

# Guide to Assessing Risk

**For community-based residential providers**

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# I N T R O D U C T I O N

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This document is the result of a collaborative effort. The goal was to develop a basic strategy to address assessing risk in a way that could be built on and adopted consistently throughout the agency.

The goal is not to list every known hazard and possible risk along with the solution to lessen the damages, but to serve as a guide or tool to be used to promote awareness as well as creativity in assessing and addressing risks and reducing avoidable incidents in community-based residential settings.

Knowing that there is dignity in choice, risks must be analyzed and then balanced based on the uniqueness of the individual and their environment. Identifying the risk is the first step in planning.

Most actions carry some degree of risk. Walking down the street can be a risk; we might get hit by a car or fall and skin our knees yet we can't give up walking. Sometimes people are so afraid of what can go wrong that they don't live a full life. In many cases it requires negotiation and creativity as well as a common understanding of the goals.

Risk management can also be referred to as using safeguards. Safeguards apply to both the individual receiving services as well as the service provider. Safeguards are intentional actions to help reduce the risks a person or family might face because of their vulnerabilities. Everyone is at risk or vulnerable at some time in their life, however people with disabilities may face enhanced risks because of their disability.

Safeguards are meant to be empowering and they can prevent a bad outcome. They can help a person, as well as an agency, be better prepared and create a positive result and potentially offer a sense of security to the individual, their family and staff members.

For an agency, intentional safeguards can show a level of professionalism and in the event of an incident will document best practices and procedures to investigators and to the public.

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*“Some risks, some suffering, is integral to our common humanity. It is impossible to defend against it without destroying the fabric of human life. But without vigilant and vigorous protection, people with disabilities are far too often neglected and abused. This is the dilemma we face: how do we collectively protect people without patronizing them or destroying their opportunities?” ~John O’ Brien /Responding to Vulnerability*

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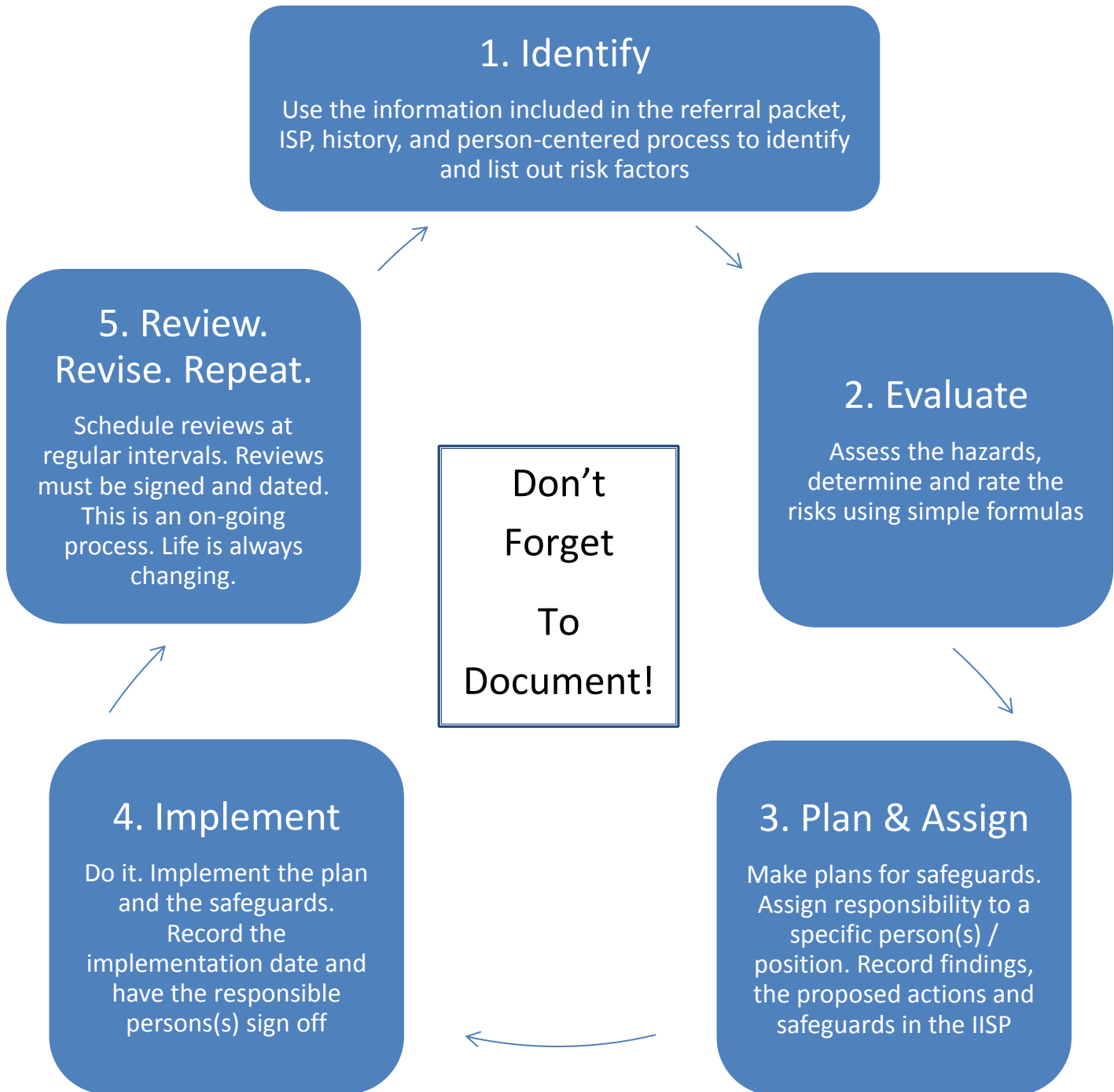
**Objectives:** As a result of utilizing this assessment tool you will:

