Southwark Schools

Risk Assessment Procedure

Guidance for completing risk assessments

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1. Introduction

This procedure underpins the Risk Assessment Policy by providing clear guidance on how to carry out a suitable and sufficient risk assessment in a systematic manner.

Employers have a legal duty to protect employees and others from harm arising from their activities. Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations, employers are required to:

- Identify what could potentially cause injury or illness to people, activities, and the environment (hazards)
- Assess the likelihood and severity of harm occurring (risk)
- Take appropriate action to eliminate the hazard or, where elimination is not possible, to control or reduce the risk

Risk assessment is a fundamental part of the broader process of managing workplace health and safety.

This procedure is designed to assist Headteachers and other Responsible Persons in creating and maintaining a safer and healthier working environment. It aims to reduce reputational risk, control costs, and ensure compliance with health and safety legislation. By identifying potential hazards and taking appropriate actions, this procedure will help protect staff, visitors, and pupils, prevent accidents and injuries, and promote a strong safety culture across Southwark Council community schools.

2. Arrangements

Risk Assessor

2.1 Who should carry out a risk assessment?

Risk assessments can be conducted by staff who are directly involved in an activity or responsible for a specific job role, but only if they are competent to do so. A competent person is someone who has received appropriate training, possesses relevant experience or knowledge, and demonstrates the necessary qualities to effectively identify and manage risks. It is the duty of headteachers and appointed responsible persons to ensure that all necessary risk assessments are completed, either by themselves or by a designated competent member of staff. Before undertaking a risk assessment, responsible persons and staff must first complete the required training to ensure they are fully prepared and qualified to carry out the task effectively.

Risk Assessor Training Requirements

Training Name	Benefits	Frequency/refresher	Designation
Risk Assessment Training	This training provides essential knowledge and practical skills for anyone responsible for carrying out risk assessments in the workplace. By completing the course, they will gain a clear understanding of each step in the risk assessment process—from identifying potential risks and managing hazards to evaluating the likelihood of harm. The course builds confidence and competence, ensuring staff are well-prepared to create suitable and sufficient risk assessments.	On induction, 2-yearly	Mandatory

Risk Assessor Training Requirements

Training Name	Benefits	Frequency/refresher	Designation
Basic Health and Safety Training	This course will provide risk assessors with an understanding of the importance of health and safety in the workplace and of the responsibilities employees and employers have under health and safety law. It will provide information on the hazards that are common in the workplace and the effective methods to reduce them, and the risk they pose to human health. With this knowledge, risk assessors will be fully prepared to recognise hazards in the workplace and know how to uphold health and safety control measures.	On induction, 2-yearly	Highly recommended
IOSH Managing Safely	It provides a practical understanding of health and safety principles, enabling responsible persons to manage workplace risks effectively. The course helps managers and responsible persons to identify, evaluate, and control hazards, and improve safety awareness	3-Yearly Refresher	Mandatory for SLT and appointed responsible persons

3. Procedure

3.1 Completing a risk assessment

To ensure that all community schools' risk assessment meets regulatory requirements, we have adopted the HSE 5-step risk assessment guidance, which will assist staff in creating a suitable and sufficient risk assessment.

Schools must complete local site-specific risk assessments via the ASSURE system, the council's health and safety management system.

Step 1: Identifying hazards

- Review the different types of work activities your staff carry out on a daily and ad-hoc basis, documenting the hazards associated with the work, environment, and people
- Walk around the school site(s) and look at what could be reasonably expected to cause harm – you only need to concentrate on the significant hazards.
- To identify the less obvious hazards, consult with staff and trade union representatives and look at your accidents and ill-health records.
- Look at long-term hazards to health and safety, such as exposure to harmful substances.
- Wherever possible, SLT members should adopt a team approach to risk assessments and involve employees who have practical experience of the activity being assessed, as they often have the best awareness and understanding of the hazards involved with the activity and know how the activity is carried out.
- Manufactures instructions for equipment, safety data sheets for chemicals/substances.

Step 2: Decide who might be harmed and how they might be harmed

- For each hazard, you must be clear about who might be harmed.
- Ensure you take into account the health and safety of workers who have particular requirements, such as new and expectant mothers, young workers, disabled employees, and staff who might work alone.

