

Why, When and How to do a Risk Assessment

Why do a risk assessment?

There is no such thing as a risk-free environment. But if we set up our activities so that the dangers and hazards that we are aware of can be avoided, we will be minimising the risk to children and vulnerable people. Our first concern is to protect the welfare of children, young people and adults who may be vulnerable. But in doing so, we are also protecting our workers (paid and volunteers), and protecting the reputation of the church.

When to do a risk assessment

It is recommended that for all new and existing parish activities where children and adults who may be vulnerable may be included – both one-off and regular - you carry out a risk assessment before it starts or happens, and then review it at regular intervals.

What is a risk assessment is when you look carefully at what could be dangerous and possibly cause harm to children and adults who may be vulnerable, and see how this can be prevented. By identifying the danger you can look at what is already in place to prevent anyone coming to harm, and also look at what else could be done or put in place.

A hazard is anything or anyone that could cause harm e.g. high stacks of chairs, uneven floors, unsafe electrical equipment, blocked fire exits, lack of fire escape signs, missing light bulbs, overfilled cupboards, high shelves, loose carpets, toxic paints, chemicals, horseplay, unknown workers (paid or volunteers), working in unsupervised situations, exposure to sun or cold weather conditions, lifts in cars, challenging behaviour, smoking and drinking.

A risk is the chance great or small, that someone will be harmed by the hazard.

How to do a Risk Assessment : The Five Steps to Risk Assessment (See toolkit for Risk Assessment Form)

Step 1 – Identify the hazards/dangers

- Walk round the building/venue looking out for things or situations that could be reasonably expected to cause harm
- Ask other people – including vulnerable people - about what they think could cause harm.

Step 2 - Identify who might be harmed/vulnerable

- Young people
- Children or young people with special needs
- Children
- Adults who may be vulnerable, including people in wheelchairs; partially sighted and blind people; people who are hearing impaired; people who walk with a stick or a frame; learning disabled people; mentally ill people
- Visitors/parents/carers
- Leaders/organisers
- Members of the public.

Step 3 - Identify the risks and what can be done to remove or reduce them

- How likely is it that the hazard could cause harm - scale of 1 (low) to 3 (high)?
- How severe is the potential harm - scale of 1 (low) to 3 (high)?
- Use the risk assessment tool on the following page to assess whether existing precautions in place are sufficient.
- What else can be done to reduce the risk, control or remove the hazard/danger?
- Use the risk assessment tool to work out the risk level - high, medium or low - both before and after you have taken action to reduce the risk.

Step 4 – What are your findings? What do you need to do?

- Use the *Risk Assessment Form* to record your findings (see below)
- Each hazard should be recorded, including an assessment of the risk, recorded as either high, medium or low
- Any action taken should be recorded (next to the hazard), showing the date and the name of the person carrying out the remedial action
- Once action has been taken, the level of risk that the hazard presents should be as low as possible, and no higher than medium
- Date and sign your record.

Step 5 - Revise and evaluate your risk assessment regularly - at least annually, and before new or one-off activities begin.