frequency of lower level violence as this may increase the likelihood of unintended death/serious injury;
- lifestyles involving exposure to risks of conflict with others (e.g., rivalries, confrontations);
- coercive control and obsessive behaviour such as stalking and
- lifestyle that might expose children to a risk of harm (association, substance use or confrontations).

Previous offending

Consider the previous patterns of offending and behaviours. Explore the details of these incidents. Try to find unbiased sources wherever possible and examine the context. Consider:

- criminal damage and public order offences – these can hide a variety of behaviours, including domestic abuse;
- the most serious offence/behaviour so far –the time since that offence and the impact of aging and increase in maturity on the continued likelihood of further offending;
- any civil orders that may indicate harm, and
- any patterns of harm related offending.

Assessing Unconvicted Behaviour

Remember all behaviours may be an indication of the likelihood of re-offending or the risk of causing serious harm, including where the individual has not been convicted of an offence. If we focus only on the most recent conviction or even the current and previous convictions we can miss past evidence of risky behaviour, such as violence against previous partners, evidence of weapon use, behaviours in custody or gang membership.

For example, it is important to include in your assessment information about the circumstances where someone has:

- been questioned by Police in relation to an offence, but not formally charged
- been acquitted or found not guilty at court of an offence
- offended or behaved in risky ways in a prison, health/education or AP setting for example

However, when behaviour has not led to a conviction but may give rise to concerns about their risk, you need to understand the precise nature of the information, how reliable it is and what it may or may not be telling you about that person's risk.

- Seek information from others, including the person on probation and partner agencies to draw the information you have together to establish the best picture you can of the behaviour.
- Analyse the relevant information within your risk assessment to gain a clear understanding of how this relates to the nature and likelihood of current or future harm posed.
- Identify any safety planning required for any individuals at risk and explore opportunities for intervention and risk management.

Return to Contents

Civil/Ancillary Orders

Civil orders aim to prevent future re-offending, prevent repeat victimisation or redress the harm caused. The Police or Courts may impose civil orders in a variety of circumstances for example:

- Where a criminal conviction has not been pursued
- Where an individual has been acquitted of an offence at court
- In a family court
- Alongside a conviction at court

The imposition of a civil order where there has not been a conviction indicates that even though the evidence of the behaviour may not have met the threshold for a criminal conviction (for example, sometimes because a victim is reluctant to be a witness), the court was satisfied that there was enough of a concern about their behaviour for a civil order to be imposed.

Ancillary Orders are imposed by a judge or magistrate, in addition to imposing a sentence and include orders such as restraining orders, serious crime prevention orders or sexual harm prevention orders.

The evidence for why an order was imposed, who it aims to protect or what behaviours it aims to prevent will provide important information to feed into your risk assessment and risk management plan.

Find out more about civil orders at Protective measures and civil orders | College of Policing

Civil Order Checklist

- Actively seek information from agencies relating to civil orders
- Talk to the person on probation and explain how this information will aid your risk assessment and management of them
- Review the evidence used to support the imposition of any civil order. Confirm the behaviours that occurred and the facts that are agreed upon
- Think about what this means, what behaviours may be of concern and who may be a potential victim and include in your risk assessment
- Identify the action needed to keep any identified individuals safe and put this in the victim safety planning pillar of your risk management plan
- Monitor compliance with the order – where someone is not complying, think about what this means for risk management and take proportionate action

Return to Contents

Decide who is at risk

Once you're satisfied that there is evidence of behaviour indicative of risk of serious harm, establish who this risk is to.

Be specific. Potential victims may include identified individuals, such as a partner, previous victim, associate or neighbour, or may be identifiable groups who are individually unknown. They may include people with protected characteristics, e.g. gender, individuals undergoing gender-reassignment, age, race, disability, religion, sexual orientation, profession.

They may also be people encountered under specific circumstances, such as staff and/or other prisoners or a particular motivation, such as exploitation that results in a broader risk to the public and strangers.

You must also consider the risk posed to individual children or particular groups of children.

Target groups

To understand who is at risk, develop a solid understanding of current and previous offending. Questions to ask are:

- What do I know about past victims?
- Who might potential victims be?
- Is there a pattern to the characteristics of previous victims? Age, gender, vulnerability?
- How did they meet, target and/or groom victims?
- What similar scenarios could present a risk to differing groups?
- How vulnerable are they?
- Who else might be a target as a result of their lifestyle?

Identifying individuals

An assessment must lead to a plan to manage risks. Where you can identify specific individuals, it is important that their safeguarding becomes a core part of the plan. OASys refers to them as **known adults**.

For clarity: a "future partner" (in other words a person in the future with whom they form a relationship) is **not a known adult** because that relationship is yet to happen and they are not identifiable. You should capture that group under risk to the public.

Think about risk passing both ways "through the gate"

Always consider the risks in custody and the community. If an individual poses a risk to peers involved in criminality, what risk might they pose to other prisoners? If a prisoner uses violence in custody consider what has triggered it, such as response to use of authority or expressive violence due to poor communication skills. Consider what similar situations might occur in the community.

Risk does not necessarily decrease when an individual is in custody. Don't forget the prisoner may continue to present a risk to members of the community. This includes ongoing domestic abuse, grooming and psychological harm from abuse, neglect or harassment.

Ask: how is custody likely to impact on an individual's risk to themselves?

Return to Contents

Safeguarding children. Gather essential information about the child and their family, including whether the individual has any significant relationships with children, has contact with them, or is attempting to have contact or access. Share relevant information with children's services by making a safeguarding enquiry to establish whether the local authority are involved or hold information that may inform your assessment. Always adopt a 'Think Child' approach, this means consider what the situation looks and feels like from the perspective of any child who may be in contact with the individual being assessed.

A Think Child approach is more than a focus on the risk of abuse. Be aware of the factors in an individual's behaviour and lifestyle which pose a risk to a child's overall wellbeing and development. Think about what the impact is likely to be on the child and know what agency procedures you must follow to protect that child from harm. Further detail can be found within the HMPPS Child Safeguarding Policy Framework.

Understand how to make referrals to Children's services for early help and how to progress an urgent safeguarding referral where necessary.

Overview of Types of Abuse Children may be at Risk From

Neglect

- Factor in 60% of Serious Case Reviews[6]
- Parental substance misuse, domestic abuse, mental health
- Young parents
- Postnatal depression and social isolation
- Financial problems – poverty, homelessness, unemployment
- Patterns of improvement followed by deterioration
- Think about who is most vulnerable e.g. new-born babies, children with disabilities
- Consider adolescent neglect

Emotional abuse

- Ignoring the child, not showing affection
- **Rejection e.g.** verbal humiliation, physical abandonment, excluding the child from activities
- **Isolating e.g.** restricting social interaction, not communicating with the child
- **Exploitation e.g.** encouraging a child to take part in criminal activities(think County Lines Offending)
- **Terrorising e.g.** threatening violence, bullying
- Deliberately putting a child in a dangerous situation (Daly and Wright, 2017).

NSPCC Emotional Abuse

[6] Brandon, M. et al (2013). Neglect and serious case reviews: a report from the University of East Anglia commissioned by NSPCC. London: NSPCC.

Return to Contents

Physical abuse	**Sexual abuse**
● Consider non-accidental injuries and where these are more likely to occur ● Bruises, broken bones, cuts, burns ● Shaking, throwing, poisoning ● Consider fabricated or induced illnesses. ● Have the parents kept appointments with health staff and other professionals? ● Have you seen or observed the children recently? ● Strong links to neglect and emotional abuse	● Much wider than physical touching of a child ● Consider non-contact abuse ● Difficult to identify physical symptoms ● Beware of subtle risk indicators e.g. self-harm, sexualised behaviours, substance misuse, missing episodes ● Characterised by long term psychological harm, like mental health problems, poor relationships, risk taking behaviours

Self-harm and suicide

You will need to consider the individual's risk of suicide and self-harm in custody and the community.

Suicide is the result of a wide and complex set of inter-related factors. There are high rates of suicide and self-harm in the community probation population. People in police or prison custody are also at increased risk of suicide.

It's important to understand the relationship between suicidal behaviour and self-harm. Self-harm is a high-risk factor for later suicide and needs to be factored into assessments.

Self-harm can be a way of dealing with a difficult situation, but it can also be a way of communicating or managing distress. This also includes feelings of grievance, anger or frustration. Self-harm often acts as an internalised coping mechanism for managing difficult feelings, for tension relief or gaining a sense of control. It can also be 'externally focused', which means its function is communication, or seeking care and support. While self-harm does not always mean someone is suicidal, it is one of the strongest risk factors for suicide and it's important to consider whether suicide risk is present in addition to self-harm risk.

Seeking multiple sources of information when assessing risk to self will mean you are not overly relying on self-reporting. Very few individuals who die by suicide raise their intention with a professional.

Practitioners should also consider the imminence of suicide where current thoughts indicate risk (e.g. wish to die, or feeling hopeless and trapped). Such thoughts might move the individual towards dangerous behaviour including self-harm and/or plans for suicide. Where a risk to self is identified this must be addressed in risk management plans. Talk to a line manager about immediate steps you may need to take.

Recent research also suggests there may be a link between violence and self-harm or suicidal behaviour. We know that exposure to violence increases the likelihood of self-harm or suicidal thoughts. Being violent, especially repeatedly, further increases the risk of both self-harm and suicide. Current Ministry of Justice estimates suggest that between 20% and 30% of those who are violent also self-harm.

