

### What is a Risk Assessment and why is it needed?

A Risk Assessment is where any potential risks posed around any activity are assessed for severity (how dangerous is it) and for the likelihood of it happening plus what steps can be taken to reduce the risk which should then leave a lower residual (remaining) risk. At this point it can be decided to carry on with the task if the risk is seen as being sufficiently low or to not proceed if the risk remains unacceptably high.

Carrying out and reviewing risk assessments are an ongoing part of delivering any childcare business, however, in these unprecedented times following the COVID-19 lockdown, it is essential that you carry out fresh, robust and thorough risk assessments to cover all aspects of your childcare business prior to reopening, and that these are regularly reviewed after opening.

Even if your setting has remained open providing a valuable service caring for the children of critical workers, it is likely that your numbers were greatly reduced so any wider reopening will also require you to start with a fresh risk assessment.

Please remember that risk assessments should be carried out with careful regard to all relevant regulations and guidance. Examples of where to find such guidance:

- **Welsh Government, Childcare guidance:** <https://gov.wales/protecting-staff-and-children-coronavirus-childcare>
- **Welsh Government, Coronavirus:** <https://gov.wales/coronavirus>
- **Public Health Wales:** <https://phw.nhs.wales/>
- **Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for Childcare Settings:** <https://phw.nhs.wales/services-and-teams/harp/infection-prevention-and-control/guidance/accordians/docs/infection-prevention-and-control-guidance-2019-for-childcare-settings-0-5-years-in-wales-nurseries-childminding-and-playgroups/>
- **Health & Safety Executive:** <https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/coronavirus.htm>
- **UK Government:** <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>
- **All Wales COVID-19 Workforce Risk Assessment Tool:** <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-06/covid-19-workforce-risk-assessment-tool.pdf>

### Where can you start?

Once you are told it is safe to look at reopening, you may find the first most important considerations are safety of children, safety of staff and will parents feel comfortable in sending their child back to your setting.

Starting with staff, the manager/owner should have one to one meetings or a team meeting with staff outlining what has been or will be put in place when the setting is reopened. You could then ask staff if they are able to and will be comfortable to return once the measures are put in place, so there will be an indication of staff availability.

You are directed to consider the All Wales COVID-19 Workforce Risk Assessment Tool for staff. Staff can also be asked if they have any suggestions as to what can be done to improve measures or better meet their needs.

At the same time, you can ask parents if they intend to bring their children back to your setting when you reopen, letting them know that this might be on a reduced timetable and will be dependent on you having sufficient safety measures in place.

### **Carry out thorough Risk Assessments before reopening.**

When carrying out Risk Assessments, you will need to consider at least the following broad areas and you will know your setting's needs best:

- staff safety,
- the working environment, indoors and outdoors.
- safety of children in your care and
- safety of parents and other visitors to your setting.

Every setting is unique so it is impossible to provide sample templates that can be simply adapted to individual settings. To ensure Risk Assessments are sufficiently thorough, the owner/manager/other staff, who are carrying out the task will need to look at the risks associated with absolutely every activity at the setting with particular reference at this time, to the prevention of the spread of COVID-19.

Allowing staff and parents to have sight of your Risk Assessments showing how you have considered and reduced risks, will provide reassurance to those who are anxious about their own or their children's safety.

### **Staff safety:**

All employers are required to ensure the safety of their staff and to now provide a safe environment for staff returning to work following the COVID-19 lockdown period. Examples of work-based Risk Assessments can be found on the Health and Safety Executive website however there is no example there for childcare provision, but you could use the example given that nearest fits your service, to use as a guide for your own Risk Assessment:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/casestudies/index.htm>

There is also a toolkit that is aimed at the Health and Social Care sectors and that you might find more appropriate and useful: <https://gov.wales/covid-19-workforce-risk-assessment-tool>

Individual staff Risk Assessments should be kept confidential and stored in the appropriate staff file in accordance with your usual HR practices.

To help you minimise risk to your staff, children, parents and others, you may need to adapt existing policies or adopt additional policies such as Handwashing, Hygiene, Staff wellness, Self-isolating, Social distancing etc. Contact Early Years Wales for guidance templates.

### **Working environment:**

It is essential that the working environment is as safe as possible for all users. Following the current guidance available from Welsh Government, Public Health Wales and any other relevant guidance, carefully assess all risks posed and what steps you are taking/have taken to minimise the risk to an acceptable level.

Do not forget to consider both the indoor and outdoor areas used by the setting and also the Drop-off/Pick-up areas used by parents.

## Safety of children:

Safety of children is paramount at all times, and more especially in relation to the prevention or spread of COVID-19. Risk assessment should identify how risks associated with all children's activities have been considered and addressed. This should include everything from their arrival at the setting, hygiene and handwashing, their interactions with other children and adults, the toys and equipment they will use, snack or meal times, toileting, changes of clothing etc. These are just a few of the areas you might need to consider, you will know the potential risks at your setting. Follow the latest guidance from Welsh Government.

## Safety of parents and other adults:

As a setting you will want to help parents to help you. Sharing new procedures with the parents will be helpful to ensure that the safety of all is maintained. You might consider placing markings in collection areas to remind parents about social distancing. You might consider staggering arrival and departure times to limit parents gathering. Depending upon your location and travel arrangements for families, you might avoid requiring parents to use public transport at peak times.

Welsh Government advise only 'essential visitors' within settings. It will be for the setting manager to determine who is essential on any given day.

Agency staff are advised to be engaged on a weekly and not daily basis to limit social contacts.

## Remember:

A risk assessment is a common-sense approach to mitigating risks and limiting the spread of the virus. It should be kept under review and adapted if new risks or potential issues arise. The effective implementation of a risk assessment is reliant on dissemination and being followed by all.