

Risk assessment

The purpose of the risk assessment is to **gain a shared understanding of the context, nature, frequency, duration and extent of any risk to self, to others and from others. This will involve collecting information from collateral sources.** A thorough risk assessment should also identify **protective factors** which are things that decrease the potentially harmful effect of a risk factor. Examples of protective factors include a high IQ, commitment to school, warm and supportive relationships with parents/carers or other adults, and supportive peer relationships with adaptive shared interests (for example, sport rather than drug misuse).

When considering risks to self, protective factors include:

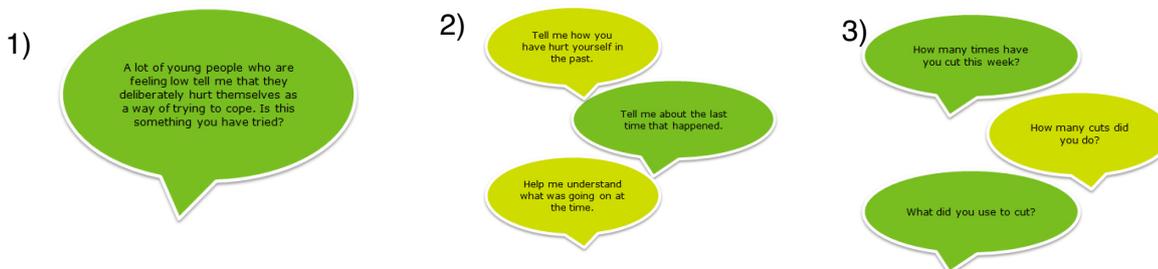
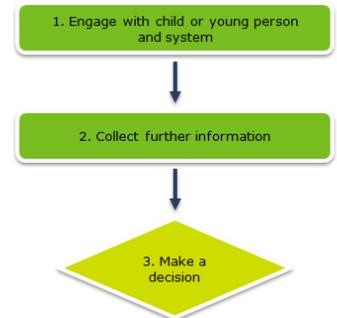
- Having clear future plans
- Citing reasons for living
- Having religious views that consider suicide a sin

The first step in promoting collaboration between the clinician and child or young person is to **explain what will happen during the risk assessment process.**

The scope and limits of **confidentiality** should be clearly explained to both children or young people and parents/carers at the earliest opportunity (see session Confidentiality, Consent, Capacity and Ethics (413-022)). Whilst the therapeutic alliance is very important it is **secondary to the safe management of identified risk.**

Sensitive, empathic and confident questioning is needed to support children or young people in sharing information regarding risk. It should be made clear to the child or young person that risk is an important area to be discussed and that the therapist is able to contain the distress it can cause. The clinician must ask the difficult questions; a child or young person will rarely volunteer risk information unless asked.

To introduce the topic, first use questions that validate the child or young person's experiences, normalise and encourage discussion. Then, to help get the child or young person talking, pose open follow-up the questions as instructions. After you have done this, the questions can then move on to elicit more detailed information.



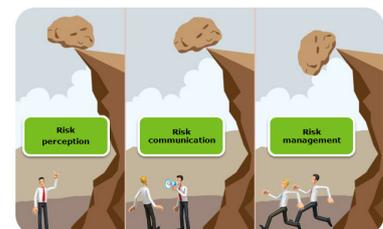
The information is collated and considered according to the practitioner's judgement, whilst assisted by guidelines that reflect current views of best practice.

Managing identified risks

Risk assessment is only as good as the shared risk management plan that it informs. Without effective communication and planning, the identification of risk serves no meaningful purpose

Once risk is identified, action to eliminate or, more commonly, manage that risk must be taken. In order to make sense of the assessment information and to inform a clear, individualised risk management plan, risk formulations should be devised with the child or young person and the professionals involved in their care. The risk formulation and management plan should include:

- A summary of all identified risks and protective factors
- Details of the situations in which risks may occur
- Early warning signs of escalating risk
- Actions to be taken by the practitioner, child or young person and others in response to these signs



Above information is from the MindED e-learning platform www.minded.org.uk
To find: Search for 'Assessing and managing risk' on home page. Quick reference 413-029