

Contemporary Risk Assessment in Safeguarding Children

**Edited by
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Dedications

To Janet, Stacey and Emma

Thanks for making me smile and reminding me every day of the things that really matter

Martin C. Calder

Congratulations to Abbie Leyland from Lowton Junior and Infant School for winning the drawing competition.

Her winning picture is on the front cover.

Every Child does matter.

Dedicated to the children of Lowton Junior and Infant School to keep them safe and healthy and to my Mum and Dad for keeping me safe and healthy

Abbie Leyland

Preface

Risk is a key concern and preoccupation for both staff and managers in the safeguarding and assessment of children and young people, especially given the level of public and subsequent media scrutiny and blame in the event of negative outcomes and loss of credibility. However, life without risk would be sterile and would limit positive outcomes being achieved for and by some children.

We are all risk managers

All of us who work in the protection and safeguarding of children and young people are all risk managers already. We all take decisions every day, often without thinking about it. Without realising it, we might be taking unnecessary or excessive risks or we might be too timid about taking reasonable risks that offer better outcomes or rewards. Risk taking and management has to be balanced against exposing oneself and others to unnecessary harms and dangers. The right to protection and the right to risk have to be carefully considered and many risk assessments will produce professional dilemmas as they attempt to reconcile the two positions. Risk management can and should be seen as seizing opportunities, not just to avoid danger, but to increase the odds of good outcomes, and reduce the odds against bad ones.

The context of risk management

Risk and risk assessment are complex issues, aggravated by an inadequate knowledge base to inform practice and by the removal of the terms from professional social care vocabulary and official guidance relating to safeguarding children (*Safeguarding Children*; DfES et al., 2006) (see earlier note). There are no standardised definitions of risk or risk assessment, particularly about whether risk means only the possibility of harmful outcomes, whether it involves a balancing of possible good and possible harm, and whether it even includes the idea of positive events.

The chapters in this book reflect that different professionals working in different organisations have very different understandings of evidence based practice as well as the focus of their risk assessments. The chapters are designed to help the reader to think through the meanings of words and phrases and in so doing increase the possibility of developing a common language, essential for safe decision making.

Risk is clearly related to dangerousness, resulting in harm. This is not restricted to service users but is also a feature of professional and organisational practice that has

to be acknowledged and redressed. Risk is not a value free activity and risk assessment represents a significant intrusion into family privacy and we need to consider how we engage service users in the task of risk assessment.

The aspiration of this book

The chapters in this book have been brought together since the editor became aware that there was precious little material relating to the many areas of risk assessment subsumed under the safeguarding umbrella. This book thus attempts to:

- Provide a readily understood explanation of the concept of risk and risk assessment.
- Provide an accessible discussion of the key areas where risks need to be assessed.
- Provide an overview of the state of research and practice wisdom in this field.
- Examine some of the dilemmas which staff and managers take in their daily decision-making.
- Consider how managers and staff are isolated when trying to redress the local and national guidance void in the area of risk assessment and safeguarding children, with the ensuing inconsistent and un-standardised approaches and decision making.
- Examine the place of actuarial risk tools compared to clinical judgement in the risk assessment process, and the tensions and confusions that can arise between professionals talking at cross purposes with each other.
- Explore the arguments and means of assessment in an accessible manner with a practice-based emphasis.
- Identify and examine the origins and contemporary features of professional and organisation dangerousness with some antidotes.
- Examine the links between strengths (needs)-led and risk assessment practice.
- Consider ways of engaging service users in the risk assessment and management processes.
- Consider the emerging dilemmas in the areas of rights, protection and responsibilities.
- Provide some suggested contemporary risk assessment frameworks for consideration.

In so doing, there is a link made between theory, research and practice; the past, the present and the future; between academics, researchers and practitioners. The book cannot offer a magic formula that will always provide us with the right answers, but it can offer a way of thinking that will give us better answers to better questions that leads to better outcomes. The reader should be able to see the house being built as they read the chapters and through this they will be more able to understand their own approach to risk and thus manage their professional practice better. Staff need

to learn how to conduct risk assessments that are evidence-based, comprehensive and equitable, and which produces risk management strategies where levels of intrusion are commensurate with levels of risk.

Staff will always have to live with uncertainty. But we can refine the exercise of professional judgement in estimating and managing uncertainties prospectively, rather than being judged retrospectively with the benefit of hindsight.

The importance of inter-agency approaches in policy, practice and training

The material is drawn from a number of different professional groups and disciplines, and as such should make the text a broadly appealing one. The emergence and ongoing development of safeguarding, which unifies prevention and protective structures and systems, will benefit from considering the messages within the book when all those with levels of responsibility are constructing their policies, procedures and practice guidance in relation to risk assessment across all the agencies serving children.

