

Risk and Person-Centered Thinking

Dignity of Risk

Overprotection may appear on the surface to be kind, but it can be really evil. An oversupply can smother people emotionally, squeeze the life out of their hopes and expectations, and strip them of their dignity.

Overprotection can keep people from becoming all they could become.

Many of our best achievements came the hard way: We took risks, fell flat, suffered, picked ourselves up, and tried again. Sometimes we made it and sometimes we did not. Even so, we were given the chance to try. Persons with special needs need these chances, too.

Of course, we are talking about prudent risks. People should not be expected to blindly face challenges that, without a doubt, will explode in their faces. Knowing which chances are prudent and which are not - this is a new skill that needs to be acquired.

On the other hand, a risk is really only when it is not known beforehand whether a person can succeed...

The real world is not always safe, secure, and predictable. It does not always say "please", "excuse me", or "I'm sorry". Every day we face the possibility of being thrown into situations where we will have to risk everything...

In the past, we found clever ways to build avoidance of risk into the lives of persons living with disabilities. Now we must work equally hard to help find the proper amount of risk these people have the right to take. We have learned that there can be healthy development in risk taking... and there can be crippling indignity in safety!

From [*Hope for the Families*](#) By Robert Perske

Person-centered risk assessment

Person-centered risk assessment is crucial in person-centered planning to support individuals with developmental disabilities to understand and manage risks, allowing individuals to make informed choices about their lives and support the development of a plan that aligns with their goals and values.

Key aspects of person-centered risk assessment in person-centered planning:

Informed Choice: The goal is to support individuals in understanding potential risks and make informed decisions about their own lives, rather than having decisions made for them.

Focus on Individual Needs: Risk assessments should be tailored to the specific needs, preferences, and goals of the individual, rather than relying on generic approaches.

Collaboration: The process should involve the individual, their support network, and relevant professionals in a collaborative manner.

Risk Identification and Assessment: This involves identifying potential hazards and evaluating the likelihood and severity of potential risks.

Risk Management: Developing strategies to mitigate or manage identified risks, while still allowing the individual to pursue their goals and engage in activities that are meaningful to them.

Documentation: Maintaining clear and concise documentation of the risk assessment process, including the identified risks, the strategies for managing them, and the outcomes of the assessment.

Review and Update: Regularly reviewing and updating the risk assessment to ensure it remains relevant and effective, as the individual's circumstances and goals may change.

Benefits of Person-Centered Risk Assessment:

Increased Safety: By proactively identifying and managing risks, person-centered risk assessment can help ensure the safety and well-being of individuals.

Improved Quality of Life: By empowering individuals to make choices and participate in activities that are meaningful to them, person-centered risk assessment can contribute to a higher quality of life.

Enhanced Personhood: By valuing individual autonomy and preferences, person-centered risk assessment can help individuals feel more respected and valued.

Better Outcomes: By creating a plan that is tailored to the individual's needs and goals, person-centered risk assessment can lead to better outcomes and a more fulfilling life.

When Choice and Risk Are At War

Even with lots of practice in making safe choices, individuals (with or without developmental disabilities) sometimes choose to make risky ones. These are difficult times for Direct Support Professionals (DSP) and others who know and care about someone. Individuals have a right to make choices and DSPs, family members (and others who know and care about the person) have a responsibility to help keep the people they support healthy and safe. In these situations, choice and risk are at war.

When this happens, it helps if everyone (the individual, family members, service coordinator, and DSPs) works together to figure out their responsibilities. One way to do this is to use something called the **responsibility sort**. This team process has been adapted by [*The Learning Community on Person Centered Practices*](#) for these kinds of challenges. It helps the DSP and other figure out: (1) core responsibilities; (2) what takes judgment and creativity; and, (3) what is not the responsibility of the DSP.

Type of Responsibility What it Means

Core Responsibilities These are things that are expected of the DSP at all times in this situation. If these responsibilities are not met, then something unsafe or unhealthy could happen to the individual. It would also mean that the DSP is not meeting his or her job duties.

Judgment and Creativity These are the areas where you expect a DSP to use their own judgment and creativity when making decisions both about whether to do something and how to do it. When they “get it right”, the learning from that experience should be passed along to others. If they “get it wrong,” there is a chance to talk about what can be learned from the experience.

Not our “Paid” Responsibility These are areas where the DSP has no paid responsibility for what happens.

Here’s an real-life example about someone who takes medication and likes to drink beer. He either buys a beer near the bus stop on his way home from work or he goes to the park and buys one from a friend who hangs out there. He doesn’t drink a lot, but he

should not be drinking at all because of the medicine he takes. Bob's planning team worked on this together with Bob. They started out by talking with Bob about:

- The risky choice that he was making;
- What's important to him about his choice; and
- What's important to others (like his family, DSPs, service coordinator) for Bob.

Next, they worked on a plan that honors both what is **important to** Bob and balances it with what is **important for** Bob.

Risky Choice: Drinking beer and taking medicine.

What's Important to Bob About this Choice: He likes beer; he likes to hang out with his friends; and, he wants to be like everyone else.

What's Important for Bob: To keep taking his medicine; and, not to drink while he is taking it.

