

# Positive risk taking

**This section is about positive risk taking and how risk assessments should enable your relative to do things instead of preventing them. The Mental Capacity Act says everybody aged 16 years old and over is entitled to make their own decisions and if they can't there is a process which should be followed which ensures that any decisions made on their behalf are in their best interests. People should always be supported to be involved in as much of the decision-making process as possible.**



**“What good is it making someone safe, if it merely makes them miserable?”.  
(Source: Justice Munby, 2010).**

## Safety versus happiness

There is a difference between keeping somebody safe and preventing them from being independent, allowing them to make choices and have control over their life. Unnecessary restrictions will ultimately impact on quality of life and could cause a decline in emotional and mental health and/or increase in behaviour described as challenging.

If your relative expresses an interest in doing something, the starting point should always be ‘how can we make this happen’. A risk assessment should be a way of identifying what needs to happen to ensure your relative can do whatever it is they want to do, not to justify why they can't.

The Mental Capacity Act says that if your relative

has the capacity to make a certain decision at a certain time then they should. This does not mean that as a family carer you cannot give advice, outline the benefits and risks of making a certain decision. Everyone asks for advice or a different view when making decisions and sometimes an opinion is given even if it isn't asked for. The pros and cons are weighed up using the information to hand and then a decision is made. This process should be no different for your relative.

**Read this blog about risk assessments and the Mental Capacity Act:**



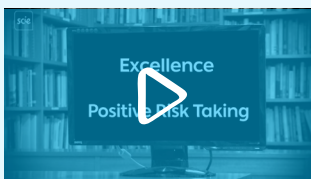
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If your relative has shown an interest in a particular activity (e.g. going swimming) but they have been assessed as not having the capacity for instance to weigh up the pros and cons of this activity, this should not be a barrier to participation. Those who know them well (e.g. you as a family carer, other family members, friends, paid support staff) can provide information about past experiences, what worked and what didn't work, solutions that have been identified.

Think about the following:

- What does your relative want to do and why, e.g. go swimming because it is an activity they used to enjoy
- If it is something that your relative used to do and it stopped, question why this happened. This provides useful information about what worked and didn't work. For example, if it stopped because there was an incident this can be explored further: was it just one incident, were there a number, what happened, was there any reflection to identify the cause?



### **Positive Risk Taking** By Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)

Watch this video clip from SCIE about how positive risk-taking enabled Michelle to continue to participate in an activity she enjoyed, despite the first attempt resulting in behaviour described as challenging. (starts at 10:19)

[Click here to watch the video](#)

- Carry out a visit to the proposed location. Those who know your relative well will already be familiar with factors your relative may find challenging e.g. parking, entering a building, lighting, noise levels, waiting
- Identify a named person from the location who might be able to support you to find solutions, and help to arrange for instance reserved

parking, entering the building via a different way, using the facility at a quiet time, booking in advance to avoid waiting. Remember that the Equality Act 2010 entitles your relative to reasonable adjustments

- Personal reasons should not influence whether your relative participates in their chosen activity, e.g. if paid support staff do not like swimming or they think your relative takes too long to get undressed/dressed
- Risk can change over time. For example, when somebody first learns to drive their risk of having an accident is higher and this is acknowledged by the insurance premium they must pay. Over time, with experience this risk decreases. The same principle applies when introducing your relative to new activities. Initially there needs to be more planning, additional staff, but over time as they become familiar with a situation any risks are likely to reduce
- What barriers are there related to resources (e.g. staffing, cost, transport)? Remember the Care Act places an obligation on local authorities to follow the concept of wellbeing which includes participation in recreational activities.
- Control by your relative over their day-to-day life, physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

### **Ten benefits of positive risk taking**

1. Opportunity to develop new skills
2. Builds confidence and self-esteem
3. Teaches responsibility
4. Promotes learning from experience
5. Sense of achievement and success (for your relative and those involved in supporting them)
6. Encourages independence, choice and control
7. Demonstrates that trying new activities can be a positive experience

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9. Can result in opening up other opportunities, increase social experiences and community presence
10. Positive impact on emotional and mental health and depending on the activity, physical health

Positive risk taking does not remove the need for safeguarding or duty of care. It is about identifying risks associated with an activity and then assessing how that activity can be completed in a way that minimises risk. Nothing is risk free and safeguarding or duty of care should not be used as an easy excuse to prevent your relative from participating in an activity of their choice.



### Making it happen By The Challenging Behaviour Foundation

Read this fact sheet from the Challenging Behaviour Foundation which includes a matrix to help identify risk, the level of risk and how to find solutions.



[Click here to read the fact sheet](#)

### Further information

Read this report about Positive Risk Taking:

[Click here to read the report](#)



Read this webpage from Skills for Care which includes a video about supporting services to manage risk taking:

[Click here to visit the webpage](#)