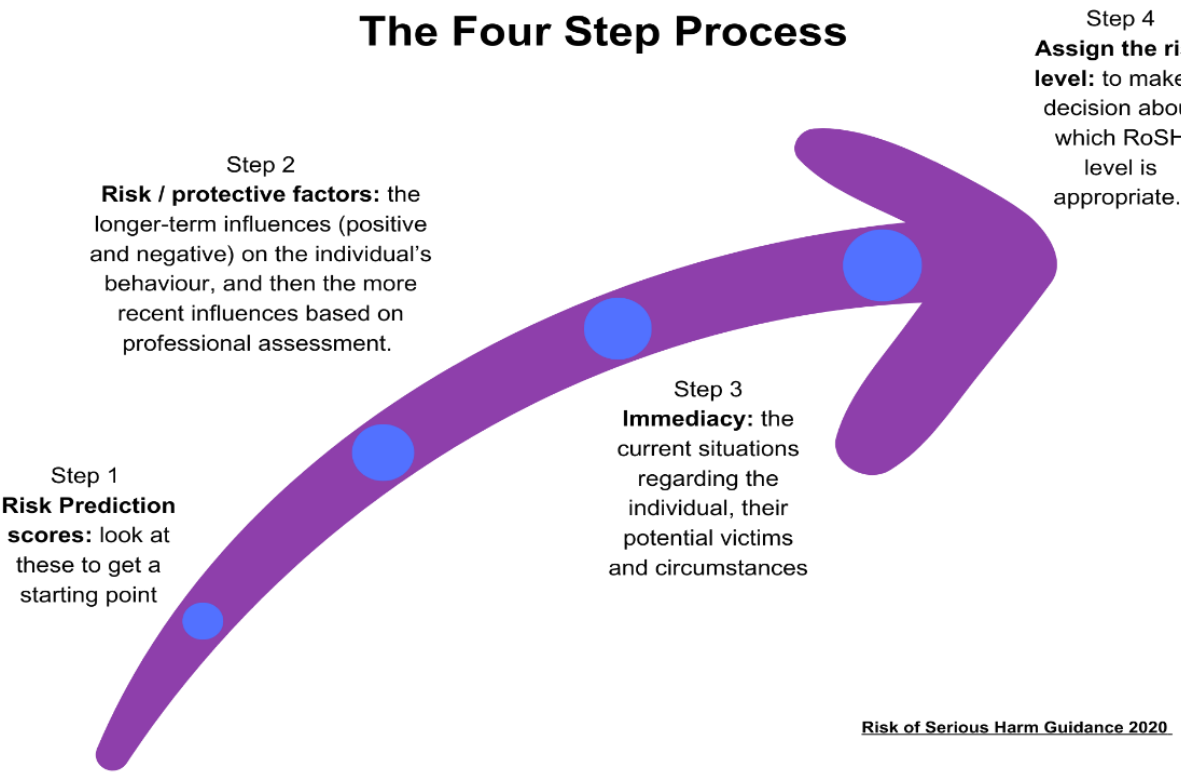
Return to Contents

The Four-Step process

The four-step process is a structured and analytical approach to risk assessment which can reduce bias and support consistency of risk assessments. It can really help you to focus on the key issues, especially when time is pressured and you have a lot of information to analyse. The four steps consist of:

1. **Using reoffending predictor scores as a starting point**
2. **Risk and Protective Factors**
3. **Immediacy**
4. **Assign the Risk Level**

Once you have



screened for a risk of serious harm, you'll need to use the Four-Step process to form a judgement about the risk category. It is currently HMPPS practice to assign one of four levels of risk. This supports the allocation of resources and determines the level of intervention, control, supervision and monitoring required.

Step 1 Use reoffending prediction score(s) to give a starting point

CSRP score

CSRP is a really helpful tool to use as a 'starting point' to aid your judgement about the RoSH level because CSRP predicts the likelihood of a seriously harmful offence being committed within two years, that will result in criminal sanction, beginning at the start of a community or suspended sentence order or any release on licence. If calculated for someone already under sentence or licence in the community, it will cover the next two years from the assessment date. Further information on CSRP and what constitutes a serious offence can be found here.

Return to Contents

For men with sexual offending history, the CSRP predictor combines three predictors: the Serious Violent Reoffending Predictor (SVRP) and the two scales of the SRP (Sexual Reoffending Predictor: direct contact, and images and indirect contact) to provide an overall combined score of serious reoffending.

Where there are no sexual offending convictions, the CSRP and SVRP scores will be the same. For women with sexual offending history, the CSRP score is slightly higher than the SVRP score, adding a simple estimate of their potential sexual reoffending risk.

The CSRP calculation includes a feature called Offence Free Time. This is a really positive factor for individuals as their good progress in the community will be reflected in their reoffending predictor scores. The serious violence (SVRP) element of CSRP takes into account the amount of time someone is in the community without returning to custody or being convicted of a new offence and reduces their score for each month that has passed (up to a maximum of 36 months).

The CSRP score can change based on how the dynamic questions in OASys are scored by the Probation Practitioner, which is why it's important to recalculate the CSRP score at key decision points during someone's supervision.

CSRP displays likelihood of proven serious reoffending within 2 years as a percentage score. These 2-year scores translate to the 'Low', 'Medium', 'High' or 'Very High' bandings as shown in the table below.

Band	**Combined Serious Reoffending Predictor** **2 year %**
Low	0 – 0.99%
Medium	1- 2.99%
High	3- 6.89%
Very High	6.9% and above

Return to Contents

CSRP Below 0.99%

This group usually have no or limited violent offending history. Women, and older men without sexual history, are particularly likely to be in this group.

CSRP 1- 2.99%

Among this group, those who also have higher VRP scores have long criminal histories including low-level violent offending. Others have shorter criminal careers that include sexual offences or more serious violent offending

CSRP 3- 6.89 %

Among this group, some have a history of repeated violent offending including some serious violence or high levels of dynamic risk factors, while most of those with lower VRP scores have been convicted of sexual offences.

CSRP 6.9% and above

Among this group, those with higher VRP scores tend to have longer criminal histories and higher levels of dynamic risk factors. Others will have multiple sanctions for contact or indecent images offences. Young men can present especially high serious violent and direct contact sexual risk.

Sexual Reoffending Predictor (SRP) score

The SRP levels will inform your starting point and aid your judgement about the RoSH level for adult males who have been convicted of a current or previous sexual/sexually motivated offence.

DC-SRP predicts the likelihood of contact adult offending.

IIC-SRP predicts the likelihood of indirect child contact offending and indecent image offending.

DC-SRP allocates people into one of four bands, Low, Medium, High or Very High.

Band	DC-SRP (%)	IIC-SRP (%)
Low	0.02-0.59	0.43
Medium	0.60-2.10	3.33
High	2.11-5.30	10.31
Very High	5.31 or above	N/A

On average someone assessed as high DC-SRP is approximately **three** times more likely to be convicted of a contact adult sexual offence than someone in the medium DC- SRP category. Someone in the very high-risk category is approximately **6x more likely** to have a proven direct contact sexual than those in the medium group.

Return to Contents

Violent Reoffending Predictor (VRP) score

The VRP predicts the likelihood of **all** proven violent reoffending. However, SVRP (the violent element of CSRP) was designed to identify those more likely to commit the most serious violent offences so we mainly use VRP to predict less serious violent offences such as: ABH, Common Assault, Public Order, Criminal Damage, harassment and violent acquisitive offences but **not** sexual offences.

Understanding the difference between the seriousness of the offences that CSRP and VRP predict will help you make decisions about the level of Risk of Serious Harm an individual is likely to pose.

For example: an individual might have a lower CSRP score, but they have numerous violent offences in their previous convictions. This is because they are lower-level violent previous offences, such as those listed above. This is telling us that someone might be more likely to commit lower-level violence than serious violence.



VRP reports the risk of proven violent reoffending within 2 years as a percentage score. These 2-year scores translate to the ‘Low’, ‘Medium’, ‘High’ or ‘Very High’ bandings as shown in the table below:

Band	**Violent Reoffending Predictor (VRP): 2 year %**
Low	0 – 29
Medium	30 – 59
High	60 – 79
Very High	80 – 99

Return to Contents

What the reoffending predictor scores tell you about an individual's risk of harm

We have different reoffending predictors so we can predict specific types of reoffending to help us better understand and address the specific risks.

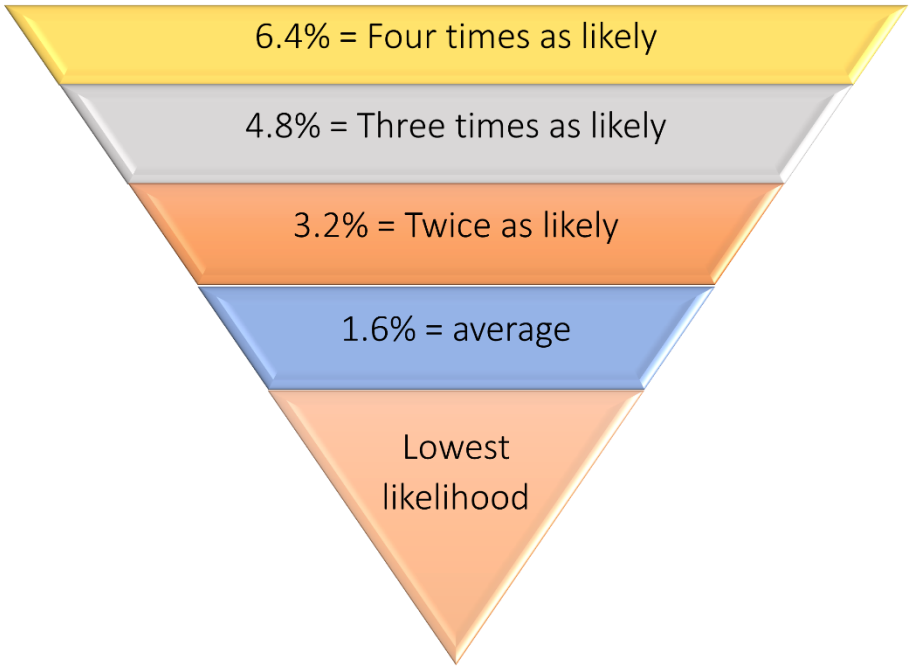
Scores that indicate harm (CSRP, SRP, VRP) should be prioritised when identifying your starting point for considering the harm someone may pose.

Consider what these scores are collectively telling you about the future risk e.g. what is the likelihood of them causing further sexual harm (SRP) as opposed to the likelihood of non-sexual violence. Is that violence likely to be serious (SVRP) or less serious (VRP).

For this reason, it is valid, for example, for someone to have a high DC-SRP score but a medium overall CSRP score, or a low CSRP but have a high VRP.

Interpreting CSRP

CSRP (including SVRP and SRP) percentages may seem low (especially when compared to VRP or ARP). This is because serious violent and sexual reoffending is relatively rare. The explanation and diagram below can help demonstrate what CSRP tells us.



The average CSRP score on the HMPPS community caseload (including those on licence) as of June 2023 was approximately 1.6%, but most of the community HMPPS population have a score lower than that: the average is raised by the small proportion with much higher scores. Custodial cases tend to have a slightly higher average score, due to custodial sentences being more likely for people with serious index offences and/or significant criminal history. It highlights the increased likelihood of proven reoffending as the CSRP score increases, compared to the average person on the HMPPS community caseload.

So, when we see scores above average and particularly over 3%, we need to pay attention, as this indicates those individuals are significantly more likely than most people we supervise to commit seriously harmful offences.

