

Introduction

Risk management is something we all do, whether managing large projects or simply crossing the road. Performing a risk assessment is a way of formalising the judgements we make day in day out.

A risk assessment is a very useful tool to help think through making activities/buildings safe for children and young people. It is not supposed to be a deterrent to doing things, but rather a proactive way to make things as safe as possible, whilst bearing in mind that a level of acceptable risk is good for children and young people to experience, and is a natural part of their development.

It is not possible to have a uniformed risk assessment as each assessment will be done by different people, who will assess risk differently. The outcome of the level of risk will largely depend on the attitude of the person performing the risk assessment to risk taking - they may be risk adverse, or they may take levels of risk that others would consider unacceptable.

There is much guidance available from the Health & Safety Executive in respect of Health & Safety and risk assessments.

This document aims to assist anyone who is responsible for assessing Children and Youth activities. Obeying only the letter of the law is not always the most important consideration. Good practice dictates that sometimes it is important to go beyond what you have to do and do what you think is right. If in doubt, consult your synod Children's and Youth work Development Officer (CYDO).

What is a risk assessment?

A risk assessment is a systematic examination of a building, job or activity in order that you can:

- Identify any hazard that has the potential to cause harm
- Decide if there are already enough controls in place to make the risk at an acceptable level
- Decide what further control measures you need to implement to reduce the risk to an acceptable level

Who should do risk assessments?

Someone who is experienced and competent to do so. Being competent does not mean that you know everything there is to know about what you are assessing, in fact it can mean knowing when you need to call in an expert, for instance where electricity is concerned. Part of your risk assessment for a building for instance could be that equipment has been tested by experts.

Competence can be built up with a combination of experience, knowledge and training. If in doubt, consult your CYDO.

When should risk assessments be done?

Risk assessments should be completed in respect of buildings annually and in respect of activities, before they start. They should be reviewed if circumstances change, or annually. It may be that if an activity is a one off, it will not be necessary to review it. It is, however, useful to keep copies of any risk assessments done as they could be a useful guide for someone completing a similar risk assessment in future.

Non compliance

If risk assessments are non existent or inadequate, this could have a negative impact in terms of financial and reputational risk, and in extreme cases, could involve liability. They are therefore crucial for a number of reasons, as well as most importantly, ensuring children's safety at church activities.

STEP 1: Identify the hazards

If you are assessing a building, walk around the building to identify a potential hazard, for instance, sockets may become safer if they have socket guards on them.

If you are assessing an activity, think about it step by step so that you know what is going to happen and potential risks are identified.

STEP 2: Decide who might be harmed and how

Often in assessing events involving children and young people, it will either be the children or staff that could be harmed, and sometimes both. It could also be members of the public. Give careful thought as to how each risk could affect people. Remember that the risk of harm could be physical and/or emotional.

STEP 3: Evaluate the risk and decide what precautions need to be put in place

Think about what measures are already in place and decide whether additional ones need to be put in place. Involve staff, be they employed or volunteers, and children and young people. This is a two stage process. Firstly you need to assess the likelihood of harm and secondly the severity of harm.

Stage 1 – likelihood (a)

It has been found useful to allocate a numerical value to assist in determining levels of risk. So, in terms of likelihood, it will be as follows:

1. Remote – highly unlikely
2. Unlikely – may occur rarely
3. Possible – could occur, but is uncommon

4. Likely – probable it could occur
5. Very likely – frequently occurs, more certain than not

Stage 2 – severity of harm that could be caused (b)

When deciding on a score for the severity of the outcome, try to avoid always choosing the worst-case scenario. For example, if someone tripped on a trailing cable, they could in theory fall and bang their head, experience a blood clot and end up dying, so you might be tempted to record the severity as 'fatal'. Indeed, you may conclude that any injury could in theory be fatal. However, taking this approach will skew your risk assessment findings, and it will be very difficult to prioritise any action needed if everything ends up as a 'high risk'. Instead, a more realistic approach is needed.

It is useful to know something about the people who are going to be involved in an activity. For instance, a young person who has a rare blood disorder that means that any slight bump could lead to clotting and possible death would be a very relevant consideration. It may be that risk assessments should be done in respect of particular individuals with additional needs or disabilities.

A helpful guide is the following in relation to severity:

1. Trivial e.g. scratch, slight bruising
2. Minor injury e.g. small cut, abrasion – first aid needed
3. An injury that would take 3 days to heal/recover from e.g. sprain
4. Major injury e.g. amputation, fracture, hospitalisation over 24 hours
5. Fatal

You then need to multiply the likelihood of harm by the severity. So for instance, if your assessment concludes that it is **possible (3)** some harm would be caused and that the severity of harm being caused would amount to a **major (4)** injury then this would make it 3 x 4 equalling 12. You may find the matrix below helpful in arriving at your level of risk.

	Trivial	Minor	Moderate	Serious	Fatal
Remote	1	2	3	4	5
Unlikely	2	4	6	8	10
Possible	3	6	9	12	15
Likely	4	8	12	16	20
Very likely	5	10	15	20	25

If you consult the table below you will see that a score of 9-12 calculates as a medium risk and you should therefore implement additional controls. If, however, your score was 15 or over, you should not proceed with the activity before additional controls have been implemented.

Rating Bands (a x b)		
LOW RISK (1 – 8)	MEDIUM RISK (9 – 12)	HIGH RISK (15 – 25)
Continue, but review periodically to ensure controls remain effective	Continue, but implement additional reasonably practicable controls where possible and monitor regularly	– STOP THE ACTIVITY– Identify new controls. Activity must not proceed until risks are reduced to medium or low level

STEP 4: Record your findings

This is a crucial stage as it provides proof that a risk assessment was carried out. Of equal importance, it also helps to crystallise your thoughts and is a way of ensuring accountability for tasks that have been agreed as needing doing.

STEP 5: Review risk assessment and update

It is important if you have identified action points and dates by which these should be achieved, that this is checked upon and the risk assessment amended and updated. Failure to carry out control measures by the dates specified could obviously have serious ramifications were anything to happen during the identified activity.