You must include those who may not be your employees; these could include

- Cleaners, visitors, contractors, maintenance workers, etc.
- Members of the public

Step 3: Evaluate the risk and take action

- Once the hazards and persons at risk have been identified, you must decide on the required controls, existing controls currently in practice, and any further controls required to be implemented to further reduce the risk to an acceptable level. The law requires that everything 'reasonably practicable' be done to protect people from harm. However, caution should be applied, ensuring only foreseeable risks are assessed.
- You should consider what controls are already in place and decide if there is more that can be done.
- If further control measures are required, the hierarchy of controls must be implemented.

Step 4: Record your findings and implement them

- Record in writing the main findings of the risk assessment. This record should include details of any hazards noted in the risk assessment and the action to be taken to eliminate or reduce the risk
- This record provides proof that the assessment was carried out, the safe systems of work required, and is used as a base for a later review of working practices.
- All records must be stored in Assure school portal(Southwark Council health and safety management system)

Step 5: Review and update the risk assessment

A Risk assessment must be reviewed on a regular basis, and if there are significant changes, for example –

- If there is reason to believe that it is no longer valid
- After an accident or near miss
- If there is a significant change in the circumstances, e.g., new equipment/ways of working
- Change of premises
- New staff or persons with specific needs
- Change in legislation or changes in technology/science.
- In all other cases, regularly (every 2 years)

4. Types of risk assessment

You must carry out specific risk assessments where required by health and safety regulations. Begin by thoroughly evaluating your site to identify any activities or conditions that fall under regulated or high-risk categories. Once identified, complete and implement a specific risk assessment tailored to each applicable hazard.

4.1 Specific Hazards: Pay particular attention to hazards such as lone or remote working, violence and aggression, permit-to-work operations, slips, trips and falls, accidents and incidents, workplace transport, construction activities, work-related stress, pest control, and the presence of vulnerable individuals. These hazards require targeted control measures and must be assessed accordingly.

4.2 Specific Regulations: In addition, ensure compliance with specific regulatory requirements. These include, but are not limited to, display screen equipment, working at height, electrical safety, manual handling, confined spaces, considerations for new and expectant mothers, fire safety, vibration, noise, lead, gas, personal protective equipment, radiation, hazardous substances (including those governed by COSHH), lifts and lifting operations, plant and work equipment, asbestos, water safety. Each of these areas may require its own risk assessment and must be addressed in line with current legislation.

4.3 Dynamic risk assessments: When an unexpected hazard or risk arises suddenly and no existing risk assessment covers the situation, you must carry out a dynamic risk assessment. This should be done immediately by a responsible person who is competent to evaluate the risk and implement appropriate safety control measures, following the hierarchy of controls. If you are unsure about the appropriate measures to take, stop or pause the work and seek guidance from the school's health and safety advisor before proceeding.

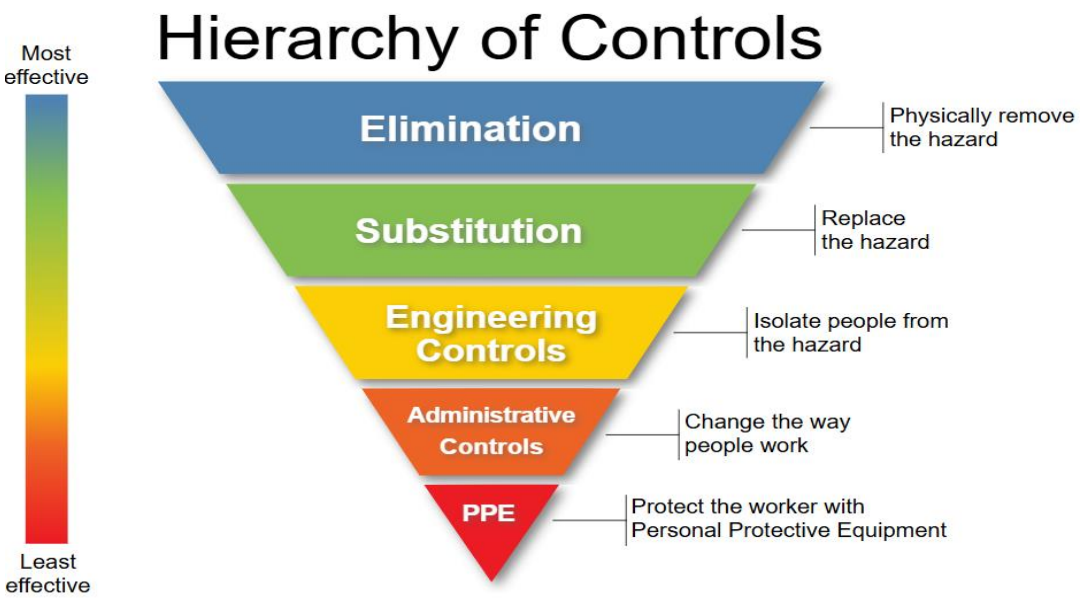
Remember, dynamic risk assessments are intended for unforeseen, ad hoc situations. They are not a substitute for formal, documented risk assessments and must not be used in place of planned safety procedures.

