



# Dynamic risk assessment in residential care

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Brian Smith

# Learning Principles

- Confidentiality
- Positive challenge
- Always consider equality and diversity issues
- Respect each others views, diversity of opinion can be enriching
- Naïve questions are valuable
- Look after yourself
- Ask for support if you want it
- Take responsibility for your own learning



# Learning Outcomes

- breaking down risk
- Understanding risk
- professional judgement
- hypothesising & analysis
- Drawing risk from need
- roles & responsibilities
- dangerous dynamics

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# Children's relationship with risk

“

One should teach children to dance on a tightrope without a safety net, to sleep at night alone under the sky, to row a boat out on the open sea. One should teach them to imagine castles in the sky instead of houses on the ground, to be nowhere at home but in life itself and to find security within themselves.

”

H.H. Dreiske, German poet and social worker









What does **risk assessment**  
make you think of  
...

# Defining dynamic risk assessment

**continuous assessment** of risk in the **rapidly changing circumstances** of an **operational incident**, in order to implement the **control measures necessary** to ensure an **acceptable level of safety**



# Risk in child protection

In child protection we are considering 'the value and likelihood of the possible benefits of a particular decision against the seriousness and likelihood of the possible harms'

(Risk Principle 3 from The Munro Review of Child Protection, Final Report , A Child Centred System, Department of Education , May 2011.





# Impact risk assessment

- Initial identification of risk in tender/care plan docs
- What do we know? What don't we know?
- Pre-placement assessment
  - Social work reports
  - Voice of young person, family, significant others
  - Previous carers – what makes you so different?
  - Interagency contribution



# Risk and Significant Harm – a clarification

- Working Together specifically adopts the legislative terminology of ‘significant harm’ in preference to the use of the word “risk” - to avoid confusion given the different contexts and methodologies associated with “risk”
- When assessing whether a child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm local authority children’s social care will of course draw on a wide variety of information including the outcomes of relevant risk assessments or judgments provided by other agencies and professionals to inform their own evidence based assessment.



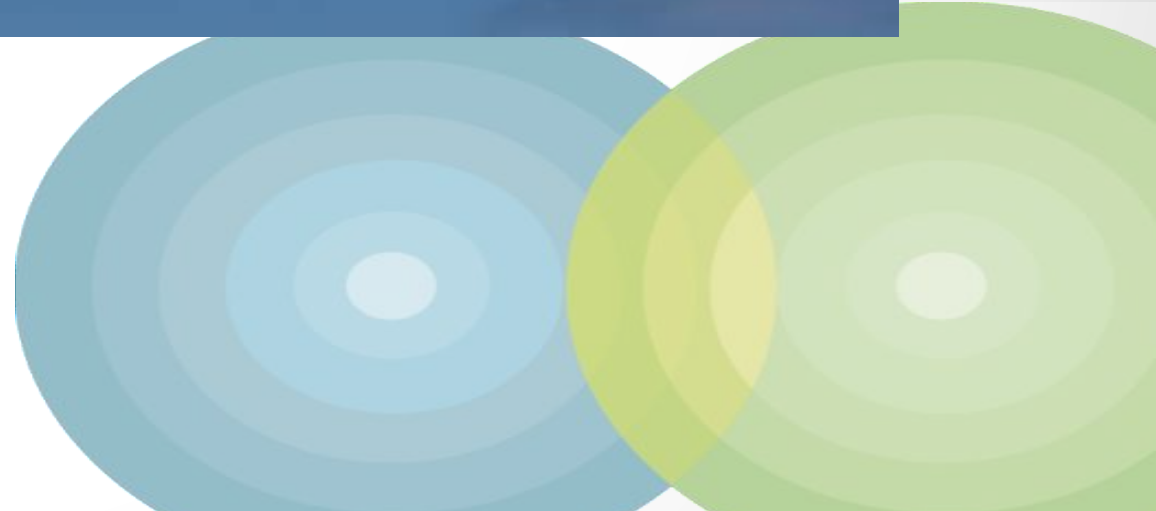


think of a **risk...**

...



  
dialogue







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# Consider a risk you have taken

- Did you assess the risk in advance?
- How did your view of the risk change during the event?
- What did you change about the action you decided to take?
- What did you learn?