This is their plan for supporting Bob with his risky behavior:

Core Responsibilities of DSPs

- Give Bob the information he needs to make a healthy choice.
- Remind Bob of the risks of current choice (for example, he can get very sick and have to go to the hospital).
- Make sure that all staff that work with Bob know the risks.
- Let Bob's primary care physician know about Bob's drinking.
- Help Bob make an appointment with the doctor to talk about it.
- Remind Bob about other ways to be like everyone else (for example, drink non-alcoholic beer).
- Help Bob get medical attention if he gets sick after drinking.

DSPs Use Judgment and Creativity

- How to remind Bob about the risks and other, safer choices without nagging.
- Working with Bob to figure out other ways he can be like everyone else
- If Bob's primary care physician is not supportive, help Bob find another.

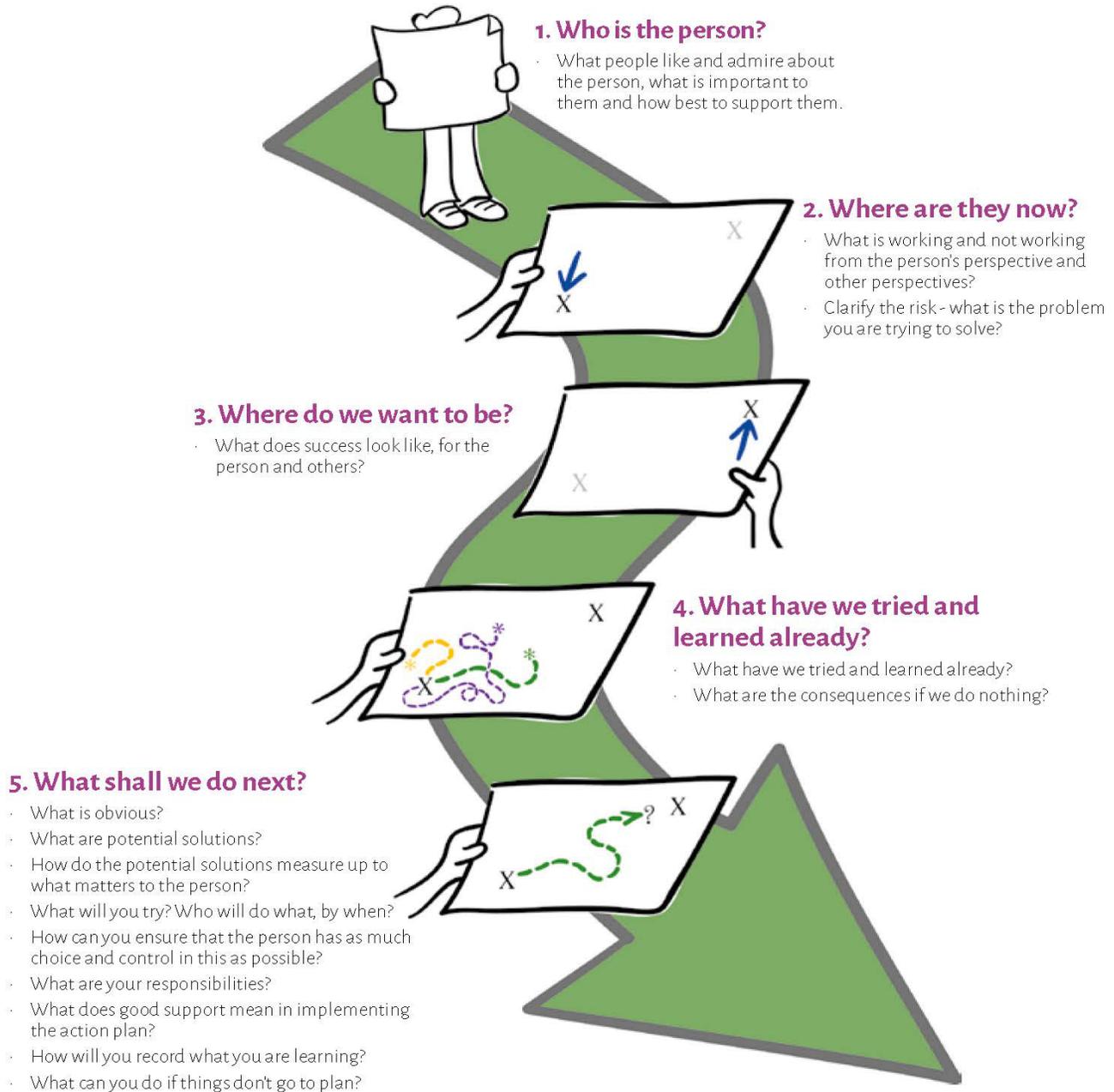
Not the Paid Responsibility of DSPs

- Whether or not Bob chooses to continue drinking beer.

Everyone on the team agreed to this plan. Bob's family and Regional Center service coordinator will help remind him. They will also help think of other ways that he can hang out with friends without drinking. Bob's support staff feel much more comfortable in dealing with this situation where choice and risk are at war.

Additional Considerations for Providers

SKILL: Person-Centered Approach to Risk



3.52 Living Well In My Community

Risk assessment graphic from A Guide to Home and Community Based Service Standards and Person-Centered Practices. [This link](#) will take you to this guide in Spanish, Tagalog and English.