Who this book is for

This will be an essential text for staff in the social care and criminal fields, psychologists, counsellors, as well as students on many courses -especially social work training at degree and PQ levels – and Safeguarding Board trainers. It should also appeal to government staff with a responsibility for policy development or review.

It can be read end-to-end, or be dipped into, chapter by chapter. It is strongly recommended that any chapter that is being looked into be read in its entirety. Pulling out sections can result in missing part of the message. But numerous and descriptive subheads have been added to help anyone seeking specific topics as their starting point. This is felt to be more appropriate than an index.

About the Contributors

Chris Beckett is a Senior Lecturer at Anglia Ruskin University. His main interests are the care proceedings process, the discrepancies between the rhetoric of policy makers and day-to-day practice experience. He has written or co-written five books including (with Stephen Walker) *Assessment and Intervention in Social Work* (Russell House Publishing, 2003) and *Child Protection: An introduction* 2nd edn. (Sage, 2007).

Martin C. Calder established Calder Training and Consultancy in 2005 after 20 years in frontline child protection practice. His aim has been to generate and collate the available and necessary assessment tools for frontline staff, especially in times of massive change. He also critiques central government guidance and attempts to provide remedial materials to help fill the gap left between aspiration and reality. He is contactable through his website at www.caldertrainingandconsultancy.co.uk

Jo Clarke PhD, is a chartered forensic psychologist and Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society. She is also an honorary teaching fellow in the Department of Psychology, University of York and an Associate Trainer with the Work Skills Centre and Centre for Supervision Training. Jo has extensive experience working in a diverse public sector organisation, as well as a range of private and charitable companies, as a clinician, trainer, consultant and researcher. In recognition of the multiple and complex challenges facing staff in critical occupations, Jo's work focuses on working with both individuals and organisations to achieve and maintain good psychological health.

Shelley Cohen Konrad PhD, LCSW is Assistant Professor of Social Work at the University of New England in Portland, Maine, USA. Prior to teaching at UNE Shelley worked as a clinical social worker with children and families in residential, school, and outpatient settings. Her work has centred on relational practice that emphasises the quality of the alliance between clients and practitioners as well as the collaborative and interactive nature of change. Shelley recently ventured into filmmaking with her production of the *Art of Hope*, which chronicles the lives of three families dealing with the death of a child.

Liz Davies is a senior lecturer in Social Work at London Metropolitan University. Liz provides consultancy to the media and writes widely on child protection issues. Whilst a team manager in Islington she exposed extensive abuse of children within

the care system and later, as child protection manager in Harrow, developed her specialism in child interview skills and the investigation of organised abuse networks. In 2005 she was the expert witness at the Care Standards Tribunal for Lisa Arthurworrey, social worker to Victoria Climbié. More recently, with the publisher Akamas, she designed online child protection training and is the author of a practice based resource book entitled *Protecting Children*.

Dr John Devaney is a lecturer in social work at Queen's University Belfast, where he delivers teaching at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and is involved in research in the area of child protection and violence against the person. Prior to joining Queen's University in 2006 he was a Principal Social Worker at the Eastern Health and Social Services Board and policy advisor to the Eastern Area Child Protection Committee. He has advised central government on the development of strategies in relation to domestic violence and sexual violence.

Clay T. Graybeal PhD is Professor of Social Work at the University of New England in Portland, Maine, USA. His work has focused on strengths-based assessment, solution-focused practice, and the creative arts in social work. He is also a playwright, and the videotape of his play, *The Calling*, has been screened at multiple national conferences in the US. His most recent article, *Evidence for the Art of Social Work*, traces the history of the evidence-based practice movement and challenges its conclusions. His first book, *Transformative Social Work Practice*, will be published in the near future.

Phil Heasman qualified and practised as a generic social worker, senior practitioner (child protection) and practice teacher before becoming involved in social work and inter-professional education, professional development and research as a senior and then principal lecturer at Canterbury Christ Church University College, as a trainer for Kent and Medway Social Services Departments and PQ Child Care Award programme director.

Phil is currently a principal staff development officer (Safeguarding Children) and training co-ordinator for the Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Board and has long-standing interests in children and young people's rights; service user, patient and carer participation; multi-agency and inter-professional practice; effectiveness and impact evaluation; and international social development.