**The accuracy of ... how an individual presents in interview is 'only slightly better' than guessing**



		Impact			
		Low	Concern	Harmful	Significant harm
Likelihood	Very unlikely				
	Possible				
	Suspected				
	Likely				
	Almost certain				

**LOW**

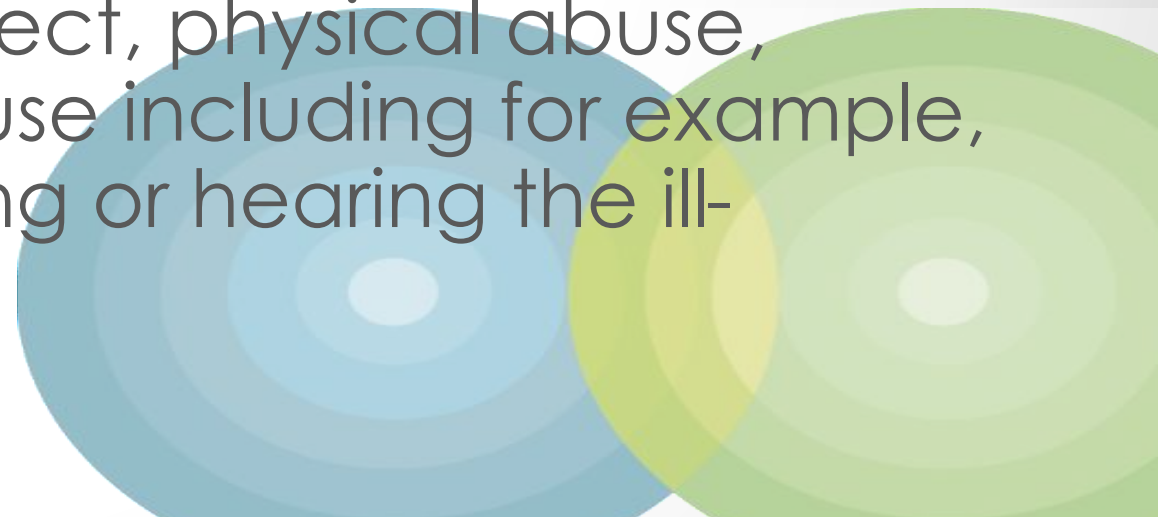
**MEDIUM**

**HIGH**

# Impact

- **Low – LEVEL 1** - No injury or cause for concern
- **Concern – LEVEL 2** - A young person isn't doing as well as they should, although there is no evidence of harm.
- **Harmful LEVEL 3** - Harm means ill-treatment or the impairment of health or development, including for example, impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another.
- **Significant harm LEVEL 4** - Neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse or emotional abuse including for example, impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another.

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# Likelihood

- **Very unlikely** - An event that could happen, but is almost certain not to happen
- **Possible** - An event that could happen
- **Suspected** - There is an indication that something has happened or may happen
- **Likely** - Something you believe is more likely to happen than not
- **Almost certain** - Something that will happen unless action is taken

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# How **sure** should you be?

‘Beyond all **reasonable** doubt...’

