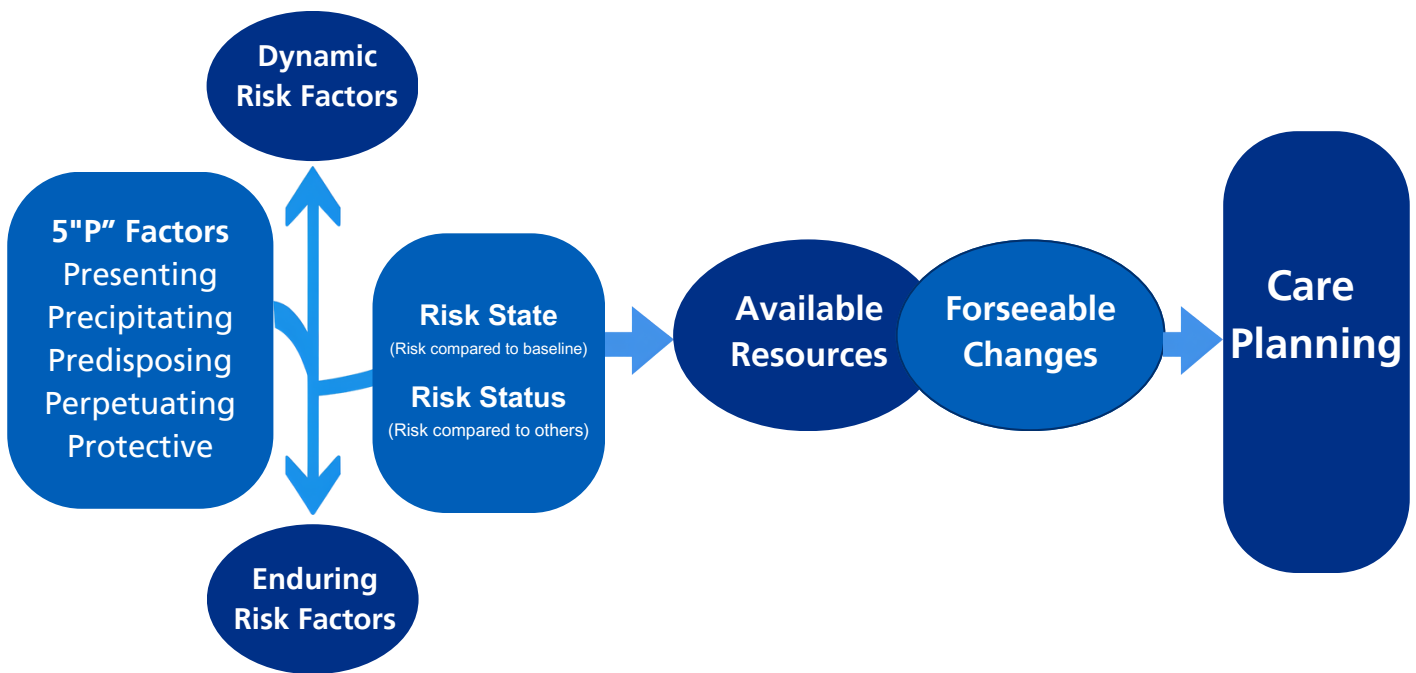


RISK FORMULATION

A risk formulation is an understanding of why a person has presented in a particular way at that moment in time. The risk formulation should consider any factors that might impact an individual's risk so that safety strategies can be put in place to support the individual or others.



Using the 5 P framework (Weerasekera, 1993) can be helpful to capture important details about the service user's presentation and clinical data related to their risk. The 5Ps are Presenting, Predisposing, Precipitating, Perpetuating, and Protective factors.

- **Presenting Factors:** Describe the person using language that focuses on their strengths and promotes acceptance, hope, respect, and uniqueness. Include details such as age, gender, reason for entering the service, referral source, current concerns, diagnoses, mental and physical state, and known risks, including current suicide ideation or behaviour.



RISK FORMULATION

- **Precipitating Factors:** Ask the person to describe any recent triggers or events that have exacerbated the problem, such as mental illness, substance use, physical illness, or life events like bereavement or loss of status.
- **Predisposing Factors:** Explore how and why the person's lifetime experiences have contributed to the development of their problems and patterns of symptoms and behaviour over time.
- **Perpetuating Factors:** Identify potential contributors that maintain or worsen the problem if not addressed, such as unhelpful coping strategies like alcohol and drug use, gambling, and other behaviours.
- **Protective Factors and Strengths:** Ask what helps them to be resilient and maintain their emotional health, such as family support, stable accommodation, employment history, medication adherence, and problem-solving approaches.

When conducting a risk formulation, you will collect clinical data related to person's risk, including enduring and dynamic factors. It is important to consider all factors, both dynamic and enduring.