Anne Hollows, PhD, BA (Hons), Grad Dip in Social Work, CQSW is Principal Lecturer in Social Work at Sheffield Hallam University, where she combines teaching on child and family work and research methods with her research work. She directs the MA in Collaborative and Therapeutic Work with Children and Young People and the MA in Social Research methods for Social Work. She has undertaken evaluations of Sure Start programmes and has undertaken several studies relating to

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Hazel Kemshall is currently Professor of Community and Criminal Justice at De Montfort University. She has research interests in risk assessment and management of offenders, effective work in multi-agency public protection, and implementing effective practice with offenders. She has completed research for the Economic and Social Research Council, the Home Office, and the Scottish Executive, and both teaches and consults extensively on public protection and high risk offenders. She has written numerous publications on risk, including *Understanding Risk in Criminal Justice* (Open University Press, 2003). She recently completed an evaluation of multi-agency public protection panels for the Home Office (with Wood, Mackenzie, Bailey and Yates) and is currently investigating pathways into and out of crime for young people under a European Social Research Council network (with Boeck and Fleming) and has recently completed an evaluation of *Stop it now! UK and Ireland* (with Mackenzie and Wood). She has developed training and guidance materials on high risk offenders for the National Offender Management Service (with Mackenzie and Wilkinson).

Roger Kennington has specialised in work with sex offenders since 1991. He was a member of the Northumbria Probation Service Specialist Sex Offender Team and now coordinates the Sexual Behaviour Unit in Newcastle upon Tyne. He developed and co-authored *The Accredited Sex Offender Treatment Programme from Northumbria* and the treatment programme for it. He has co-authored books on the assessment and management of men who sexually abuse.

Robert E. Longo, MRC, LPC is Corporate Director of Special Programming and Clinical Training for New Hope Treatment Centers, Charleston, South Carolina. He also serves as a consultant, educator, trainer, and author dedicated to sexual abuse prevention and treatment. Robert was previously Director of the Safer Society Foundation, Inc. and the Safer Society Press from 1993 until 1998. He has published four books, five workbooks, more than forty chapters and articles in the field of sexual abuse treatment, and pioneered the adult sexual offender workbook series formerly published by the Safer Society Press and now published by NEARI Press.

Roger Smith is currently Professor of Social Work Research at De Montfort University, Leicester. He previously held posts as Head of Policy with the Children's Society, Project Director (Corby Juvenile Liaison Bureau) and Probation Officer (Northamptonshire Probation Service). He is currently Chair of the East Midlands

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James Vess received his PhD in clinical psychology from Ohio State University. He spent 15 years at Atascadero State Hospital, California's 1,250 bed maximum security forensic state hospital, where he served in a variety of clinical and supervisory positions. He is currently a senior lecturer at Victoria University of Wellington, and Deputy Director of the clinical training programme. His research is in psychometric assessment, personality disorders and psychopathy, especially as they relate to risk assessment in forensic populations. He also maintains a forensic clinical practice, conducting risk assessments and serving as an expert witness in violent and sexual offender cases.

Tony Ward PhD, MA (Hons), DipClinPsyc is Professor of Clinical Psychology and Clinical Director at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. His research interests include the offence process in offenders, cognitive distortions and models of rehabilitation. He has published over 200 research articles, chapters and books. His most recent books are *Theories of Sexual Offending*, with Devon Polaschek and Anthony Beech (Wiley, 2006) and *Rehabilitation: Beyond the Risk Paradigm*, with Shadd Maruna (Routledge, 2007).

Nicki Weld lives in Wellington, New Zealand, and has had experience in a variety of social service roles including senior social worker, supervisor, acting team leader, senior trainer, and national social work advisor. She has had involvement in key capacity building initiatives particularly within the New Zealand Statutory Child Protection Agency, and delivers workshops both nationally and internationally. Nicki is a registered social worker who believes in the application of creativity and innovation in social service work to inspire people to reach their true potential.

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To Debbie Hulme for her creative wizardry

To each of the contributors for producing materials of such a high quality

Introduction

This book was conceived when managing the transition from child protection to safeguarding service in Salford, when the reality of the extent of the changes was realised. The first indication of the demise of risk in government vocabulary and thinking had appeared in the assessment framework (DoH, 2000) and has never resurfaced since. This is worrying since the core population of families for social care professionals is child protection and this requires enhanced risk assessment skills and frameworks. Moreover, those minded to correct this unsatisfactory state of affairs could find little in the field that was up-to-date and contemporary. Ironically, the health and criminal justice fields have moved in the opposite direction, developing more refined frameworks for measuring risk, although there are inherent dangers of importing these as a natural corrective to the social care void as they measure risk of re-offending for the index offence rather than the risk of harm which is significantly broader. I decided to assemble a group of professionals and practitioners to try and produce a text that would:

- Attempt to provide a link between historical and contemporary thinking and materials.
- Examine the place of actuarial risk tools compared to clinical judgement.
- Examine the links between strengths (needs-led) and risk assessment practice.
- Consider a re-conceptualisation of risk assessment.
- Provide a contemporary vision of child protection structures, thinking and assessment tools.