1. Identify risks related to hazards and vulnerabilities.
2. Evaluate, plan, implement and review/revise risks as in on-going cycle of risk assessment.
3. Apply the risk matrix and simplified risk scoring tools.
4. Identify agency actions on behalf of individuals to reduce their risks and increase their safety.
5. Design plans of injury and risk prevention.

*~ Before you begin to complete the forms  
PLEASE READ through the entire document ~*

*Choice is  
empowering  
and it  
enriches the  
quality of life  
and so does  
the assurance  
of a safe  
environment*

# Process of Assessing Risk



# Step 1: IDENTIFY

**A Hazard** is defined as a potential source of harm or damage that may pose a level of risk. Most hazards are possibilities with only a theoretical risk of harm. Many things may constitute a hazard. Hazards can be actions, activities or objects.

**A Risk** is the likelihood or potential that a specific action or activity (including the choice of in-action) will lead to an undesirable outcome.

Hazard and vulnerability can interact together to create risk. Not every hazard is a risk. When a hazard coincides with an individual’s vulnerabilities, then the hazard becomes a risk. Lives change, environments change and vulnerabilities also change. Some changes may mean that new safeguards are required while others may render current safeguards unnecessary.

Below are a few hazards, related risks and issues that may make a risk relevant to a particular client in a residential setting:

Hazard Summary	Associated Risk	Issue that makes risk relevant to specific client	Who is affected?
Personal Care: Bathing	Fall	Seizure Disorder	Client
Kitchen Cutlery	Injuries from unsafe use.	Aggressive behavior-uses “improvised” weapons	Client, Housemates, Direct Staff, Community
Medication	Overdose	History of attempted overdose	Client
Matches	Arson	Fascinated with fire; Doesn’t understand risks	Client, Housemates, Direct Staff, Community
Throw Rugs	Trip and Fall	Unsteady Gait	Client, Housemates, Direct Staff

## Additional Examples of Risks

### Abuse/Neglect/Exploitation

Financial  
Lifestyle  
Vulnerability

### Behavioral

Self-injurious behavior  
Inappropriate sexual behavior  
Food seeking  
Aggression

### Environmental

Fire/earthquake/flooding  
House configuration  
Neighborhood  
Hot water  
Ingestion of cleaning supplies

### Falls

Home/Yard  
Bathroom  
Stairs  
Community

### Medical

Diabetes  
Seizures  
Heart  
Respiratory/allergy  
Skin integrity

### Legal

Guardianship  
Custody issues

### Financial

Over drafting account

*\*This list is not intended to be all-inclusive*

# *Step 2: EVALUATE*

## **Risk Assessment & Scoring**

The goal of risk assessment is to support increased competence, safety, and choice; not to remove all risk to everyday life. Determining the level of risk helps to determine the level of safeguards which will be the most effective in reducing the negative outcomes and the likelihood of the risks.