Return to Contents

CSRP is an unsuitable starting point for:

CSRP does not predict offences of:

- Child neglect;
- Extremist offending

Therefore, it would **not** be a suitable starting point for assessment of risks related to these types of serious harm.

Plea bargaining may hide severity of behaviours

Decisions in the pre-court process may lead to caution or conviction for less serious offences although a more serious charge might have been pursued. In those cases, you can consider the person's VRP score. Although this predicts a much broader set of violent offences than CSRP, it will give an indication of propensity for violence and aggressive behaviour.

Unusually high rates of unsanctioned offending behaviours

CSRP works on known recorded convictions and other formal sanctions. This will exclude convictions gained abroad unknown to the UK authorities, as well as offences which are not brought to justice. Some suspected, but not officially sanctioned, offending is likely for those with extensive criminal histories. A disproportionate and unusual level of offending not brought to justice can be analysed in the professional judgement steps 2 and 3.

Domestic abuse

CSRP predicts serious reoffending. This does include domestic abuse, but it is not specifically designed to predict all behaviours associated with domestic abuse. As offences such as coercive control and stalking have become far more frequent over the past few years, and nonfatal strangulation only recently became a specific criminal offence, we do not have sufficient reoffending data to establish how well CSRP predicts these offences.

This means the CSRP score provides a valid indication of whether someone is likely to commit a harmful offence that could be related to DA (e.g. GBH for all offenders, and rape for men who have sexual offending history), but we are not sure if the CSRP score can predict whether they are likely to commit an offence of for example, non-fatal strangulation specifically.

Domestic abuse may not always be known about or lead to criminal sanction, so reoffending predictor scores may not show the full history of behaviour. This is a known issue in the current system, and we may never know about some incidents that occur. Therefore, we cannot include this information in the calculation of the ARAIs.

However, testing shows reoffending predictors do predict proven reoffending just as accurately for people with domestic abuse concerns, as they do for other offending groups, even when past unproven offences aren't captured.

Research shows that overriding reoffending predictor scores on these cases usually makes reoffending predictions less accurate, not more. This is because practitioners may weight this information differently and are therefore likely to reach different conclusions.

Violent domestic abuse offences below the level of seriousness of Grievous Bodily Harm (GBH) such as common assault and criminal damage are predicted by the Violent Reoffending Predictor (VRP), rather than CSRP.

Return to Contents

VRP predicts the likelihood of all proven violent reoffending. However, SVRP (the violent element of CSRP) was designed to identify those more likely to commit the most serious violent offences so we use VRP to predict less serious violent offences such as: ABH, Common Assault, Public Order, Criminal Damage, harassment and violent acquisitive offences but not sexual offences.

Understanding the difference between the seriousness of the offences that CSRP and VRP predict will help you make decisions about the level of Risk of Serious Harm an individual is likely to pose.

Steps 2 and 3 are Professional Assessment

Both Step 2 and 3 relate to the concept of professional risk assessment. You will balance the impact of protective factors against the risk factors and then consider how the current circumstances interplay with those factors to affect the immediacy of the risk.

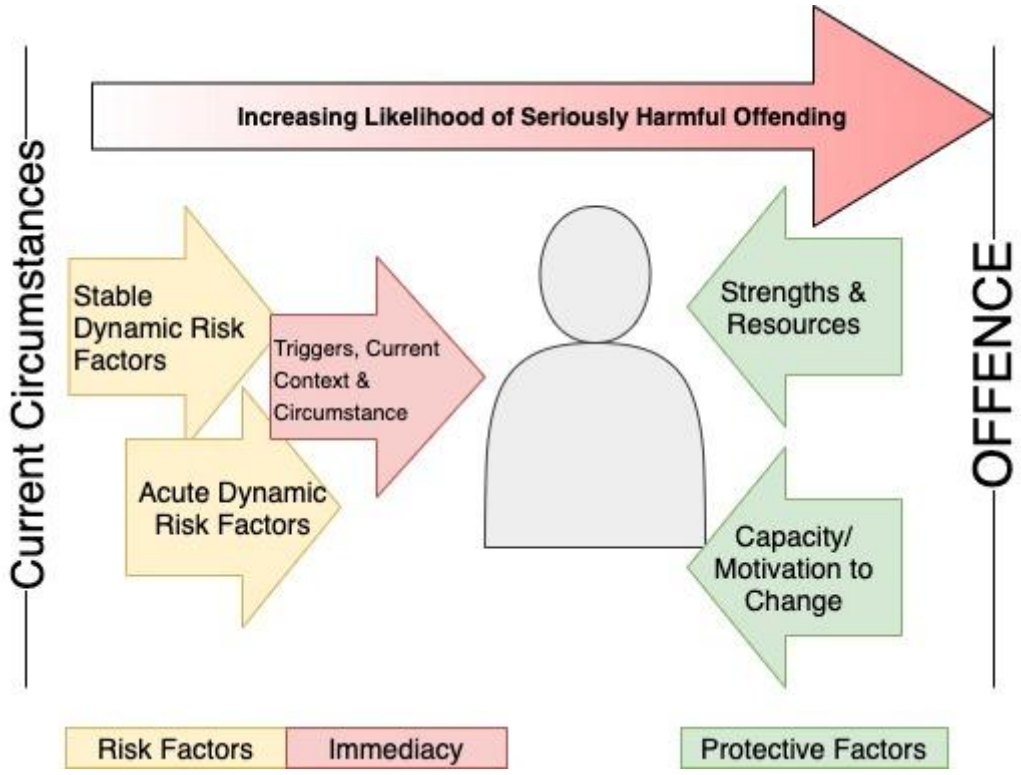


Diagram depicting the factors to consider in professional assessment that affect the likelihood and immediacy of serious harm[7]

Step 2 Consider risk and protective factors in the individual case

Risk Factors

When assessing the risk of serious harm, risk factors are characteristics or circumstances that make further seriously harmful behaviour more likely. They can be helpfully broken down to **static, stable dynamic and acute dynamic.** Examples are given in the table below**.** You will need to balance these against any established or emerging protective factors which may mitigate the risks posed.

[7] Informed by Risk of Harm Guidance and Training Resource (Kemshall 2011)

Return to Contents

Static Risk Factors	Stable Dynamic	Acute Dynamic
Static factors are things that cannot be influenced to change during supervision, such as someone's age or criminal history.	These are long term factors that may contribute to an individual's offending that could cause serious harm: i.e. temper control and substance misuse.	Things about the person that can change rapidly, usually identified from triggers to offending: a person with low self-esteem as a stable dynamic factor might have episodes of extreme jealously as a risk factor.

Protective Factors

Protective factors can be a strength, a circumstance or way of thinking that helps the individual overcome and desist from offending behaviours. They must be active in the individual's life and may mitigate the risks posed. The absence of a risk factor is not the same as protective factor. What is protective for one person may not be protective for another.

Strengths	Resources	Motivation
These are internal factors, like skills, abilities, self-control and coping skills.	These are external factors, like social networks, relationships, living circumstances, purpose and belonging	This might be what the individual values or makes them want to change, such as work or life goal

Protective factors are aspects of a person's life that are both actively present and are actively reducing the likelihood of offending, harmful behaviours or the impact of specific risk factors.

The role of professional assessment

Having identified the likelihood of serious reoffending using the reoffending predictors, you now need to ask:

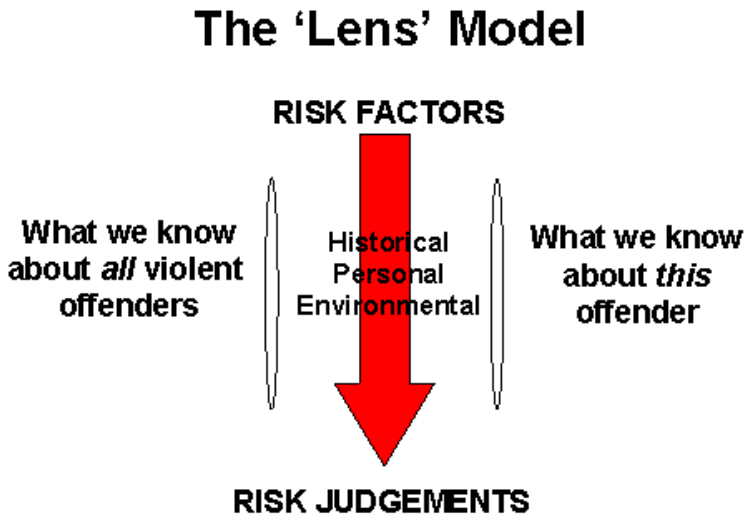
Which factors have the most impact on risk, which may significantly increase the likelihood of risk, or immediately escalate the potential for serious harm?

Understanding the individual is crucial to personalising the assessment and working out how general risk factors apply to a particular person in a particular set of circumstances. You will bring your own ways of seeing the world, which act as filters or lenses on your perceptions. Consider how this might affect your judgements.

In the 'Lens' Model[8], Brunswick describes lenses or filters that can influence the way evidence gathered is examined.

[8] Cited by Blackburn, R. (2000) Risk Assessment and Prediction. In: McGuire, J., Mason, T. and Kane, A. (eds.) *Behaviour, Crime and Legal Processes: A Guide for forensic Practitioners*. London: Wiley, pp. 177-204.

Return to Contents



[9]

Consider what impact does this person or their offence have on you and have you considered any role that bias might play in your assessment?

Risk Practice and Desistance

Professor Kemshall in Academic Insights 2021/07 has helpfully stated, *"There is often a perception that risk practice and desistance practice are two separate approaches but the boundaries are often less distinct. The key aims should be to integrate practice to manage risk with practice to enhance desistance, and to reintegrate individuals safely into the community. The over-riding question is always 'how can we do this safely?'"*

"Practitioners need to focus on a balanced approach to the 'pursuit of control and the promotion of change'.

Critical questions have to be applied to practice decisions. For example:

- Asking whether something can be done safely (e.g. joining a group, becoming a volunteer), and assessing and evidencing the answer to this question.
- Asking what could be put into place to make it safer and thereby potentially acceptable.
- If concluding that it is not safe, clearly articulating and recording the grounds and evidence base for this conclusion. And considering what alternatives might be better. Explain your rationale to the individual.
- Actions must be proportionate with a level that is commensurate with public safety; you can be precautionary up to a point, but this must be evidenced, reasonable, and justified.
- Remembering that all decisions potentially come under public scrutiny, including legal challenge. So be prepared, be explicit, and record well".