The book is divided into two parts: contextual considerations and operational considerations. There is clearly a significant amount of overlap but I wanted to allow for an examination of issues within the structures and systems that impact significantly on practice before moving on to look at issues facing frontline practitioners and trying to furnish them with some operational considerations and frameworks for practice. The book is not designed to produce assessment frameworks designed to assess different kinds of presenting risk as these have been adequately covered elsewhere (Calder, 2000; Calder and Hackett, 2003; Calder, in press; Hackett and Calder, forthcoming). Risk and involuntary clients seem to be opposite sides of the coin and whilst a chapter is dedicated to this subject here it is examined in significantly more detail in Calder (in press b). This book is not designed to be the answer to all the issues and problems in the field currently but it

is designed to stimulate discussion and clarification of the available tools in the field and to assess whether they are fit for purpose and in what context.

In Chapter 1, Roger Smith locates risk in the ever changing social care landscape, summarises the current position and reflects on potential future trajectories as the safeguarding revolution continues to unfold. He lays down some important foundations for the book and identifies areas requiring further and more detailed consideration in other chapters. In Chapter 2, John Devaney takes us sideways to examine the issue of performance management which has been introduced centrally and prioritised locally because of the status and financial incentives/restrictions associated with good or bad performance. What he seeks to do is to challenge such output based measures as being in any way connected with good outcomes for children and in fact produce diversionary practice with huge consequences. He maps the evolution of the performance management systems and focus and then offers a critique of these as a mechanism of governance for the child protection system. This is an important area as frontline practitioners are often confused about processes and priorities that seem to be divorced from their work, yet are grounded in the performance management framework. In Chapter 3 Liz Davies encourages us to reclaim the language of child protection. She argues that since the mid 1990s the refocusing of children's services away from child protection work has represented a backlash following the success of child protection investigations across the country and that this trend has accelerated since the publication of the Green Paper, *Every Child Matters*, with an increased emphasis on prevention as the prime solution to child abuse. She argues that such a focus on prevention is a pretence camouflaging the reality of wide spread destruction of child protection services known to protect vulnerable children. Family support has been framed as diametrically opposed to proactive child protection investigation and prevention is presented as the opposite of interventionist strategies. She suggests that the government has reinforced these policy divides in order to segregate service provision between the two extremes of prevention/family support and child protection. This has allowed for the restructuring of service delivery to 'child in need' teams, has increased centralised control of child protection work and has facilitated privatisation of family support services. A service focus on the needs of children and their families has diverted attention from the proactive investigation of perpetrators outside of the family network. She advocates a dual strategy of protection and prevention as the way forward. In Chapter 4, Chris Beckett examines the thorny issue of thresholds and the increased pressure for certainty within the system that has the potential to paralyse professionals who fear blame when anything goes wrong. He does accept that thresholds are important. For resource reasons, for reasons to do with the right to privacy and self-determination and for reasons to do with the negative consequences of intervention itself, it is both inevitable and appropriate that the most extreme interventions should be focussed only on those situations where the risks of adverse events are high. For all the same reasons it makes sense that there should be

progressively lower thresholds for less intrusive interventions and for various levels of assessment. But child protection professionals should be absolutely clear, both with themselves and with their political masters, that a threshold is – and only ever can be – a line drawn across a pyramid of probability, not a line that neatly divides families that will definitely seriously harm their children from families that definitely will not. In Chapter 5 Anne Hollows examines professional judgement within the child protection process – a critically essential ingredient in evidence-based defensible risk assessment practice.

In Chapter 6, I examine professional dangerousness in the current context and examine the definition, the impact of child protection work on the workers, the circumstances when professionally dangerous practice may emerge and the wider context of professional practice. The hope is that early recognition and identification of the concept can promote safe professional practice. In Chapter 7 Phil Heasman introduces the professional dimension as an integral part of the system surrounding a child or young person – playing a part through complementary and/or substitute services in tipping the balance towards the safeguarding and promoting of health and development immediately and in relation to longer term optimal outcomes. However, it is suggested that in some circumstances the professional dimension through omission, and less commonly through commission, may contribute to tipping the balance towards risk and danger. He presents a three point model to assist reflection and analysis of the potentially complex professional domains, dimensions and dynamics operating at an individual, agency and inter-agency level. In Chapter 8, I move outwards in line with Heasman's proposed model to examine the broader concept of organisational dangerousness that represents the cultivating and facilitating environment in which professional dangerousness can be found. Some element of crossover exists between the two and indeed the seeds of individually dangerous practice are frequently traceable to the organisational context and the origins of their problems are further traceable to the political and policy context. What is clear is that there continues to be displacement of responsibility for poor outcomes from the top down, showing that politicians and managers are potentially part of the problem rather than part of the solution. Finally in this section, Jo Clarke introduces us to some groundbreaking work in the HM Prison service that examines the concept of resilience in high risk jobs. This is a critical component of promoting safe and sustainable risk assessment and which is a potential ingredient and antidote to organisational and professionally dangerous practice.