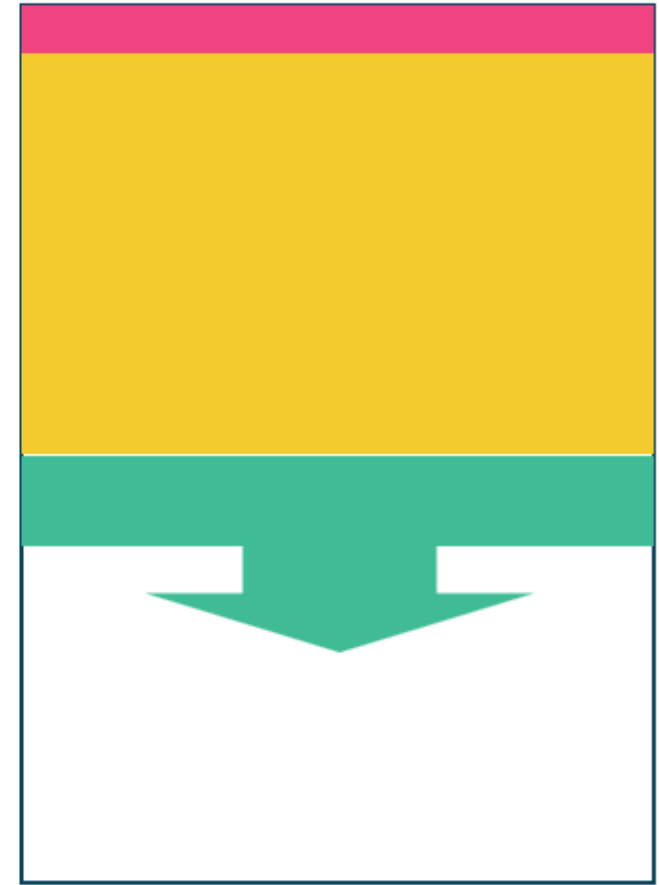
100%

“balance of **probability**”

50%

“reasonable cause to **suspect**”

0%





# risk management **plan**



# Level of risk? Factors affecting your judgement?

- Sarah is 15 and has had a number of adverse childhood experiences which include substance misuse, bereavement, self harm and suicidal ideation. You are aware that Sarah's mother also has a history of mental ill health leading to Sarah coming into care.
- Sarah has been missing on 3 occasions in the past week. She stayed out overnight on the last occasion with her phone switched off. In the morning Sarah was found by a friend asleep on their front door and called you for help.
- You go to pick Sarah up and notice cuts and bruises plus Sarah is not very responsive.
- The friend said she understood Sarah had some bad news last night but doesn't know what that is.



# Risk assessment - Sarah

- What is the level of risk?
- What factors affected your judgement?



# Threshold

Thresholds for assessment depend on:

- the nature & quality of the information available about the individual child/ren and family who are the subject of a referral;
- the reasoning strategies employed by practitioners to analyse that information and manage referrals; and
- systems and organisational factors



# Risk assessment and management

Staff should **continually and actively assess** the risks to each child and the arrangements in place to protect them. Where there are safeguarding concerns for a child, **their placement plan**, agreed between the home and their placing authority, **must include details of the steps the home will take to manage any assessed risks on a day to day basis**

para 9.5, Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the quality standards



# Defining dynamic risk assessment

**continuous assessment** of risk in the **rapidly changing circumstances** of an **operational incident**, in order to implement the **control measures necessary** to ensure an **acceptable level of safety**





## what it's **not**

the rapid making up of excuses on the hoof to  
excuse the failure to predict the predictable and  
justify your response