A risk matrix is a support tool which can be used to make informed choices. There are limitations to a risk matrix because it is possible for identical ratings to be assigned to significantly different risks. The risks and ratings are as unique as the individual, the situation, and their tolerance for risk. So, while the risk matrix is not scientific, it can correctly and clearly compare risks based on projected negative outcomes and likelihood.

Risk factors must be documented in the IISP. All assessments and plans should be accurately recorded in a clear and concise manner so that decisions are transparent. Action plans should be developed, assigned, acknowledged in writing by staff and appropriate team members, and revised as necessary.

Documentation should reflect that:

- A comprehensive assessment was done to identify all of the hazards and determine if they presented any risks.
- The precautions and safeguards are appropriate and reasonable and that the remaining risk is acceptable.
- If there is a benefit which outweighs the potential risk.
- The plan is effective and sustainable.
- The plan has been agreed on by the team, assigned and documented with scheduled reviews.
- There is a plan to revise whenever there has been a change to condition or environment (The IISP must be reviewed at least every 6 months per DDA policy).

## *Step 3: PLAN & ASSIGN*

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Once risks have been identified and evaluated, they must be properly addressed within the IISP. Consideration should be given to the types of safeguards, if any, that are necessary and available to lessen the risks. Steps of the risk assessment process are documented in a clear fashion that will facilitate easy reviews and revisions. Documentation should include the following information:

- Risk
- Safeguards / Interventions and who is responsible for them

### **Plan:**

While the objective of planning is to find a way to reduce the risks directly affecting the client, it is necessary to recognize that risks are not limited to just the client. They may affect the direct staff, the household, the agency and/or the community at large.

Safeguards will vary based on the uniqueness of the situation and the individuals involved. Each agency will have its own procedures to determine the appropriate safeguards and strategies. Sometimes the best safeguards are informal actions that prevent things from going wrong. For instance, it can be as simple as removing a “throw” rug that someone could slip on.

One of the most valuable assets in risk prevention is well-trained direct staff members. Often their feedback is integral to the process. A direct staff member should be empowered to think on their feet and be active in the implementation of everyday safeguarding.

Intentional safeguard planning recognizes that there is no guarantee that all risks are removed. Things change and not everything can be foreseen; constant oversight is required. Responsibility for safeguards must be assigned and agreed upon safeguards must be implemented. Documentation needs to be completed and regularly updated.

Record your findings, proposed plans and safeguards. Document the identified risks and how they will be managed. Safeguards need to be reasonable and the remaining risks must be acceptable and sustainable.

### **Assign:**

Identify who will be responsible for all safeguards. All safeguards must be assigned to a responsible party for implementation and review. A chain of command delegates the responsibilities.

## *Step 4: IMPLEMENT*

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Do it. Take action in a timely manner based on your plan. This may include training, plan writing, and/or physical modification of the environment.

Implementation of a plan requires everyone to be on the same page. Each staff, on every shift, needs to know the information and to consistently implement the plan you have developed. Check in with staff regularly.

## *Step 5: REVIEW—REVISE—REPEAT*

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Risk assessments and safeguard planning should be reviewed and revised in the IISP routinely, at least every 6 months per DDA policy. Additionally, the plans must be revised any time there is a change to the client's situation; personal, medical or environmental. Communicate all changes to the IISP to the Case Manager so that the ISP can be updated as needed.

Clear documentation is necessary to create a history of the risk assessment process and any safeguards implemented.