"All risk work is ultimately a balance between risk and rights, protection and integration, desistance supportive work and control, with the appropriate balance tailored to the

[9] Kemshall 2011, Risk of Harm Guidance and Training Resource

individual. The art of professional practice is the skill to weigh up such balancing acts in a transparent, defensible and evidential way."[10]

Forming and recording a rationale for the risk and protective factors identified

The dynamic version of CSRP includes the risk factors that are evidenced as being most clearly linked to serious harm, such as alcohol misuse or thinking and behaviour. Consider any additional risk factors that are not included within CSRP, such as sexual risk factors (emotional congruence with children, hostile orientation).

Where there are multiple victim groups, you should identify relevant risk factors for each group. In developing this analysis you'll need to draw on the current offence, current behaviours and circumstances including protective and risk factors, and any previous behaviours.

Understanding the Cross-over between Professional Judgement and Reoffending Predictors

When developing an understanding of a case using your professional assessment you are likely to consider the same dynamic factors that are present in the reoffending predictors. Reoffending Predictors, such as CSRP do not apply equal weight to all factors. Similarly, you are unlikely to weight all factors in your own professional assessment as equal.

We do not expect staff to have a formal understanding of the mathematical underpinnings of CSRP. However, you should be clear in your own judgement if there are circumstances or situations that suggest risk is increasing or that an reoffending predictor score, such as CSRP does not take into account.

Step 3 Immediacy

The primary difference between the levels of risk of serious harm is one of imminence.

Imminence means that risk that is **immediate** and **likely** based on the circumstances and context of that risk.

- How **active** is the risk now?
- How **exposed** are potential victims to that risk?

At step 3 it is important to analyse whether circumstances or situations serious harm would be most likely are currently present or likely to occur – during this step ask yourself:

What impact do I think the person's dynamic risk factors and protective factors will have on the chances of this person causing serious harm to a child, a known adult, the public, staff or a prisoner?'

High and Very High, an Important Distinction

A very high risk of serious harm means that the risk is **imminent**; the potential event is more likely than not to happen imminently, and the impact would be serious. To say risk is high means the potential event could occur at any time and the impact would be serious and is therefore not quite imminent.

[10] Kemshall, H. (2021). Risk and Desistance: A Blended Approach to Risk Management. HM Inspectorate of Probation Academic Insights 2021/07. Available at: Risk and Desistance: A Blended Approach to Risk Management (justiceinspectorates.gov.uk) (Accessed: 21 February 2022).

Return to Contents

Consideration of immediacy

In considering immediacy think about:

- the nature of **relationships with others;**
- the extent that **potential victims are known**;
- the **motivation to inflict harm** on others;
- the person's **relationship with others** that have similar motivations and/or behaviours and
- the **places** they habitually visit and the **activities** in which they partake.

Consider whether any of the following factors *a*re present as these can indicate an increase in risk:

- Lifestyle deterioration
- Victim proximity
- Breakdown in supervision and
- Psychological factors.

If we remember the Scott model (1977) from Page 8, here are some questions to aid thinking about immediacy using this model:

Individual

- What do I know about the person?
- What is their history and pattern of offending?
- Is the person exhibiting intent and capability to inflict serious harm on others or demonstrating minimal self-control or reckless dangerous behaviour with no concern for the safety of others?
- Is the person actively manipulating people and situations in order to cause serious harm?
- Is the person constantly on the lookout for opportunities to fulfil needs met by their offending?
- Will the person act as soon as any controls or limits on their behaviour are lifted or breakdown? If so, why do they not breach their conditions? Does the fear of return to custody sufficiently reduce imminence? Or are they trying to work around those conditions?
- Is there any offence-paralleling behaviour?
- Is the person able to manage their own risk? Do they understand their risk factors and use strategies learnt to manage these?

Victim

- What do I know about past victims?
- How were they targeted or groomed?
- Have previous victims been strangers? If so, why were they targeted and in what situations? How likely is that now?
- What do I know about the individual's proximity/access to and potential grooming of victims? How available are their target group of victims?
- Who might potential victims be?
- How vulnerable are the potential victims?

Return to Contents

Circumstances

- Is the person failing to comply with controls and limits set? Why is this? Is it ability to comply or because they are engaging in behaviours that could be triggers to offending? Consider the impact of timekeeping, literacy and personality disorder on compliance.
- Are the circumstances in which the person has committed harmful acts in the past now repeating?
- Are there any stressors or triggers in a person's environment? If so, does the individual have internal skills, strengths or motivation to cope with these?
- Does the person's current interactions or circumstances provide increased opportunity? (e.g. access to weapons or living with a child?)
- Does the person do anything or visit places which make risk of serious harm more likely?
- Is there any indication of offence-paralleling circumstances?

By thinking about these issues, you can judge how likely serious harm is and how soon it might occur and then assign the person to a RoSH level based on your assessment.

Setting the Overall RoSH level

Beginning to establish a risk level

It is important that deciding on a risk level:

- is a structured, evidence based and well-informed decision;
- is based on proper consideration of the risk criteria; and
- reflects the level of risk as accurately as possible.

To establish the level of risk you need to consider:

- what reoffending predictors tell you about the likelihood for harmful reoffending;
- nature and seriousness of harm – serious violence and/or sexual reoffending
- absence or presence of risk factors;
- absence or presence of protective factors and
- are there current circumstances that indicate offending is more likely at present than previous steps suggest or would risk factors need to escalate for offending to be more imminent (how soon).

(Kemshall 2011 Risk of Harm Guidance and Training Resource).

Risk of Serious Harm Level Definitions

In order to help you consider the appropriate risk of serious harm, consider the definition of each level below:

Low Risk of Serious Harm -Current evidence does not indicate likelihood of causing serious harm.

Return to Contents

Medium Risk of Serious Harm -There are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. The person has the potential to cause serious harm but is unlikely to do so unless there is a change in circumstances

High Risk of Serious Harm -There are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. The potential event could happen at any time, and the impact would be serious.

Very High Risk of Serious Harm- There is an imminent risk of serious harm. The potential event is more likely than not to happen imminently, and the impact would be serious.

Assigning the Risk of Serious Harm Level[11]

The following table can be a helpful reference for assigning the risk of serious harm level.

To assess a case **as low risk of serious harm** the assessor must be broadly satisfied that: • reoffending predictors scores that predict the most significant harmful behaviour for the case classify the risk as low or alternatively the assessor has a clear rationale for why the scores overestimate the risk • dynamic risk factors will be under long term control and there is no evidence of acute risk factors being present • protective factors are well established, self-maintaining and do not rely on an external risk management plan Remember, low risk does not mean no risk. You are assessing there is no **current evidence** of a likelihood of seriously harmful behaviour in the future.	Low
To assess a case **as medium risk of serious harm** the assessor must be broadly satisfied that: • reoffending predictors scores that predict the most significant harmful behaviour for the case classify the risk as medium or alternatively the assessor has a clear rational for why the scores overestimate or underestimate the risk • risk factors will be present but are under control and with limited acute risk factors; • the balance of protective factors is sufficient to mitigate current risk factors • the person has underpinning needs that indicate a risk of serious harm but there will be no evidence that they are actively seeking to engage in such behaviour • they will be compliant with external risk management strategies and will have made progress in developing their own ability to manage their own risk As a result they present as unlikely to cause serious harm without a change in circumstances.	Medium

[11] adapted from Kemshall 2008, 2011 Risk of Harm Guidance and Training Resource, and Kemshall, 2019 adapted from Kemshall et al (2011) Risk of Harm Guidance and Training Resource, DMU/NOMS

Return to Contents

To assess a case **as high risk of serious harm** the assessor must be broadly satisfied that: • reoffending predictors scores that predict the most significant harmful behaviour classify the risk as high or above or alternatively the assessor has a clear rationale for why the scores underestimate the likelihood of seriously harmful offending • static and stable dynamic risk factors are present and several acute risk factors may also be present • several protective factors may be present but they require active management, maintenance and support and are not sufficient to mitigate the risk • the person is likely to be on the lookout for opportunities to engage in those behaviours linked to serious harm • there is some level of compliance and engagement with risk management strategies; • the event is likely to happen if risk factors escalate or protective factors fail As a result they present a risk of serious harm that could happen at any time and the impact would be serious.	High
To assess a case **as very high risk of serious harm** the assessor must be broadly satisfied that: • reoffending predictors scores that predict the most significant harmful behaviour classify the risk as high or above or the assessor has a clear rationale for why the scores underestimate the likelihood of seriously harmful offending • risk is pervasive with a pattern of static, active dynamic and acute risk factors currently present • protective factors are absent or extremely limited • the person is hugely invested in the behaviours linked to serious harm and seeks opportunity to engage in those behaviours • the compliance with risk management is likely to be minimal and they have minimal (or no) capacity for self-management As a result they present an ongoing and imminent risk of causing serious harm that is more likely to happen than not and the impact would be serious.	Very High

Return to Contents

Risk Thresholds

Thresholding High vs Very High

When you assess someone as very high risk of serious harm, you are setting the expectation that you and all risk management partners treat the case as a top priority.

Some questions to consider are below:

- Are there any protective factors in place?
- Are the acute risk factors in the case active?
- How soon do you expect the offending to occur does anything need to change?
- Are they actively trying to create opportunities to offend or seeking opportunities instead?

Are they complying with risk management strategies in any way?

Thresholding High vs Medium

Determining the threshold, between high and medium risk of serious harm is one of the biggest challenges. It is an important distinction as the risk management expectations and restrictions on a case assessed as high risk of serious harm will be greater than a medium risk case. It will be helpful to discuss and reflect with colleagues or a line manager so you are not making decisions in isolation. Some questions and considerations are below:

- What does CSRP indicate?
- Are there a range of stable and acute risk factors currently present?
- What are the circumstances in which seriously harmful offences would be committed and how likely are they?
- Is the trigger something that could happen at any time or is it likely to require a change in overall circumstances?
- Is the individual seeking opportunities to offend in a seriously harmful way?
- Are they seeking to engage in behaviour that would activate their dynamic risk factors and make serious harm more likely?
- Are there any protective factors in place that mitigate the risks? Have they worked (or failed to work) before?
- Are they engaging with interventions and/or restrictions and what is their attitude to them?
- Is the evidence you are using credible and valid?
- Have you considered any personal bias you might hold?
- Are additional resources required to manage this case?
  Have you considered the impact of age? We know that, as people age there is a dramatic reduction in the likelihood of serious offending. Recent analysis of CSRP confirms that to be the case, so this factor is well captured in CSRP. Have you considered it in your professional assessment?