5. Applying the Hierarchy of Controls in Risk Assessment

When completing a risk assessment, you must always aim to eliminate or avoid identified hazards wherever it is reasonably practicable to do so. This decision should be based on a balanced consideration of the resources required and the level of risk involved, including both the likelihood of occurrence and the potential severity of harm.

If it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate the hazard, you are required to implement control measures that reduce the risk to an acceptable level. To do this effectively, you must follow the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) Hierarchy of Controls.

This hierarchy provides a structured approach to selecting risk control measures. You must apply the controls in the order of effectiveness, starting from the most effective (elimination) and working down to the least effective (personal protective equipment). It is not acceptable to bypass higher-level controls in favour of easier or cheaper options lower in the hierarchy.



When planning your controls, prioritise collective protection measures—those that protect multiple people at once—over individual measures. Always document your reasoning and ensure that the chosen controls are proportionate to the level of risk.

Refer to the accompanying table for a detailed breakdown of each level in the hierarchy and how to apply them in practice.

See below hierarchy of controls chart below

Hierarchy of risk control measures to be adopted in risk assessments.	
Eliminate/Avoid hazard.	Redesign or change the job so that the hazard is removed or eliminated. E.g., changing light bulbs in a high-ceilinged atrium **Elimination Method**: Use of telescopic light bulb changers or automated lighting systems that lower fixtures to ground level for maintenance.
Substitute/replace the hazard.	Replace the material or process with a less hazardous one. E.g., review the manufacturer's instructions and purchase a new tool or a less hazardous product. Substituting solvent-based paint for less hazardous water-based paints. Use a less hazardous battery-operated strimmer, rather than noisy, high-vibration, volatile fuel petrol-driven equipment. Care must be taken to ensure that new hazards are not introduced through substitution.
Engineering controls / prevent contact with the hazard.	Combat risks at source, for example, treating or replacing slippery steps is more acceptable than simply displaying warning signs. Use work equipment, such as a scaffold and/or other measures like a well-maintained safety barrier, to prevent falls where you cannot avoid working at height. Separate the hazard from operators by methods such as enclosing or guarding dangerous parts of machinery/equipment, and use local exhaust ventilation to remove dusts, gases, and vapours.

Hierarchy of risk control measures to be adopted in risk assessments.	
Administrative Controls /safe systems of work.	Ensure that workers understand their role and have sufficient training, information, instruction, and supervision for the job on the risks and safe systems of work. Create, implement, and review risk assessments, safety procedures, site rules, and safe systems of work. Reduce the time workers are exposed to hazards, implement job rotation/shifts, introduce relevant warning, prohibition, and mandatory safety signage, such as prohibiting the use of mobile phones in hazardous areas. Involve those who would be affected by any change. Ensure effective communication through regular team discussions, one-to-one meetings, and performance review sessions.
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	This is the last measure to be considered. Only after all the previous measures have been implemented, tried, and found not sufficient in controlling risks to a reasonably practicable level, then personal protective equipment (PPE) be used. Workers should be consulted when selecting and fitting PPE. Workers must be trained in the use, function, limitations, and maintenance of all PPE used.