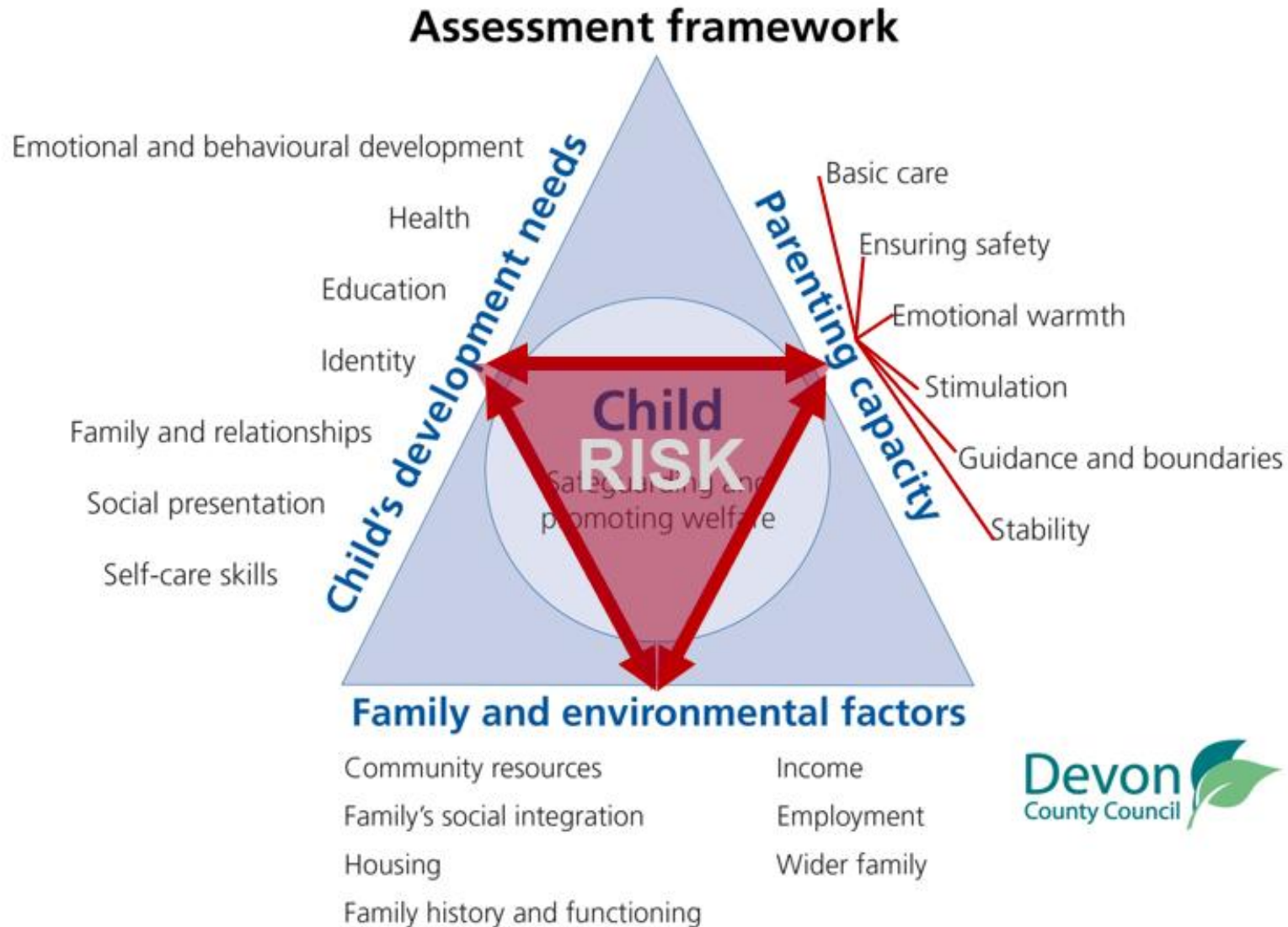


# how risks **arise**

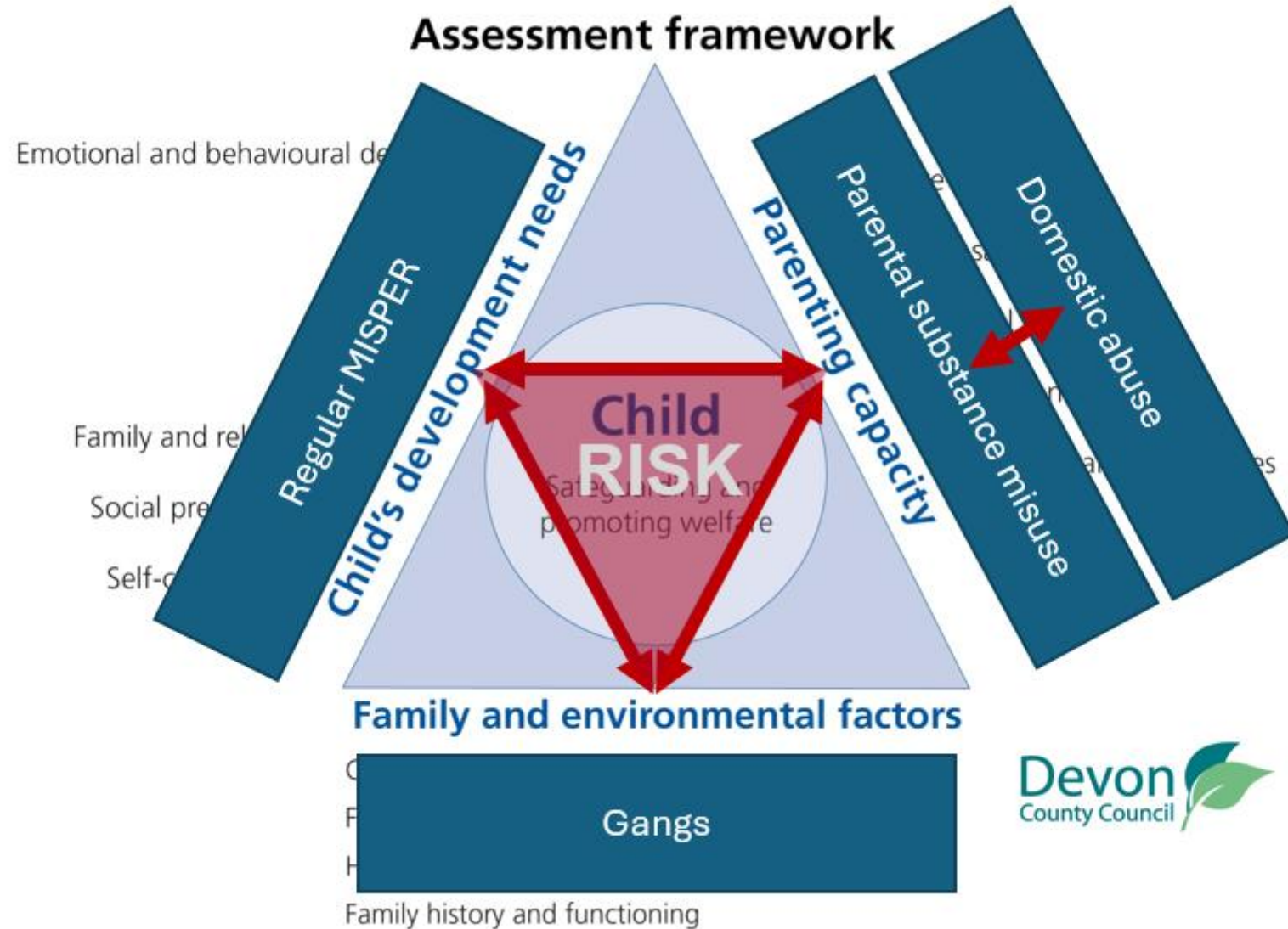
risk identification



# Drawing risk from need



# Specific risks



# Principles underlying risk analysis

We need to distinguish

- What has brought things about in the past
- What keeps things going in the present
- What is likely to happen in the future

\*Adapted from The Family Assessment, : Assessment of Family Competencies, Strengths, and Difficulties, Bentovim and Bingley Miller 2011



# Highlight...

- What am I worried about?
  - Why?
  - How likely is each issue?
- What strengths are there that affect this?
  - How?
- What needs to change
  - How will you know if it has, or hasn't?





# Risk Management

Keeping children safe



# Risk Management



Uncertainty and risk are features of child protection work...Risk management cannot eradicate risk: it can only try to reduce the probability of harm.... Those involved in child protection must be “risk sensible”. There is no option of being risk averse since there is no absolutely safe option

The Munro Review of Child Protection: A Child Centred System,  
May 2011



# Why take risks?



During the first period of a man's life the greatest danger is not to take the risk.

Søren Kierkegaard, Danish philosopher



# Outcomes

- How could you tell the child is safe?
- What does 'good' look like?
- How will you check?

**What needs to be done to get from here to there?**



# Case study



# Scenarios

try it out...





# eliza

Several young people come to you to complain about another young person, Eliza (15).

They feel Eliza is being overly aggressive towards them and you have recently been aware that other staff intervened because there was nearly a fight between Eliza and one of her peers.