Thresholding Medium vs Low

It is reasonable to assess someone as a low risk of serious harm where there is evidence to support this assessment, irrespective of the type of previous offending. You need to assess future risks, not just the seriousness of previous behaviour:

- What do reoffending predictors scores tell you about the likelihood of future harmful offending?

Return to Contents

- How significant would the change in the person's circumstances need to be for risk to increase? Are those circumstances stable?
- Is there sound evidence that protective factors are mitigating the risk of serious harm and that they are well established and secure?
- Is the evidence you are using credible and valid?
- Have you considered any personal bias you might hold?
- If your view is that there is no current evidence to suggest a potential for serious harm then those individuals would normally be considered to pose a low Risk of Serious Harm.

Completing an assessment is not a one-off activity and risk can escalate very rapidly, so ongoing professional curiosity is essential to inform assessments and re-assessments. It is really important to consider the dynamic nature of risk.

Recording your rationale

You must use OASys, to undertake your risk of harm assessment as this will structure your thinking, support your judgement on the level of risk of harm selected and record the reasons for your decision along with the evidence in the RoSH summary. Risk Levels cannot be set or changed without a formal assessment being completed.

The tool is also structured to lead you into planning to manage the risks identified.

In providing your rationale, consider the opposing evidence and explain why you have given that less weight than the evidence that supports your argument.

Examples of rationales

Return to Contents

Risk Management Planning

Build your risk management plans using the risk and protective factors identified in the assessment.

Risk management is taking action to address the risk presented by a person, reducing the likelihood of serious harm occurring and reducing the potential impact of any such harm.

The OASys RMP is structured using the "Four Pillars" [12] to help you:

- address all the risk factors that you identified;
- safeguard identified individuals assessed to be at risk of serious harm;
- use a combination of internal and external controls;
- build protective factors and
- involve all connected agencies.

Good risk management plans are **based on sound, evidence based risk assessment**, and take into account the need to **balance support and restriction**. The plan must be **lawful, proportionate and necessary** but also most importantly the plan **must be implemented**.

Risk management strategies are grouped into three broad categories:

External controls are strategies aimed at reducing triggers to and opportunities for harmful behaviour. For example by restricting access to particular venues (like schools, leisure facilities) or access to previous victims or other individuals at risk.

Internal controls are strategies that focus more on developing an individual's ability to avoid and manage risk situations. They focus on longer term reductions in risk. They include accredited programmes. To promote self-risk management use programmes of intervention that seek to address readiness to change and to develop skills and strategies for:

- avoidance – e.g. of specific triggers for offending behaviour;
- involvement in other activities to 'divert' away from offending and
- cognitive skills – understanding consequences of behaviour, identifying reasons not to offend, learning to negotiate or be assertive.

Building protective factors reinforcing, developing or using strengths and resources to build a positive alternative to an offending lifestyle.

Individuals we work with may often be subject to multiple plans to manage risk. You should know the rationale and content of other agencies' plans and integrate them with your own. Common examples are child protection plans and police response plans.

[12]The 4 Pillars of risk Management is an approach to the planning and delivery of risk management developed by Prof. Hazel Kemshall at De Montfort University. The model is based on the four pillars of Supervision, Monitoring & Control, Interventions and Treatment and Victim Safety Planning.

Return to Contents

Further Reading

Risk and Desistance: A Blended Approach to Risk Management (justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)

MAPPA Guidance Risk Management Chapter

The role of capacity in developing risk management plans

Consider the impact that the individual's needs have on their capacity to engage with the plan. The plan needs to be achievable for the individual as well as proportionate to the risk:

- What impact do risk factors and individual needs have on their ability to engage with components of the plan?
- Could you consider sequencing components to reduce pressure on the individual or develop stability first?
- Have you considered the role of personality disorder, neurodiversity, or other mental health needs in the management of the case?

Exploring previous plans

- Explore previous plans to identify what has and hasn't worked in the past:
- Are there specific risk management strategies that have proven effective in detecting precursors to offending?
- Have specific restrictions such as Approved Premises (AP) placement enabled sufficient monitoring to allow early intervention?
- What hasn't worked well and what were the barriers to engagement? Is there any sign that circumstances are different now? Is there another way to achieve the outcome via a different route? Can barriers to engagement be addressed?

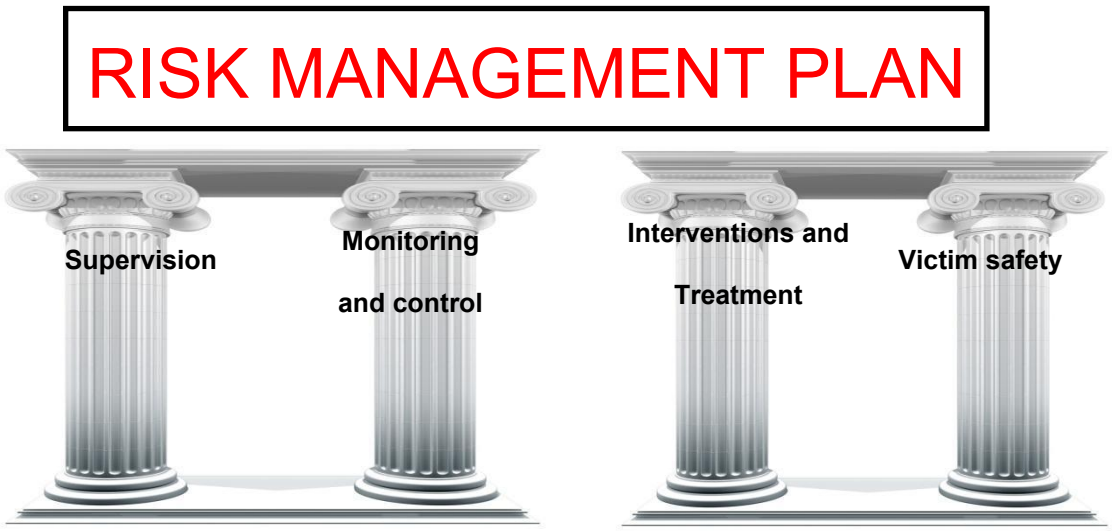
Making plans happen

Risk Management Plans will be agreed between multiple parties including the person being managed. To ensure plans are enacted you should seek agreement and clearly record:

- who is responsible for implementing each part of the plan;
- what actions are needed to implement each part of the plan and
- when they should be completed by.

Return to Contents

The Four Pillars



The Four Pillars approach

Risk management must have these elements. Together they produce plans that focus on protecting people at risk. They help you monitor and act on increases to the risk of serious harm, and also support the individual in making positive changes.

Supervision Having contact with the person. This is not limited to the HMPPS staff working with the them; it includes contact as part of a reporting requirement, but will also include partner agencies.	**Monitoring / Control** The steps taken by agencies to restrict their ability to offend and monitor the emergence of acute risk factors.
Interventions / Treatment Work that develops internal controls. It is likely to involve accredited programmes, developing protective factors such as strengths and personal resources, or engaging in treatment.	**Victim safety planning** Plans to keep the current and/or potential victims safe and ensure that the victim has a voice in the management of the risk to them.
Contingency planning The best contingency plans include action to take for when dynamic risk factors change, restrictions are broken, circumstances change or components of the plan fail.	

Return to Contents

Supervision

The Role of Supervision

Supervision is not limited to statutory supervision by the Prison, the Probation Service and YOS but also includes engagement with any other agency with a role in supporting people in a way which can help them to lead law abiding lives.

To be effective you need to decide on:

- the frequency of contact; matching this to the level of risk;
- the need for supervised accommodation;
- any activity to develop protective factors and
- the role of supervision e.g. focussing on compliance and motivational work.

Examples of Supervision

- Office-based supervision
- Home visits (from all parties)
- Contact with healthcare professionals
- Interaction with staff in Approved Premises
- Tenancy support from Housing Associations
- Employment advocacy
- Education
- Mentoring

Deciding on the frequency and nature of supervision

To monitor risk factors, you should consider how much need there is for frequent contact, based on the risk assessment, the nature of the interventions you will deliver and the needs outlined under monitoring and control.

A strong RMP will:

- identify all agencies involved; agreeing the service they provide and the nature and frequency of contact;
- record your professional judgement about the frequency of supervision and home visits by the relevant agencies;
- identify when contact can be reduced and why;
- refer to other parties for support with developing protective factors;
- identify and conduct the work required to improve motivation to change or improve compliance and
- be specific about sequencing of different elements.

For cases where there is placement within an Approved Premises, clarify the actions required of the AP key worker, particularly around resettlement and purposeful activity.

Return to Contents

Monitoring and control

This is a term used to describe strategies you design to detect the build-up to serious harm and prevent it happening.

Monitoring

Monitoring should focus on identifying:

- potential victims, including means of access;
- compliance with restrictions imposed to limit capacity to cause serious harm;
- evidence of acute risk factors becoming active;
- evidence of any change in the individual's circumstances (such as a partner's pregnancy or the end of a relationship);
- evidence of any change within the person that is likely to have an impact on the immediacy of risk (growing fixation with victims and increased sexual preoccupation are examples) and
- additional information about behaviours and networking.

Types of monitoring

Having an investigative approach is important – it is not the responsibility of the police to undertake all monitoring.

Monitoring can take many forms:

- Monitoring contacts in prison, visit lists, pin phone monitoring and mail monitoring
- Cell and room searches to identify inappropriate reading material, contact details, weapons etc
- Monitoring of internet use through monitoring software
- Home leave (prison) or overnight stays (community) to test implementation of learning and test out resettlement plans
- Direct surveillance
- Sharing information and asking for updates from partners
- Polygraph testing
- Drug testing
- Electronic/location monitoring.

Control

Control is the part of the plan that aims to reduce the opportunities for someone to cause serious harm.

Don't assume one type of control will suit everybody, even if they have similar offending. They should be tailored to the individual and their identified risks.

Types of Control

Examples of control:

- The use of licence conditions:
  - Restrictions on accommodation;
  - Restrictions on associations, activities and movements
- Electronically monitored curfew or exclusion zones Where people have committed sex offences or domestic abuse - the use of restrictive orders

Return to Contents

- The use of warning markers to notify staff of specific risks to staff safety such as history of weapon possession
- Child Protection Plans
- Adult social care plans
- Custody restrictions:
    - Non-association
    - Location requirements,
    - Public Protection Manual restrictions including restrictions on contact with children in custody if identified as a Person Posing a Risk to Children (PPRC).

Conditions must be lawful, realistic and enforceable. They must also be necessary and proportionate. Necessary means there are no other way of managing the risk. Proportionate means that the restriction is the minimum necessary.

Links to contingency planning

If monitoring for the acute risk factors results in you identifying changes, make sure you respond and trigger your contingency plans.