**The following pages have a number of sample forms that can be used and/or modified to assess risk. The header of each page identifies which stage of the assessment process the form is intended to document.**

*"People with disabilities share the same risks as everyone else in society; with less power to deal with them. No one has the power to control all the threats to safety and well-being. But people with disabilities typically have a much smaller area of power over the environments they live in than the rest of us."~ John O'Brien /Responding to Vulnerability*



## Identified Risks and Interventions

RISK ISSUES – Specific issues or protocols needed to ensure my safety if applicable:	
<b>● Abuse / Neglect / Exploitation</b>	
Likelihood: <i>Choose an item.</i>	State that no additional direction or explanation needed <u>OR</u> Describe particular vulnerabilities and supports / strategies in place to manage risk
Consequence: <i>Choose an item.</i>	<u>Risks:</u> <u>Interventions:</u>
<b>● Behavioral</b>	
Likelihood: <i>Choose an item.</i>	State that no additional direction or explanation needed <u>OR</u> Describe particular vulnerabilities and supports / strategies in place to manage risk
Consequence: <i>Choose an item.</i>	<u>Risks:</u> <u>Interventions:</u>
<b>● Environmental / Specialized Equipment</b>	
Likelihood: <i>Choose an item.</i>	State that no additional direction or explanation <u>and</u> no specialized equipment needed <u>OR</u> Describe particular modifications to environment, specialized equipment, and any instructions for use or future modifications and supports or other strategies in place to manage risk
Consequence: <i>Choose an item.</i>	<u>Risks:</u> <u>Equipment:</u> <u>Interventions:</u>
<b>● Falls</b>	
Likelihood: <i>Choose an item.</i>	State that no additional direction or explanation needed <u>OR</u> Describe particular vulnerabilities and supports / strategies in place to manage risk
Consequence: <i>Choose an item.</i>	<u>Risks:</u> <u>Interventions:</u>
<b>● Legal</b>	
Likelihood: <i>Choose an item.</i>	State that no additional direction or explanation needed <u>OR</u> Describe particular vulnerabilities and supports / strategies in place to manage risk
Consequence: <i>Choose an item.</i>	<u>Risks:</u> <u>Interventions:</u>
<b>● Financial</b>	
Likelihood: <i>Choose an item.</i>	State that no additional direction or explanation needed <u>OR</u> Describe particular vulnerabilities and supports / strategies in place to manage risk
Consequence: <i>Choose an item.</i>	<u>Risks:</u> <u>Interventions:</u>
<b>● Medical (including allergies, skin integrity)</b>	
Likelihood: <i>Choose an item.</i>	State that no additional direction or explanation needed <u>OR</u> Describe particular vulnerabilities and supports / strategies in place to manage risk
Consequence: <i>Choose an item.</i>	<u>Risks:</u> <u>Interventions:</u>
<b>● Other</b>	
Likelihood: <i>Choose an item.</i>	State that no additional direction or explanation needed <u>OR</u> Describe particular vulnerabilities and supports / strategies in place to manage risk for any area not captured above
Consequence: <i>Choose an item.</i>	<u>Risks:</u> <u>Interventions:</u>

# Individual Safety and Preparedness Self-Assessment

To be completed by the individual and/or their family.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## My Life and Safety Plan

*This worksheet is for me to see where I am prepared and where I need support to safely live in the community. (A familiar Support staff may have this electronic form available during the interview as a modification and to take notes for those who cannot read or write.)*

I am confident doing:

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I might need a reminder to:

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I could use assistance to:

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I need extra assistance to:

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My goal is to:

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I want assistance from these people:

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Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Received by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Simplified Risk Scoring by color

The Risk scoring can be easily explained by using colors similar to the traffic light system; Green for Go, Yellow for Caution, and Red for Stop. Risks are rated on two separate scales, one for Consequences and one for Likelihood.

- Green is used in both scales. It signifies “Negligible” on the Consequences scale and “Rare” on the Likelihood scale. Like a traffic light, green means you can go if it is safe. Before proceeding you must take the mini-mum precaution of looking both ways.
- Yellow is “Moderate” on the Consequences scale and “Possible” on the Likelihood scale. A yellow signal indicates that caution is required—be prepared to stop, analyze the situation and proceed with caution.
- Red signifies “Catastrophic” on the consequences scale and on the Likelihood scale it represents an “Almost certain” likelihood. A red signal says STOP. This is the time to stop and you may not proceed until something has shifted to make it is safe to do so.



Note: Other colors can be added for more specificity (i.e. chartreuse green for risks that fall between Negligible/Rare and Moderate/Possible. Orange for risks falling between Moderate/Possible and Catastrophic/Almost Certain as shown on the Risk Matrix).