5.1 How to rate the level of risk

When conducting a risk assessment, you must evaluate the level of risk by considering two key factors: the **likelihood of the hazard occurring** and the **severity of the potential outcome**. This evaluation enables you to determine whether additional control measures are necessary to reduce the risk to a level that is as low as reasonably practicable. It also helps you prioritise the actions required to manage the risk effectively.

To begin, assess how likely it is that the hazard will occur. Then, determine the potential severity or consequence if the hazard were to result in harm. For example, if there are trailing cables across a frequently used walkway, the likelihood of someone tripping is high. If a person were to fall awkwardly, the severity could be significant, such as a broken bone.

Now consider the same hazard in a different context. If one person only accesses the walkway twice a year, the likelihood of someone encountering the hazard is much lower. However, the severity of the outcome remains the same—a fall could still result in a broken bone. This demonstrates that while exposure affects the likelihood, it does not change the potential severity.

Using the colour-coded (5x5) risk matrix, this will show you whether the risk rating (RR) is ‘High’, ‘Medium’, or ‘Low’.

Consequence	Likelihood				
Value **Caption**	1 Rare	2 Unlikely	3 Possible	4 Likely	5 Almost Certain
1 Minimal	1 Very Low Light Green	2 Very Low Light Green	3 Low Green	4 Low Green	5 Medium Yellow
2 Minor	2 Very Low Light Green	4 Low Green	6 Medium Yellow	8 Medium Yellow	10 High Orange
3 Moderate	3 Low Green	6 Medium Yellow	9 Medium Yellow	12 High Orange	15 High Orange
4 Major	4 Low Green	8 Medium Yellow	12 High Orange	16 High Orange	20 Very High Red
5 Catastrophic	5 Medium Yellow	10 High Orange	15 High Orange	20 Very High Red	25 Very High Red

Guidance for using the(5x5) matrix:

	Severity/consequence of harm (S):	1 =	minimal (cuts, bruises, etc., unlikely to result in sick leave or lasting harm)
		2 =	minor injuries (likely to result in 1 – 7 days' sick leave)
		3 =	Moderate injuries (likely to result in more than 7 days sick leave and notifiable to H.S.E.)
		4 =	major
		5 =	catastrophic
	Likelihood (L):	1 =	rare (less than once every five years)

	(incorporates probability and exposure)	2 =	unlikely (once in every 1 – 5 years)
		3 =	possible (between quarterly and annually)
		4 =	likely (between weekly and once a quarter)
		5 =	Almost certain (daily or weekly)

	From the table at the top of the form, by looking horizontally and vertically, you can see whether the RISK RATING (RR) is 'low,' 'medium ', 'high,' or very high '. Below is a table of recommended actions to take.	
	If ' **VERY HIGH**'	Stop work immediately. If safe to do so, make safe. Inform the manager immediately. Immediate action is needed to eliminate or reduce the risk. The resulting additional or revised controls must be discussed with the workforce & outlined in the final column. Actions implemented before work re-commencement.
	If **'HIGH'**	Inform management straight away. Every effort should be made to eliminate or reduce the risk. Resulting additional or revised controls must be discussed with the workforce & outlined in the final column. Actions implemented before work re-commences.
	If **'MEDIUM'**	Review existing controls and implement any additional controls to eliminate or reduce the risk to an acceptable level; all controls must be communicated to the workforce & outlined in the final column.
	If **'LOW'**	Review annually or when circumstances change – you may still take the opportunity to revise controls to increase safety.
	REVISED CONTROLS	Include details of further controls needed to reduce risks, who will be responsible for these controls, and include realistic target dates. Monitor to ensure compliance.
	RESIDUAL RISK RATING (RRR):	Evaluation of the expected remaining risk once the controls have been implemented.

5.2 Consultation and Communication in the Risk Assessment Process

You must involve staff and relevant stakeholders throughout the risk assessment process to ensure it is suitable and sufficient. Begin by consulting with those who carry out or are affected by the work being assessed. Their input is essential for identifying all potential hazards and confirming that proposed control measures are practical, effective, and likely to be followed.