Links to supervision and interventions

Supervision is an opportunity to monitor an individual. It provides agencies with insight into their life and activities and provides some control through requiring them to be at specific places at specific times. For the highest risk people, particularly during periods of increasing risk intensive supervision may be necessary and proportionate. Requiring them to report more frequently provides an increased level of monitoring and provides some restriction on their opportunity to offend against the public.

Professional decision-making about monitoring and control

Where there are multiple risk factors identified, each risk area must be considered for monitoring and control. The risk factors identified in steps 1, 2 and 3 of the 4-step process give you a good starting point.

- What does your assessment tell you about the early warning signs, what needs to be monitored and what controls are required?
- Is there anything about how they met their victim and the wider circumstances that now needs to be monitored or suggests a restriction is required?
- If offending is drugs related does there need to be testing available to monitor for relapse?
- If weapons have been a feature of offending, would this create a case for security led cell searches?
- Does the pattern of violence involve specific peers? Is it proportionate and necessary to restrict contact?
- How will you establish if they have begun grooming a child again? What does previous offending tell you to look for?
- Ensure that you have licence conditions or preventative orders in place that enable you to respond to any situations that might increase the risk of serious harm.
- Will management at level 2 or 3 help you to achieve additional monitoring and control?
- Have you considered conditions but decided they were not proportionate? If so record this decision with clear reasons.
- What other orders might be available via the police to restrict their ability to cause serious harm?
- How have they complied with restrictions previously? What has and hasn't worked?

Return to Contents

- When will these restrictions be reviewed?
- Is the monitoring and control necessary and proportionate?

Interventions and treatment

Interventions and treatment focus on developing the person's ability to manage high risk situations and build strengths and protective factors to support desistance from offending. They also address shortcomings in the person's behaviours and thinking skills.

They may:

- include proven accredited programmes;
- involve a number of agencies and personnel;
- be delivered one-to-one;
- comprise a number of actions and activities that require coordination and sequencing and
- involve use of the good lives model

Interventions should be specific to risk factors and sequenced to prioritise those linked to serious harm. There will be occasions where you will need to address practical issues first. You must record these decisions.

Examples

- Supportive, integrative and mentoring/key work approaches where risk assessments indicate their usefulness
- Medical or psychological interventions as required
- Drug and alcohol advisory services
- Other activities to divert them from offending, such as appropriate employment or voluntary work
- Identifying roles for family parents and carers where appropriate

Links to supervision and contingency planning

Supervision may be the delivery model for interventions, particularly where they focus on developing motivation or include 1:1 work. There will also be overlap between modern accredited programmes and building protective factors for individuals.

It's important to build in contingency plans for when interventions fail or fall through. A good contingency plan around an intervention can make the difference between a small set-back and the domino effect of breakdown in supervision and compliance. Examples might be planning for negative funding decisions for rehabilitation placements or the end of mental health intervention.

Victim safety planning

This is about previous victims and potential victims. Individuals who need safeguarding may be victims of the index offence or other identified people who you assess to be at risk. Victim safety strategies should protect these people from harm and involve other staff working with them.

Victim safety planning will comprise of monitoring and control techniques for limiting and/or preventing access to specific individuals or groups. Contingency plans will also be needed for when these restrictions are breached or when changes affect victim safety. However, when recording risk management plans on an individual's case record an

Return to Contents

assessor must take care not to disclose information that could put victims at risk or undermine agency attempts to protect them.

Victim Contact Scheme

Determine whether the case is eligible for the statutory or discretionary Victim Contact Scheme (VCS) and actively share information to keep the Victim Liaison Officer informed of any change, development or progression with the individual's sentence.

Remember the Victim Contact Scheme is about communication and keeping the victim informed. In itself, it is not a safety measure.

Domestic Abuse Safety Officers

Domestic Abuse Safety Officers (DASOs) formerly Partner Link Workers (PLW) work with victims, current and ex-partners of individuals who are attending the Building Better Relationships accredited programme. Their role includes victim safety planning to alleviate immediate risk. Remember to maintain regular contact with DASOs to share information about changing circumstances linked to risk and include them in victim safety planning.

Many other victims or other individuals at risk do not receive statutory victim input from probation, but you still need to consider their safety. Use the **victim safety planning section** of the RMP to outline the actions that will be taken to ensure they have the right information and to manage these risks. This may include gathering and sharing information with police, children's services or relevant partnership agencies in the area in which the victim resides to reduce the risk posed to them and ensuring appropriate disclosure takes place.

Safeguarding

Where you know the identity of a child or adult at specific risk, develop plans to reduce that risk. This will normally involve some degree of multi-agency working, such as child protection/child in need planning. Include references to these structures and referrals. When working with a prisoner, you must still take into consideration safeguarding measures for adults and children identified as being at risk. This may include telephone call monitoring, Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) conditions and the nature of visits.

Examples of Victim Safety Actions

- The disclosure of information to third parties or to the victim or individual at risk
- Action by Children's Social Care
- Exclusion zones and non-contact licence conditions
- Restraining, non-molestation and other orders
- Visits being restricted via the measures in the Public Protection Manual
- Supervised visits to a vulnerable adult relative
- Fire alarms or fire safety visits
- Safeguarding flagging on relevant addresses
- Cocoon watches for domestic abuse perpetrators

Return to Contents

Contingency Planning

If X happens then Y must be done, and why

A contingency plan is constructed around a potential scenario where

- further seriously harmful offending is imminent;
- the plan is about to be undermined or
- some other predictable event of significance might happen.

Contingency plans are helpful when written clearly; they make an excellent source of reference when things start to go wrong. They are also useful if you are not available and a colleague or manager has to respond to the case on your behalf. You should link contingency plans to the factors identified in the risk assessment and are most helpful when in the format: *if X happens then Y must be done, and why.*

Contingency planning should also consider breakdown in the current plan, when and why recall/breach action should be considered and any immediate safeguarding activity that would be required in the event of identifying new people at risk (i.e. new partners or vulnerable adults they have befriended).

Consider[13]-

- What is likely to happen first in this case and why?
- What is most likely to go wrong and what can I/we do about it?
- What do I/we want to stop happening?

The factors you will want to plan for will be individual and particular to the person you are managing. You will have identified these factors as part of the four-step process and the ''analysis of risk factors'' section of your OASys assessment within step 2 asks you to consider how these factors might change and increase risk. These will help you consider the circumstances you need to monitor and the broad actions you could take.

Common themes related to escalating risk around which to base contingency plans:

- A change in situational risk - this could be because someone has increased proximity to victims, or is behaving in ways that are likely to increase proximity or to increase opportunity to offend in other ways. It could also be because of a change to someone else's circumstances, such as a partner's pregnancy
- Deterioration in lifestyle e.g. loss of accommodation, relapse into drug or alcohol use, increased association with offending peers etc.
- Psychological factors e.g. increased preoccupation with offending or offending-related issues, deterioration in mental or psychological wellbeing etc. and
- Breakdown in supervision e.g. missing appointments, superficial compliance

Once you've identified the trigger it's then essential to specify what to do about it. The action must be specific and relevant. Clearly identify what the required actions are, in what circumstance they should happen, who needs to undertake them and what the timescale is. Where partnership agencies are involved, get agreement from them to undertake the actions specified. If the scenario is so concerning that enforcement is the only option, then this should be clearly specified.

Examples of other actions might include:

- increased frequency of reporting;
- safeguarding referral;

[13] Kemshall, 2019; Risk Assessment and Management Training

Return to Contents

- move into an Approved Premises;
- additional licence conditions;
- removal of cell-sharing;
- referral to mental health team;
- notifying partner agencies to increase intervention, monitoring and support;
- implementing back-up arrangements for accommodation;
- contacting victims or adults identified to be at risk;
- checks by police;
- cell searches and
- segregation.

Once you have your contingency plan, it's important to check you have included the necessary tools in your RMP to action it.

- Is further monitoring required to detect the trigger and would doing so be proportionate? (Drug testing, additional level of reporting such as sign-ins)
- Do other agencies need to be partners in the plan? Could they identify the trigger?
- What do you need to monitor regularly as part of supervision? (Consider 'check-in' topics as part of supervision).
- Is there a gap in terms of intervention? (Have you considered the benefit of a cognitive behavioural program?)

Consider the four pillars when drawing up your contingency plans.

- How should you supervise?
- What monitoring or immediate control should you impose to mitigate the risks?
- What additional interventions should you put in place?
- How should you protect children or adults at risk?

Examples

If Mr X breaches his curfew or sign ins then police will activate their safeguarding plan for the victim/former partner, this includes a welfare check on both her and her mother due to his attempts to access the victim via her mother in the past. Given the imminent nature of the risk he is currently assessed to pose; failures of more than 15 minutes should be considered for emergency recall.

The Dynamic Nature of Risk Assessment

Risk assessment is dynamic. Be mindful of potential changes in the Risk of Serious Harm presented by people as you manage them. This structured approach to risk assessment is not intended purely for the formal completion of reoffending predictors, but also the continual assessment of dynamic risk.

To this end be aware of and monitor:

- behaviours/situations/access to potential victims that will influence your assessment of the immediacy of any risk;
- what risk factors are currently active;
- what protective factors have been developed;
- how this relates to what reoffending predictors tell you about this individual and
- how your own bias may influence your assessment, and the influence that the relationship you build with the people involved may have on that bias.

Return to Contents

Consider how predictable significant changes will be managed (i.e. move on from an Approved Premises with reduced support and monitoring, or the end of supervision where you will reduce formal supervision and oversight).

Increasing risk

As part of the risk assessment you will have developed an understanding of the circumstances likely to give rise to increased risk. Common signs of deteriorating circumstances and behaviour that have been linked to increases in risk are[14]:

- **Victim proximity** e.g. new relationships
- **Lifestyle deterioration** e.g. changes such as breakdown or bereavement, loss of employment or accommodation deterioration in outward appearance; increased alcohol/drug consumption; breakdown in support systems
- **Psychological factors** e.g. change in usual mood
- **Breakdown in supervision** e.g. change in reporting pattern, behaviour in interview or group programme; reduced compliance change of routine behaviour for no apparent reason; unusual requests e.g. change of work or location for no apparent reason.

Responding to increased risk

Take action. Do not ignore. Do not just record. If your ability to act is constrained by competing demands discuss this with your line manager.

What action you take will depend on (1) the degree of deterioration identified, and (2) on your risk assessment of that individual. Discuss with your line manager or another appropriate colleague. Depending on your role, you may need to give your information to someone else or you may need to respond directly yourself.