Dynamic risk factors are those that can change over time and may fluctuate based on the individual's current situation or mental state. These factors are often influenced by recent events or changes in the person's life. Below are some examples of dynamic risk factors for suicide:

- **Recent relationship breakdowns:** Changes in personal relationships, such as a breakup or divorce, can significantly impact an individual's emotional state.
- **Increased substance use:** An increase in the use of alcohol or drugs can elevate the risk of suicidal behaviour.
- **Current suicidal plans or attempts:** The presence of current suicidal thoughts, plans, or recent attempts can indicate a higher risk.
- **Changes in mental health:** Fluctuations in mental health conditions, such as worsening depression or anxiety, can also be dynamic risk factors.



RISK FORMULATION

Enduring risk factors are those that are relatively stable and long-lasting, often rooted in an individual's history or personal characteristics. These factors do not change rapidly and can provide a baseline understanding of an individual's risk. Below are some examples of enduring risk factors for suicide:

- **Previous suicide attempts:** A history of previous suicide attempts is a significant enduring risk factor.
- **Family history of suicide:** Having a family history of suicide can increase an individual's risk.
- **Long-term mental health conditions:** Chronic mental health conditions, such as depression or bipolar disorder, are enduring risk factors.
- **Substance use history:** A long-term history of substance use, including alcohol or drugs, can elevate the risk.
- **Chronic physical illnesses:** Enduring physical health issues, such as chronic pain or terminal illness, can also be risk factors.

These factors are important to consider during a suicide risk formulation, as they can provide insight into the individual's current risk state and help in developing appropriate safety strategies.

It's important to remember that almost no factors are purely enduring or dynamic. For example, a supportive marriage, typically an enduring factor, can change and affect an individual's risk state, while dynamic factors can sometimes endure for long periods.

This document is adapted from ASPIRES Pathway Clinician Resource
Published by the State of Queensland (Metro North Hospital and Health
Service), January 2023

Download the StayAlive app.

Please use the QR code to connect with downloadable resources that
may be helpful to a service user.

RISK FORMULATION

The **Prevention Oriented Risk Formulation (PORF)**, developed by Anthony Pisani and colleagues in 2016 (1), shifts from a prediction-based to a prevention-based approach to suicide risk.

Clinicians should use prevention-oriented thinking and language to articulate the person's **Risk State, Risk Status, Available Resources, and Foreseeable Changes**.

The **Risk State** compares the person's current risk to their baseline, often influenced by more dynamic risk factors. For example, Peter's risk is higher than his baseline as he usually does not present with suicidal plans, but today he has attempted to end his life and has access to means. His risk increased after a recent relationship breakdown and increased alcohol use.

Risk Status compares the individual to a specific cohort or treatment setting, often influenced by more enduring risk factors. For instance, Peter's suicide risk is higher than a typical Community Adult Mental Health Service user and similar to those supported by acute services like the Crisis Team or inpatient unit, as he has recently tried to end his life. He has previously attempted suicide, has a family history of suicide, and a long-term history of alcohol use.

Available resources are internal and external supports that the person can use immediately during a crisis to lower their risk. These resources should be important and meaningful to the person and match the level of risk they are facing. Note that available resources differ from strengths or protective factors. Strengths can be general, but available resources are specific supports included in the risk management/safety plans.

Foreseeable changes are specific upcoming events that might quickly increase risks, such as a court hearing or an anniversary. Each event should have a contingency plan made with the person and their support to reduce the risk.



RISK FORMULATION

The Prevention Oriented Risk Formulation approach can identify areas that need to be addressed to help reduce a person's risk. For example, considering available resources, one goal may involve strengthening relationships with their support network. Identifying alcohol misuse as a dynamic risk factor, another goal may involve supporting the person to engage with alcohol services to reduce alcohol intake and associated impulsivity. Additionally, identifying foreseeable changes will assist the person in developing a contingency plan to cope with an upcoming court proceeding.

Pause to consider whether there are any gaps in the current information that need to be followed up on. It may also be helpful to consider any unconscious biases that may influence your assessment of the service user.

Proactively identifying and addressing both dynamic and enduring risk factors, as well as foreseeable changes, can significantly reduce potential risks for individuals. Utilizing tools such as the 5P and prevention oriented risk formulation ensures a structured approach to identify and implement preventative interventions. By continuously evaluating and updating information, while being mindful of unconscious biases, service providers can more effectively support individuals in creating robust and effective risk management plans.

Pisani, A. R., Murrie, D. C., & Silverman, M. M. (2016). Reformulating suicide risk formulation: from prediction to prevention. *Academic Psychiatry*, 40, 623-629. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40596-015-0434-6>

Weerasekera P. (1993). Formulation: A Multiperspective Model. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 38(5):351-358.

This document is adapted from ASPIRES Pathway Clinician Resource
Published by the State of Queensland (Metro North Hospital and Health
Service), January 2023

Download the StayAlive app.

Please use the QR code to connect with downloadable resources that
may be helpful to a service user.