Numerical values can also be assigned for planning purposes as shown in the Risk Matrix

# Risk Matrix

A risk matrix is not scientific; it is merely a support tool which can be used to visually analyze data as you make informed choices and compare risks based on projected consequences and likelihood.

Catastrophic (5)	6	7	8	9	10
Major (4)	5	6	7	8	9
Moderate (3)	4	5	6	7	8
Minor (2)	3	4	5	6	7
Negligible (1)	2	3	4	5	6
	Rare (1)	Unlikely (2)	Possible (3)	Likely (4)	Almost Certain (5)

## Matrix Key

### Consequences

- 5 Catastrophic
- 4 Major
- 3 Moderate
- 2 Minor
- 1 Low

### Likelihood

- 5 Almost Certain
- 4 Likely
- 3 Possible
- 2 Unlikely
- 1 Rare

The numbers are associated with the “consequences” (how bad) and the “likelihood” (how often). Adding the two numbers together is a way to score the risk and set priorities for planning. All risks which are identified must be documented regardless of rating, showing that there was a discussion of the risks and the possible safeguards. If no action is taken, documentation must show benefits of risk outweighed consequences, thorough documentation notes, discussions and participants.

## Scoring and Planning

2	<b>Negligible/Rare</b>	Team members discuss what safeguards are needed to be prepared in the event of an occurrence. Document by completing a checklist of events/behaviors from the ISP.
3-4	<b>Minor/Unlikely</b>	Increased safeguards need to be balanced with the person’s choices.
5	<b>Moderate/Possible</b>	Caution needed when reviewing. Plan reasonable safeguards that allow for dignity of risk but minimizes the risk factors. After the safeguards have been put in place re-evaluate to determine if they need to be adjusted.
6-7	<b>Major/Likely</b>	Active safeguards and oversight need to be in place. Safeguards need to balance choice and risk factors.
8-10	<b>Catastrophic/Almost Certain</b>	High risk requires detailed plans/safeguards and communication.

### Likes:

Include what is important to the person, what “works”, what brings them joy, areas where they excel, what really makes them happy

### Person’s Name



### Dislikes:

Include things that make the person uncomfortable, that they don’t respond well to, that may elicit a negative response, ways of interacting or other things that “don’t work”

### Risks!

Include all risks that present immediate life threatening danger to the client or others. Include things that should be restricted, supervision protocols, special dietary needs or behavioral triggers and techniques. You may also want to include other things that someone must know when supporting the person – especially those things to protect the safety and well-being of the person or others around them. More detail on risks will be in the risk section - this is a quick summary.

### Skills & Abilities:

Include things the person is really good at, types of things they do well, special talents, especially those things that may not be readily apparent

### Communication Style:

Include how the person best communicates (verbally, English, ASL, gesturally; anything someone needs to know to better understand them, and the manner they prefer others to communicate with them; if they use technology – include that, how to use it and what to do if it isn’t working

# Risk Summary

Example #2 – Implement - Risk Summary

Recent Photo

Name: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Date revised: [Click here to enter a date.](#)

This form is a summary of information from the IISP and should be accessible in hard copy to staff in order to promote awareness of risk which require ongoing caution / action of the staff. Considering likelihood and severity, the form includes risks that present immediate life threatening danger to the client or others. This form can be edited and modified to capture and convey the information in a usable format.

Rating (Highlight One)		Score	Risk Category	Details/Comments
Moderate	HIGH	6	Falls	<a href="#">Click here to enter text.</a>
Moderate	HIGH	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	<a href="#">Click here to enter text.</a>
Moderate	HIGH	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	<a href="#">Click here to enter text.</a>
Moderate	HIGH	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	<a href="#">Click here to enter text.</a>
Moderate	HIGH	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	<a href="#">Click here to enter text.</a>
Moderate	HIGH	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	<a href="#">Click here to enter text.</a>
Moderate	HIGH	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	<a href="#">Click here to enter text.</a>
Moderate	HIGH	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	<a href="#">Click here to enter text.</a>

**Emergency Agency Contact Numbers:**

Agency On-Call Number:

Supervisor Number:

Agency Plan / Personal Support Plan

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Completed by: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