Once the risk assessment has been drafted, provide staff with adequate time to review the document and offer feedback. A reasonable consultation period, such as one working week, should be allowed. Staff may choose to involve their Trade Union representatives or Safety Representatives during this process.

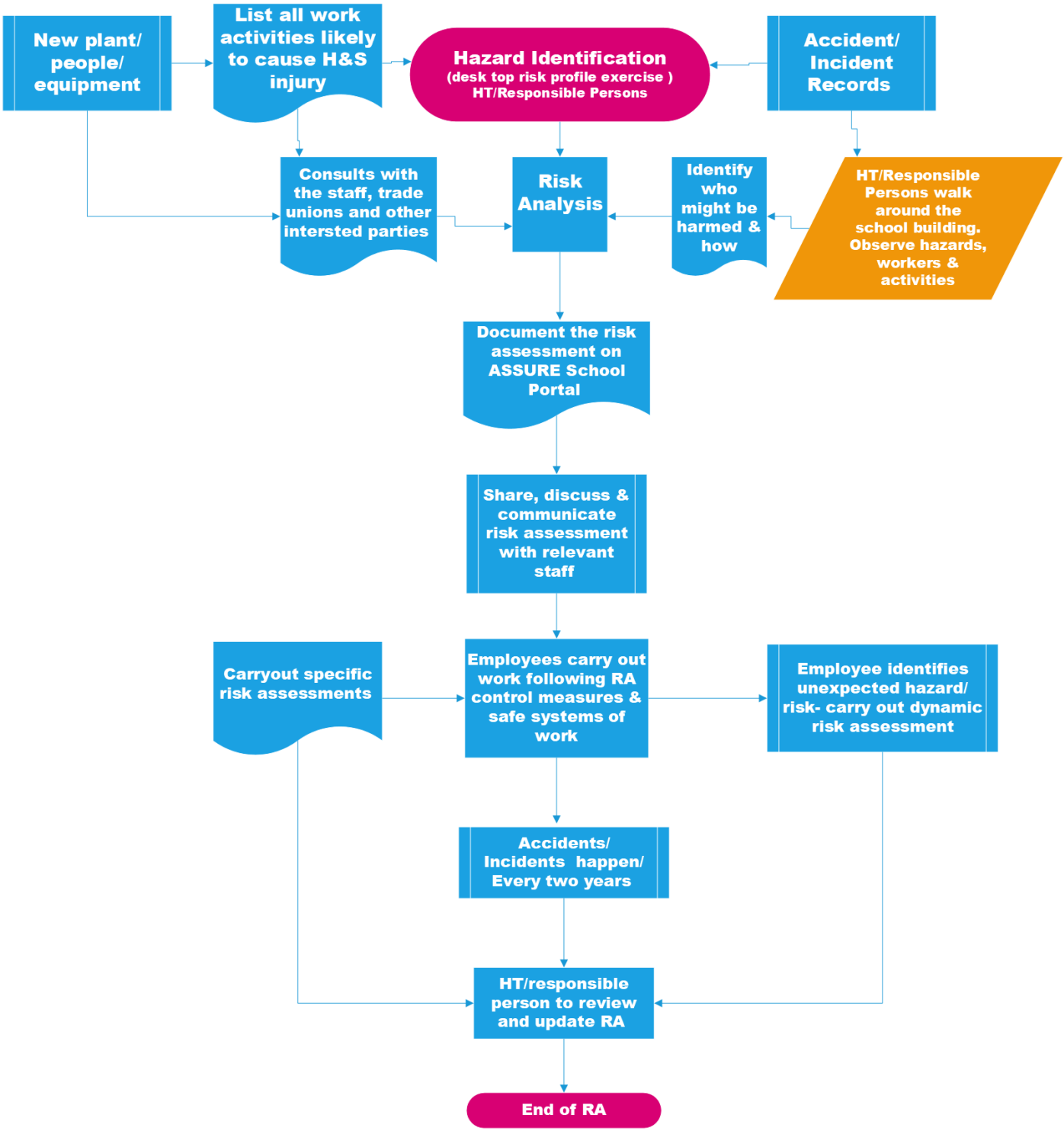
After consultation, finalise the risk assessment and implement it without delay. All staff must understand the purpose of the risk assessment and be committed to following the control measures. Cooperation and engagement are critical to ensuring the effectiveness of the process.