Types of action/response

With the individual:

- talk or home visit

For the individual:

- increase frequency of reporting/key work;
- increase the length of interviews;
- provide emergency practical help and
- seek specialist intervention.

To the individual:

- breach;
- seek recall;
- administer prison discipline;
- add additional licence conditions and
- residence at Approved Premises.

[14] Derived from Kemshall 2011 Risk of Harm Guidance and Training Resource.

Return to Contents

With partner agencies:

- share, seek and discuss information
- explore differences of opinion

Ensure action is proportionate to the risk. Use your carefully constructed contingency plans!

Recognising decreasing risk

Risk can decrease as well as increase. The primary aim of your risk management plan is to reduce the short and long-term risk of serious harm posed by the individual. In your plan you should have identified means to intervene to mitigate risk factors that influence their harm-related behaviours. You should list any ways to build protective factors to create social capital and support them to move away from offending.

It can be a significant challenge to decide at what point the overall level of risk has reduced. Use evidence when you make decisions to reduce the risk of harm level. Be mindful of the validity of sources when drawing conclusions. Also, be mindful of the interplay between risk factors that may have reduced and the overall assessment of risk.

Questions to consider:

- Has the completion of an intervention had a meaningful impact on the individual? What were the goals of that intervention and have they been realised? What is the evidence for this?
- Where else can you verify an improved pattern of behaviour? Who else might have insight and how reliable a source are they?
- How frequent has the pattern of risk related behaviour been in the past? How does that compare with any periods of positive behaviour now?
- For new protective factors consider how invested they are in them? Has this played a role in preventing harm related behaviours in the past? If so, how and why and does that relate to now?
- How do they view themselves as a result of these new protective factors? Has there been a shift in their self-perception and is this supported by third party evidence?
- Are you being pessimistic about change?
- Are you being overly-optimistic about change?

When reviewing risk of Serious Harm

Do not:

- Set or change a risk level without completing a formal OASys assessment
- make assessments in isolation; multi-agency communication is key;
- rely only on self-report about reductions in risk; identify other sources that can validate what you are being told;
- assume intervention completion always means a risk factor has been addressed; seek evidence of change and opportunities for the person to show improved, relevant skills;
- assume superficial compliance means that risk is reducing or
- assume non-compliance is defiance mistakes can still be made when risk is reducing e.g. - is time-keeping central to this person's risk of serious harm?

Do:

- conduct full reviews of your formal risk assessment when there is a significant change;

Return to Contents

- seek out evidence of positive change; this is even less likely to arrive passively;
- maintain strong relationships with partners to the Risk Management Plan so that there is confidence in the sharing of information and a joint approach;
- record your decision making; record what you are going to do (or not do) and why;
- take self-report of risk-increasing behaviours seriously, it can be a call for help and
- review your risk management plan following any change in risk to ensure it remains sufficient, necessary and proportionate.

Where Risk Management can go wrong

Themes from Serious Further Offence reviews are presented here to support learning from these incidents to strengthen our risk assessment and management.

Gathering and verifying information and seeing the whole picture

Don't simply gather information: analyse it to identify risk factors.

It is essential to verify sources of information when that information influences key risk related decision making.

When making risk assessments explore the key sources of information provided to you, including previous behaviour such as convictions, alleged behaviour and un-convicted offences.

An emerging theme in SFO reviews is that practitioners can miss use of weapons and lifestyles that are linked to street conflict as risk factors despite evidence. Look out for these risk factors even where they are not be present in the index offence and include them in your assessment and plan action to address them.

Isolated decision-making and recording

Recording why you have made a particular decision (enforcement, risk level, licence condition removal/addition, etc.) gives you an immediate opportunity to reflect on why you have made the decision and means your decision-making is open. It enables others to look back and understand why decisions were made and the evidence they were based on. Failure to record leaves people guessing your reasons.

You should ask colleagues and managers to challenge your decisions constructively so that you can ensure you have considered all the factors.

Contingency planning and taking action in response to escalating risk

The whole purpose of making a professional risk assessment is that it leads to a risk management plan being formed and acted upon to address the risks. Contingency plans are central to this. SFO reviews often identify a lack of action when risk management breaks down there may have been a lack of contingency planning or practitioners may have missed going back to their plan and acting on them in the face of escalating risk. It's essential that you develop a contingency plan for the circumstances you have assessed will increase the risk of serious harm. When those circumstances happen, it is equally essential that you follow the plan you have laid out.

Measuring progress

Progress must be measured objectively by the assessor and be specific to the person's risk factors, protective factors and circumstances. It's difficult to avoid bias when

Return to Contents

assessing progress and as you build a relationship with a person there is an increasing risk of over-optimism. This is where supervision helps. Again, don't make decisions in isolation and verify information used to make decisions. Time in itself and without context is not a measure of progress. Six months in the community without conviction can mean very different things for different people.

Reviewing assessments

Assessments should be reviewed following a significant event that indicates changes to an individual's key indicators of risk of reoffending and/or harm. As a broad set of considerations for whether an event is significant or not, please consider:

- if there is a change that could affect a reoffending predictor upon which your assessment is based (the one used for Step 1);
- if changes have a material impact on the management of the case, actions required to meet risk and needs and protect victims.
- if you think the level of risk may have either increased or decreased
- if you have discovered new risk factors through the course of supervision and ongoing assessment;
- where your understanding of the interrelationship between risk factors changes;
- where new protective factors are developed;
- where there has been progress in developing internal controls;
- where a person's behaviour, access to victims, or circumstances change and may have an impact on the immediacy of risk and
- where there needs to be a change to the risk management plan – of particular note:
    - a move from Approved Premises to independent accommodation. This is a significant reduction in monitoring and should result in a review
    - to aid understanding of a case; where the practitioner managing the sentence has changed.

Appendix 1 Bias in Risk Assessment

This appendix is reproduced here with kind permission from Kemshall et al (2011) Risk of Harm Guidance and Training Resource.

Professional judgements are not just affected by the person's responses but also by the thought processes, behaviours and emotional reactions of the assessor. We can acknowledge the ways in which people who have offended may seek to manipulate impressions, but it can be more difficult for practitioners to recognise the ways in which they can also bring **bias** into the process.

Below is a summary of the role of bias in risk assessment and some of the steps you can take to consider bias in your practice.

No assessor is completely free from bias

All assessors bring with them their beliefs, emotional responses and their ways of thinking about the world. These individual differences interact with different environmental contexts.

Return to Contents

How we think about the world, how we behave and how we feel are all interrelated and affect each other. The individual in turn affects the world around them which, of course, has an impact on them.

When we observe others, we see only the ‘tip of the iceberg’. The thoughts and feelings that are influencing actions may be less apparent.

Part of the task of a risk assessor is to gather information that clarifies the connections which are influencing offending behaviour in an individual. However, this model also applies to risk assessors themselves.

It’s therefore important for you to:

- know your own thoughts, feelings and personal beliefs and how these might affect your decision-making about an individual and impact on how you view their risk and
- know your own value base.

Impact of contact with the person

Professional methods of assessment are rooted in interpersonal contact. The individuals involved will influence those contacts. This interpersonal contact is often helpful, but can lead to mistakes.

For example, someone is very likable and you share common interests that have given you a real advantage in establishing a rapport with them. However, this will affect how you view information from them and in turn the questions you choose to ask, particularly in reference to the validity of their self-report.

Alternatively, you may fear the people you work with, as a result of the nature of their offence, their demeanour or aspects of your own life experience.

Being mindful of unreal pessimism and unreal optimism

You could place, on a spectrum, two possible core value bases which might inform practice with people who have offended. First, a focus on public protection and second, a desire to aid/change people’s lives. However, this generalisation is far too broad and in reality, individuals working across criminal justice in a wide range of settings will be at different points on the spectrum and individual responses may vary over time.

Approaches will be influenced by the agency and by the group/s the assessor manages with so that workers focusing on substance misuse or employment may differ from probation officers supervising very high-risk people.

Spectrum of core values



The extremes of this spectrum can lead to unreal optimism. You may want to believe you are being effective and that an individual is making progress or you may develop unreal pessimism, refusing to see signs of progress.

Return to Contents

4 Types of assessor

If we adapt Gilbert's (1997) description of criminal justice workers; staff can be divided into:

- professionals (open and non-defensive);
- reciprocators (wanting to help people);
- enforcers (enforcing rules rigidly and punishing violations) and
- avoiders (minimising contact with prisoners).

PROFESSIONAL Likely to be the most accurate risk assessors as they will be more willing to listen to new information and more willing to accept that they may be wrong. Are motivated by wanting to do a 'good job' should encourage accuracy.	**RECIPROCAL** Likely to be good at developing positive relationships. They can be a good basis for change, but may be over-optimistic and more likely to collude, or ignore information that may be damaging to the person they supervise.
ENFORCING Understand the importance of risk assessment for public protection. They may be less good at identifying strengths, who in turn may lack trust and be unwilling to disclose, limiting the information that can be obtained.	**AVOIDING** It's difficult to identify strengths in this sector: they will clearly limit their ability to obtain good information or to build relationships that might encourage change in the future.

The importance of good supervision

Some of the thoughts and feelings that affect our work with people who have offended our interviewing and our assessments, aren't just temporary. Some thoughts and feelings can be long-term and deep-seated.

For example, over time some workers become fatalistic about risk. They doubt their own practice effectiveness, and have doubts about their role and responsibilities. This is exhibited in an attitude where they doubt whether anything they do will make a difference. This can result in a lack of engagement and a lack of 'follow through' on key actions and responsibilities. The result can often be more error and subsequent risk management failures.

These feelings and thoughts need to be dealt with professionally and positively. Line managers should:

- talk to staff who appear to exhibit these thoughts, feelings and behaviours and
- take steps with staff to address the key issues.

Staff should:

- seek appropriate counselling and advice;
- talk with their line manager and
- develop strategies to review these thoughts, feelings and beliefs as we carry out and interviews and conduct risk assessments.

Return to Contents

Belief in ability

Your belief in your ability to work effectively with a particular person or offending type is another source of potential error and bias. People's beliefs in their efficacy have diverse effects.[15] Such beliefs can influence:

- the courses of action people choose to pursue;
- how much effort they make;
- how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles and failures;
- their resilience to adversity;
- whether their thought patterns are self-hindering or self-aiding;
- how much stress and depression they experience in coping with taxing environmental demands and
- the level of accomplishments they realise

Perceptual bias

Perceptual bias includes:

- **representative** - assuming knowledge regarding one individual within a particular group means you know about all people in that group;
- **confirmation** - only paying attention to information that supports the judgement you have already reached and
- **availability** - over reliance on information easily obtained.