## Personal Safety Essentials – Risk Summary

**Name:** [Click here to enter text.](#)

**Address:** [Click here to enter text.](#)

**Date of Birth:** [Click here to enter text.](#)

**Date of photo:** [Click here to enter text.](#)

This form can be completed with summarized information from the IISP and placed in the front of the client notebook to provide awareness of the high level risks which require the ongoing caution / action of the support staff. **List only issues particular to the individual which rate at least combined score of “5” or higher on the Risk Matrix.**

Rating: Check One	Score	Risk Category	Details / Comments	
<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Click here to enter text.	<b>EMERGENCY AGENCY CONTACTS</b>  Agency On-Call Number: <a href="#">Click here to enter text.</a>  Supervisor Number: <a href="#">Click here to enter text.</a>  Other: <a href="#">Click here to enter text.</a>  <b>Attention Staff: For further detail, see IISP</b>
<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Click here to enter text.	
<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Click here to enter text.	
<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Click here to enter text.	
<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Click here to enter text.	
<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Click here to enter text.	
<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Click here to enter text.	

Agency Plan / Personal Support Plan:

Completed by: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



## Personal Safety Essentials – Risk Summary

**Name:** [Click here to enter text.](#)

**Address:** [Click here to enter text.](#)

**Date of Birth:** [Click here to enter text.](#)

**Date of photo:** [Click here to enter text.](#)

This form can be completed with summarized information from the IISP and placed in the front of the client notebook to provide awareness of the high level risks which require the ongoing caution / action of the support staff. **List only issues particular to the individual which rate at least combined score of “5” or higher on the Risk Matrix.**

Rating	Abuse / Neglect / Exploitation	Details / Comments

Rating	Behavior	Details / Comments

Rating	Falls	Details / Comments

Rating	Environmental	Details / Comments

Rating	Legal	Details / Comments

Rating	Financial	Details / Comments

Rating	Medical / Allergies	Details / Comments

Completed by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**EMERGENCY AGENCY CONTACTS:**

[Click here to enter text.](#)

**Agency On-call Number**

[Click here to enter text.](#)

**Supervisor Number**

Agency Plan / Personal Support Plan:

[Click here to enter text.](#)



Example #1 – Review

## Client Questionnaire

Can be completed by a site manager / supervisor with responsibility for direct staff. Interview should be face-to-face with responses documented in client’s own words. If more space is required, continue on back of form.

Client	Month/ Year	Date Visit Completed

Questions:

1. Are there any concerns you want to talk about? (list concern & resolutions discussed)

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2. Have there been any significant changes this past month? (examples: move to new house; new housemate; new job; injury; illness; family situation)

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3. Support Routines: (Review the typical daily activities. List any problem areas and not any change that is made or that needs to be discussed further)

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4. Staffing: (Talk with the client about all staff who have worked during the last month. Note all concerns; also note positive statements)

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5. Identifying Abuse / Neglect issues including “safe people”: (Use this conversation to reinforce that the client is aware of who would be a safe person(s) that they could talk to about abuse/neglect issues. Assess if there are any issues that need to be further addressed or reported)

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6. Other concerns not previously discussed? (Inquire if there are any other concerns or issues that have come up during the past month)

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Interviewed by: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Action Taken:

Follow-up Required:

Assigned to:

Date:

## Employee Description of Hazard

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Your Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Briefly describe the workplace hazard:

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---

Where is the hazard located (be specific)?

---

---

*See Something*

*Say Something*

---

## Employee Description of Hazard

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Your Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Briefly describe the workplace hazard:

---

---

Where is the hazard located (be specific)?

---

---

*See Something*

*Say Something*

---

## Employee Description of Hazard

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Your Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Briefly describe the workplace hazard:

---

---

Where is the hazard located (be specific)?

---

---

*See Something*

*Say Something*

Example #2– Review (2-sided form)

**Reported to:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Hazard evaluated by:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Actions to correct hazard:**

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Corrected by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date corrected: \_\_\_\_\_

Documented:

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**Reported to:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Hazard evaluated by:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Actions to correct hazard:**

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Corrected by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date corrected: \_\_\_\_\_

Documented:

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**Reported to:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Hazard evaluated by:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Actions to correct hazard:**

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Corrected by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date corrected: \_\_\_\_\_

Documented:

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