Following completion and consultation, you must communicate the significant findings of the risk assessment to all relevant individuals. This includes the identified hazards and the control measures in place. Begin with verbal communication and follow up in a formal setting, such as a team or staff meeting. Provide staff with a copy of the risk assessment and ensure the findings are clearly explained and discussed.

Where risk assessments are reviewed during staff or governor meetings, ensure that minutes are recorded and retained. The content of risk assessments, including associated safe systems of work, must also be communicated during staff inductions, performance reviews, one-to-one meetings, and team briefings.

All staff must confirm their understanding and agreement with the risk assessments relevant to their roles. If any staff member has concerns or difficulties in complying with the control measures, they must raise these with a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). The SLT will then consult with the School's Health and Safety Advisor to provide further support and guidance.

6. Flowchart


New plant/ people/ equipment
List all work activities likely to cause H&S injury
Hazard Identification
(desk top risk profile exercise)
HT/Responsible Persons
Accident/ Incident Records
Consults with the staff, trade unions and other intersted parties
Risk Analysis
Identify who might be harmed & how
HT/Responsible Persons walk around the school building. Observe hazards, workers & activities
Document the risk assessment on ASSURE School Portal
Share, discuss & communicate risk assessment with relevant staff
Carryout specific risk assessments
Employees carry out work following RA control measures & safe systems of work
Employee identifies unexpected hazard/ risk- carry out dynamic risk assessment
Accidents/ Incidents happen/ Every two years
HT/responsible person to review and update RA
End of RA

General FAQs

Question	Answer
Why do I need to complete a Risk Assessment (RA)?	Risk assessments are a legal requirement and part of our duty of care to protect the health and safety of ourselves and others. They help identify and manage risks, ensuring safe working practices. Completing them supports our legal, moral, and financial responsibilities and helps us meet our obligations as employees of Southwark Council.
When should I carry out a risk assessment?	Risk assessments should be carried out before any work begins and regularly reviewed to ensure they remain relevant and effective. It is best practice to: • Review past incidents, • List all work activities and equipment used, • Ensure assessments are tailored to the specific tasks, environment, and people involved. Risk assessments must be in place and communicated to staff before starting work, so everyone understands the risks and the safe systems of work required to stay safe. For more details, refer to the section on different types of risk assessments in this procedure.
What does reasonably practicable mean?	**"Reasonably practicable"** means balancing the level of risk against the time, effort, and cost needed to control it. You are expected to reduce risks as far as is sensible and achievable

Question	Answer
	without taking actions that are grossly disproportionate to the benefit. For example, spending £1 million to prevent minor bruises would not be reasonably practicable. But spending the same amount to prevent a major incident that could cause serious harm or death would be. Even when full control is not practical, you must still take steps to reduce the risk as much as possible, like changing how a task is done or providing protective equipment.
What is the difference between a generic risk assessment and a specific risk assessment?	A **generic risk assessment** outlines common hazards, risks, and control measures for general activities. It provides useful guidance but is not tailored to a particular site, group, or situation—for example, a general school trip template. A **specific risk assessment**, on the other hand, is adapted to the exact activity, location, people involved, and any unique risks. It must be reviewed and updated by a responsible person to ensure it is relevant and effective. Risk assessments should always be consulted on with relevant staff and stakeholders to make sure they meet the actual needs of the situation.
What should I do if a staff member does not follow the risk assessment?	All staff have a legal duty of care to protect themselves and others, and must cooperate with their employer by following training and agreed safe systems of work. If a staff member is not following a risk assessment: • Speak to them professionally and respectfully to understand their concerns. • Involve them in reviewing the risk assessment to check if it is still suitable and practical.

Question	Answer
	• If the assessment is still valid and agreed upon, but the staff member continues to disregard it, the issue should be: • Addressed in one-to-one discussions, and • Escalated through formal procedures, including disciplinary action if necessary, to protect everyone's safety.