# eliza

When challenged about what might have caused it most of the young people claim to be at a loss saying that there has been a bit of banter recently and that Eliza might be upset because she has just split up with her boyfriend, Paul, who also is part of your home.



# eliza

When you speak with Eliza she shows a screen capture on her phone that Paul has posted of a topless photo of her which she says he has shared with “everyone”.



# james

James (14) has been self harming on the top of his arms with a razor blade for 3 months and hides his marks from staff.



**james**

Last week he watched a youtube video of someone cutting the veins in their wrists.



# james

Today, his boyfriend finished with him and on the way home from school he saw him kissing another boy.





# james

When he gets home from school he locks himself in his bedroom.



# Dynamic Risk Assessment

- It's about keeping people safe in the moment
- Being aware of the potential risks but making a judgement at the time as to the level of risk
- Being confident in managing the risk
- Reflecting on the decisions made and learning for the next time



safety





## safe person

- motivation
- experience
- competence
- attitude
- perception of risk
- etc
- 

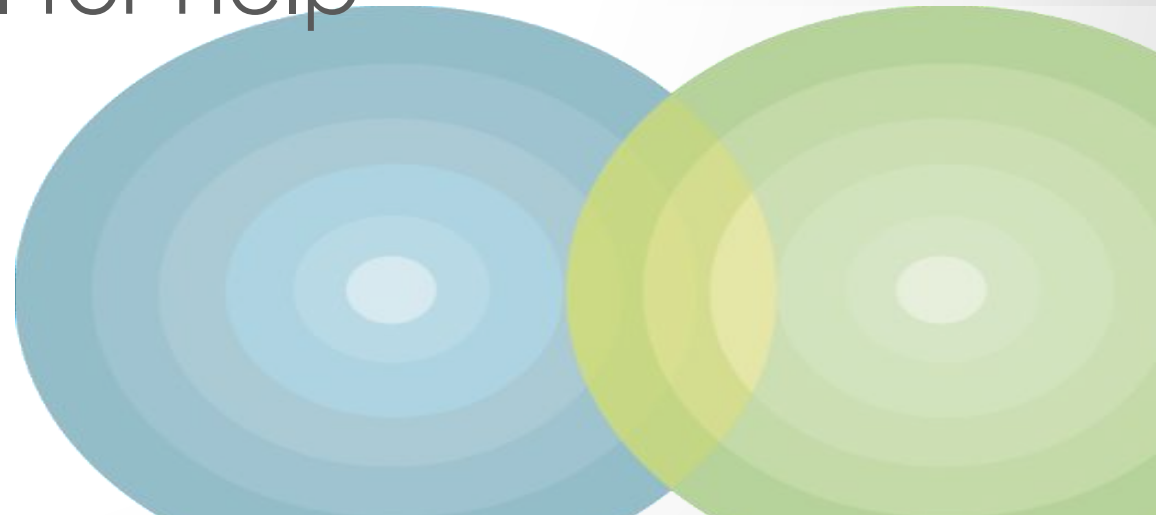
How do **you** know  
what **they** will do?



# **personal** responsibilities

- identify the risk
- assess the risk and form a judgement
- have authority to stop or call for help
- take reasonable risks
- be part of the review

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# **organisational** responsibilities

- predict the risk as far as possible beforehand
- develop shared competency standards
- train staff so they know the expectations
- seek feedback
- review the risks
- 





# Immediate Protection

- Where there is a risk to the life of a child or a likelihood of serious immediate harm an agency with statutory child protection powers **should act quickly to secure the immediate safety of the child.**
- Planned emergency action will normally take place following an immediate strategy discussion between the police, local authority children's social care and other agencies as appropriate
- If it is necessary to remove a child from their home, a local authority must, wherever possible and unless a child's safety is otherwise at immediate risk, apply for an **Emergency Protection Order (EPO)**. Police powers to remove a child in an emergency should be used only in exceptional circumstances where there is insufficient time to seek an EPO or for reasons relating to the immediate safety of the child. (Working Together)

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