In Chapter 10, Clay Graybeal examines the opportunities as well as limitations of incorporating a strengths perspective within the conceptual framework of risk assessment. In Chapter 11 Kemshall examines actuarial and clinical risk assessment processes and tools and examines their potential working relationship. The development of formal risk assessment tools to enhance the reliability of decisions and improve their defensibility is a key feature of the criminal justice system. The most robust of these tools combine actuarial and clinical factors into structured

assessment tools and their use is now commonplace. Social care professionals need to have some grasp of the tools and rules for use of the actuarial tools if they are not to just uncritically import them into their operational assessments. In Chapter 12, I attempt to provide workers with an operational framework for conducting risk assessments by exploring the definition, components and parameters of the concept. By using the concept of risk in its fullest sense, e.g. assessing for strengths and protective mechanisms as well as weaknesses, then it remains an important and central consideration in our work designed to safeguard the child. This chapter moves on to consider the forgotten stages of the risk process: risk analysis and risk management. In Chapter 13, Weld introduces us to the three houses approach to assessment with teenagers. It is an information-gathering tool that supports risk assessment by providing a thorough exploration of a person's situation. It was developed from the concepts of Te Whare Tapa Wha – a Maori model of health, resiliency theory, solution-focused theory, and Signs of Safety. It was created in New Zealand in 2003 and tested within the statutory child protection setting, as part of a wider strengths based practice initiative. The chapter provides an overview of the tool's principles, a practical description of its application with young people, parents and carers, and children within the context of child protection, and discuss its use as a reflective tool for workers, and in a family group conferencing setting.

The next few chapters move on to consider risk in the field of sexual abuse since it is the birthplace of many of the recent significant conceptual and practice developments in risk assessment. In Chapter 14, Roger Kennington examines the developments in the field of adult male sexual offenders. In Chapter 15, I examine the further refinement and development of risk materials in the young people who sexually abuse field and examine the potential to export the structural ideas to other areas of work. One of the proud achievements has been the progress made in relation to developing better frameworks for assessing risk with young people who sexually abuse and how this has now reached a level where it is informing developments needed in the adult sex offender field (Calder, 2005). As historically the case, the starting point, was importing the developments from the adult sex offender field. These took the form of actuarial risk tools and the emergence of stable and dynamic risk factors so we did not concentrate exclusively on previous behaviour. Robert Longo in Chapter 16 considers the broad approach to risk assessment but then shifts the focus onto treatment. Longo has developed a holistic treatment model that shifts the emphasis from relapse prevention to wellness planning (Longo, 2001, 2002). In his current chapter he outlines the current thinking about assessing youth with sexual behaviour problems and youth who are sexually aggressive from both a sexual risk perspective as well as risk in other life areas, and recommendations for treatment.

In Chapter 17, Thakker, Vess and Ward consider cross-cultural issues in general assessment. These include language and communication, acculturation, and the use of explanatory models. The middle section of the chapter then focuses on the

cross-ethnic use of the Psychopathy Checklist Revised (PCL-R) which is one of the psychometric tools commonly used in the assessment of risk. The final section of the chapter presents a model that may be used as a guide for the implementation of culture-sensitive risk assessments.

In Chapter 18, I consider the issue of involuntary clients within the risk assessment process. The aim of this chapter is to map the contextual considerations in relation to partnership and paternalism and relate these to how they affect client-worker interactions in the child protection sphere, dominated by the need for risk assessments and the presence of involuntary clients. The mapping of the terrain should provide us with some understanding of the contributory problems and also provide us with a pathway toward solutions when attempting remedial strategies in practice. The reader is signposted to a more substantial text in relation to working with involuntary clients in a range of contexts (Calder, 2007). The reader should also make links with Chapter 6 (this volume) that attempts to provide a contemporary framework for understanding professional dangerousness as such considerations clearly impact directly on the worker-client relationship.

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