Bias and the Lens Model

The Lens Model suggests that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with using specific filters as part of professional judgement; indeed, all the research that informs professional decision-making forms a professional filter that helps assessors make sense of complex situations.

Filters will also arise from the individual beliefs of the assessor. The challenge is to ensure that filters are helpful and used consciously by a self-aware assessor.

Risky filters are:

- conscious or unconscious discrimination (whether class, gender, race, sexuality, beliefs about the proper demeanour of the interviewee and so on) and
- use of invalid models; for example, an understanding of behaviour drawn from the media rather than from properly researched theory.

The Dangers of Confirmation Bias

Confirmation bias may be particularly significant, with workers getting a view about a case too quickly and then only looking for information that supports that view and therefore only putting into place limited interventions. For example, in interview the worker has information about alcohol misuse and the offending and reaches a view that all the offences are caused by alcohol.

[15] Bandura, A. (1997) *Self-Efficacy: the exercise of control*. W. H. Freeman and Company.

Return to Contents

While they ask about other areas, as indicated by a risk assessment tool, they fail to ask any more detailed or searching questions about other possible contributory factors. This leads them to place alcohol treatment at the centre of their intervention plan, potentially having missed the serious family and relationship problems that were of at least, of as much importance.

In order to make sense of a complex world, it is natural to form judgements about others and once those judgements have been reached, to use them as shortcuts in future contacts with the person.

Hollows [2008, p. 56][16] discusses other obstacles effective assessment of risk including:

- 'the busy screen' - finding it hard to choose what is important from a wide range of information;
- being too uncritical of sources of information, or conversely not appreciating the importance of information that comes from an unknown undervalued, or distrusted source and
- 'the decoy of dual pathology': being waylaid by one problem and missing information about another equally or more important problem.

Two significant sources of the judgements that we make are:

- our personal contact with the individual, and
- our knowledge of a group(s) to which the individual belongs.

This can mean that **the more you get to know a person, the more you may become biased.** Once you have formed a relationship with an individual, it is harder to take a neutral stance each time; harder to think outside the mental frame into which you've put the person.

Differences between us will also affect your understanding of others. If you see individuals as representatives of a group, such as women who have offended, young white men and so on, you may find it harder to individualise your assessments which and this may lead to inaccuracies.

Further Reading: Academic Insights 2021/14 Bias and error in risk assessment and management (justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)

[16] Hollows, A. (2008) Professional judgement and the risk assessment process. In: Calder, M. (ed.) *Contemporary risk assessment in safeguarding children*. Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing, pp. 52–60.

Return to Contents

Appendix 2: Additional notes

More about making sense of information and assessing its credibility

Below are some examples of sources of information. It is by no means an exhaustive list and there will be many more sources, some may even be unique to a case.

	Examples
Behaviour in Custody	• Reports from custody of conversations where the individual shares offence supportive attitudes • Collection of items in a cell that are linked to the offence (pictures, letters, self-written stories) • Engaging in behaviours that share features to previous offending such as use of weapons, threats and control (offence paralleling behaviour) • Adjudications • Wing reports
Crown Prosecution Service Paperwork	• Witness statements about the offence • Victim Statements about the offence and the context • Judge's sentencing comments • Previous Convictions
The Individual's Account	• Interview (your own, police or colleagues) • Post Programme Reports • Third hand accounts from friends and family
Information from Friends and Family	• Reports of difficulties as a youth • Knowledge of social and lifestyle pressures at the time of offences • Engagement with risk management planning • Ideas for how to support them remain offence free
Partner Agencies	• DV Callout information • Verification of any engagement with agencies before • Views around motivation to cease offending • Mental Health reports • Information about any local community tensions • Police reports of not yet convicted offending • Children's Services • YOT staff and Asset Plus

Return to Contents

Weighing it up

When using information to formulate a risk assessment it is important to decide how much weight to place upon that information. In doing so you should consider the credibility and motivation of the source and the validity of the information to the risk assessment.

Credibility	Motivation	Validity
The credibility of information is based upon the trust and belief in the source. This relates to the accuracy of the information as well as to its logic, truthfulness, and sincerity. When considering untried alleged adjudications and criminal offences be mindful of what evidence there is for and against the accusation. Is what you are being told feasible?	Why is this information being presented? What does the presenter want from you or whomever the information was presented to? What is the context of the disclosure or statement? People may often convey very different accounts for a court interview compared to an appointment afterwards. What bias might the source have?	What inferences are valid from the information? Is it logical to use it to draw conclusions? Is there a lack of other supporting evidence or contradictory evidence to what it suggests? You should explicitly acknowledge where there is conflicting evidence or inconsistencies in information.

Thinking about maintaining innocence

Maintaining innocence can be a barrier to effective analysis and assessment. However, it is a natural response to criticism or being 'found out.' Look for alternative means to find out about the context of someone's offence; seek other sources or ask questions that don't focus on what is denied as reinforcing this or arguing against it, will achieve little.

Maruna and Mann[17] ask assessors to think carefully about the excuses people who have offended use and to consider if they are likely to be helpful, or unhelpful, in making positive changes. For example, accounts that dehumanise or demean the victim are likely to promote further offending, as are offence-related beliefs that are very stable, for example seeing the behaviour of others as hostile in intent. On the other hand, excuses such as blaming alcohol may help the person separate out their behaviour from their core self, making them more able to move towards desistance.

[17] Maruna, S. and Mann, R. (2006) A fundamental attribution error? Rethinking cognitive distortions? Legal and Criminal Psychology, Vol. 11, pp. 155-177.

Return to Contents

Examples of analysing dynamic and protective risk factors

An example of formulating an analysis of a dynamic risk factor

Loss of employment. *[what we are watching for]* **Mr X derives a lot of self-worth from his employment which appears linked to his beliefs about masculinity.** *[why we think it is important in relation to his risk]* **Previously there has been an increased frequency of domestic call-outs following a loss of employment** *[our evidence that this is a risk factor for him]***. He has only recently obtained employment and he is already reporting some conflict with managers** *[why it continues to be relevant].*

An example of formulating an analysis of a protective factor

Improved Perspective Taking. *[what we have observed to be a protective factor].* **Mr X has moved from a victim blaming stance** *[makes it clear this is a change]* **to accepting responsibility for the impact of his offences on the victim. This coincides with his completion of the programme where tutors observed him challenging other group members about their own victim blaming in group** *[our evidence for this assessment].*

Examples of rationales

Mr X

Mr X has some history of expressive violence involving peers with the most serious offending to date being an assault occasioning actual bodily harm [*evidence of capacity*]. **His CSRP score is in the medium band initially suggesting a medium level of risk** [*our starting point*]. **However, since sentence he has frequently been involved in fights in custody and was found in possession of a makeshift weapon hidden in his cell. This was adjudicated and did not meet the criteria for referral to the police and so the CSRP core does not take account of this change in behaviour** [*not counted as convictions for CSRP*]. **During his account of this he was confrontational but did disclose he has significant debts outside of the prison and expressed fairly rigid views about the necessity to arm himself.**

There are also a range of additional stable dynamic risk factors in place including impulsivity; poor temper control, involvement in a criminal sub-culture linked to drug dealing and a lack of employment and related skills [*the stable dynamic factors in place*].**Many of these risk factors were considered as part of the CSRP score** [*evidence that is contrary to our conclusion but is acknowledged*], **with the key exceptions of the more recent evidence of possession of weapons (as there is no related conviction) and his involvement with drug dealing related disputes** [*clear about what hasn't been included in the starting point*]. **This, along with the very active nature of the conflicts that have escalated to carrying weapons** [*concerns about immediacy of risk*] **has led me to conclude that serious offending could happen at any time. This includes both in custody towards other prisoners and on his release given the central conflict has spilled into custody from his time in the community** [*why the risk is applicable to more than one group*].

Return to Contents

Mr Y

Mr Y clearly has the capacity to cause serious harm having murdered a peer in his early twenties following a significant period of offending as a youth. Mr Y has completed a significant amount of work in custody to address the underlying risk factors that were in place at the time of the offence including his difficulties with impulsivity, expressive violence and emotional well-being. In addition following his release 6 years ago he went into employment as a carpenter; following up on the years of training he completed in prison. He has a stable relationship and permanent accommodation which all serve as protective factors that were not present in his life at the time of the offence [*outlining the mix of risk and protective factors*]. **He has been fully compliant with his licence conditions, albeit with some struggles in the very early period when he was adapting to release. He has engaged well with the interventions designed to support him and I would assess that there has been a significant shift in his self-perception over the last 16 years. Carpentry and having a long term stable relationship both appear central to this and appear to contribute to a strong non-offending identity. As such I am satisfied that that, whilst the index offence is incredibly serious there is no current evidence of stable or acute risk factors that would suggest more than a low risk of serious harm, this is also supported by his VRP score which is in the low banding** [*conclusion and argument*].

Mr Z

Mr Z clearly has the capacity to cause serious harm, having a multitude of convictions for assault against a partner including his most serious offence to date of grievous bodily harm which resulted in the fracture of the victim's forearm. Mr Z's offending appears to be linked to relationships and therefore he is a risk to his ex-partner and any future partners [*who the risk is to***]. Were he to enter into a future relationship where children were present the frequency of domestic abuse is likely to have a long term impact on their development, whilst there are no current children involved in any of his previous relationships this remains an area to be monitored. Mr Z presents well and clearly has a range of protective factors in place such as accommodation, employment and a constructive lifestyle [***identifying the range of positive factors in place***]. He does have some risk factors in place; concerns around credible threats of death, recent separation and extreme minimisation . Mr Z's CSRP score is already in the high banding and the extensive pattern of domestic callouts suggest this may even underestimate the risk, as the number of occasions that assaults have not led to conviction is very high [***why in this case CSRP is not given full weight***]. As such I have to conclude that Mr Z poses a high risk of serious harm to his previous partner and any future partners despite the range of protective factors in place.**

Desk Aides

A series of desk aides have been produced and will be added to over time. They can be found at the following link:

ROSH - Desk Aids (justice.gov.uk)

Understanding Reoffending Predictors Technical Guidance

This document provides a brief summary of HMPPS use of reoffending predictors. It aims to set out; what are ARAIs and why HMPPS uses them and what each score we use predicts. It will also support practitioners to interpret the prediction scores and utilises them more effectively to inform their risk assessment.

Understanding Reoffending Predictors Technical User Guidance (Master)

© Crown copyright 2024

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.