

The Essentials: Reframing disability support worker practice from risk aversion to risk enablement

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Why this is important

Supporting people with cognitive disabilities to participate in activities involving risk—like cooking or travel—is part of good support practice. Often, disability support workers protect the people they support from taking risks. They fear the person may be endangered, cause harm to others or that they will be reprimanded by their employer. Our aims were twofold, to both establish the basic “essentials” of risk enablement, and develop a self-paced, openly accessible online risk enablement training package for disability support workers.

What we did

A literature review was undertaken to determine the essential elements that underpin positive risk taking. These findings were translated into pilot face to face training workshops and trialled with disability support workers from Unisson Disability, NSW. These workshops also provided a forum for participants to share their experience and knowledge on enabling risk in their working lives. We also consulted with a group of self-advocates from NSW CID. All of this information informed the development of the online training resource.

What we found

The Essentials of Risk Enablement are shown in Figure 1. As part of the risk enablement process, staff must work together, take account of context, plan and demonstrate accountability for their actions. The approach taken must be person-centred.

The online training resource, **“Enabling Risk: Putting Positives First”** is found at: www.enablingriskresource.com.au. It includes written material, video, authentic case scenarios and assessment questions to help guide the user. It can be accessed on a desktop computer or mobile device.

The 5 online Modules are:

- Module 1:** Introduction to risk
- Module 2:** Enabling risk for the people you support
- Module 3:** The 4 Essentials of Risk Enablement
- Module 4:** Risk Enablement in action
- Module 5:** Being someone who enables risk

To date, the site has been receiving an increasing number of visitors. In July there were 245 site visits. The resources are being used by organisations such as HireUp and our partners Unisson.

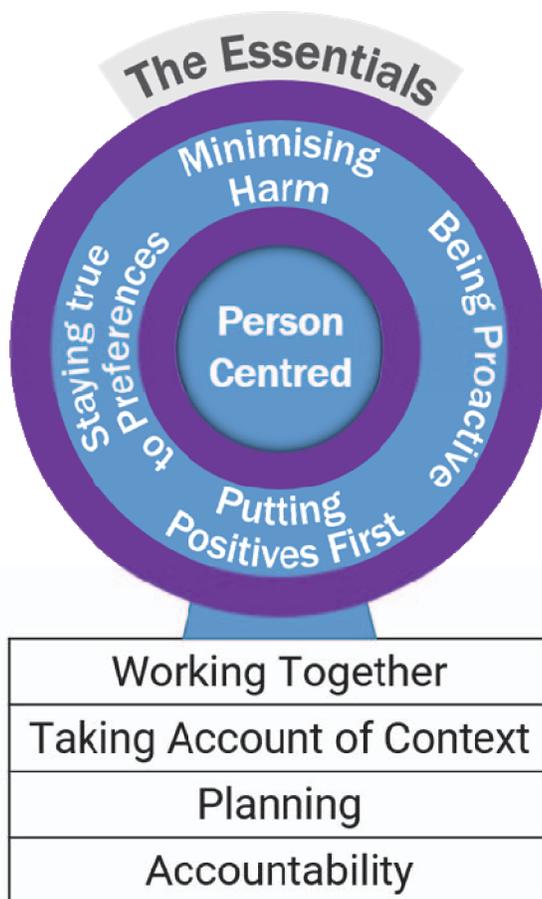


Figure 1 The Risk Enablement Process

Disability support workers have provided positive feedback about risk enablement training. They said:

“I always thought risk was a bit of a negative topic, but it’s now definitely turned into a positive....”

“It was easier than I expected it to be.”

“The way I am looking at it now is to basically not put cotton wool around the clients. If they wish to do something that I feel is risky, it’s not my choice. It’s now my choice to support their risk.”

“...just try to take your own values out of it...and separate yourself because it’s not your decision, it’s actually the person’s ... decision whether or not they want to do that.”

Conclusions and Implications

Living a full and meaningful life includes having the opportunity to take risks. People with cognitive disabilities are sometimes not supported to maintain choice and control over the activities in which they participate. Training disability support workers in how to enable positive risk taking is one step towards creating a culture of good support practice. Our training resource has received very good early feedback following its launch this year. Further evaluation is being planned.

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References

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