

Risk screening question prompts

Building a therapeutic alliance is vital when discussing risk and often is led by a conversation about what has brought the person to that point. If the risk domain is not raised in the initial conversation, then the clinician is required to investigate the risk domain through targeted curious questioning in order to complete a thorough risk assessment and management plan.

Discussing sensitive topics which are raised in a risk screen requires sensitivity and respect. Firstly, it is important that the person is made aware of the purpose of the conversation and to highlight that you will be discussing topics which may be difficult. Consent and confidentiality should be discussed and agreed where appropriate – remembering that there are exceptions to the requirement to obtain consent to share

information and maintain confidentiality in some circumstances (see Qld Health [information sharing guidelines](#)). Examples include, sharing information to prevent serious risk to life, health or safety and sharing of information for the protection, safety and wellbeing of a child.

Here are two suggested **general** question prompts regarding what has brought the person to that point in time.

- Could you help me understand what has brought you here today?
- When people feel stressed, they often have worries in many areas. Can you tell me the areas causing stress now?

The table below contains example questions to address the **specific** risk domains if not already raised in conversation.

Risk domain	Question prompts
Suicide	• With all that you've been through, have you been having thoughts of killing yourself? • What ways have you thought of ending your life? • Have you acted on these thoughts? In what way? • Do you have access to this method now? • In the past, have you had thoughts of killing yourself? • What or who stopped you? • Do you have anyone close who knows what you're going through? • Would this person be available to help you now? • How do you see your future? • What are the things that keep you going/bring meaning to your life? • Has a family member or friend tried to end their life? The CASE approach provides further skills in questioning. See the Learning Centre courses listed at the bottom of this resource for more information.
Self-harm	• When you feel overwhelmed what do you do to feel better? • Have you ever tried to harm yourself? How? (explore: cutting, burning, picking or scratching, hair pulling, swallowing items, other. Use the person's methods when questioning further). • What are you thinking when you (cut, burn, scratch)? • How do you feel before it happens? How do you feel after? • How often would you self-harm? (e.g. cut, scratch or burn yourself) • Are you currently thinking of harming yourself?

Risk domain	Question prompts
	• Can you easily get access to ways to self-harm? (methods, e.g. sharps, lighters) • Do you ever share these thoughts with anyone else? Be sure to check if suicidality is also a feature.
Violence/ aggression	• Who do you live with at the moment? • How do you get along with the people you live with? • What happens when there is a disagreement in your household? • Have you ever been hurt or injured in an argument? • Do you feel you need to protect yourself at present? • Can you remember the worst argument you have had? • How do you respond in arguments? Have you ever lost control and hit someone? • Can you tell me about the worst time this happened? • Can you tell me about the most recent time? • What triggers your anger and aggression? • Have you ever used a weapon to hurt others? Do you have access to weapons? • If not, what do you use to hurt others? • Do you feel angry towards anybody now? • Do you think about hurting someone? How often do you have these thoughts? • Do you think you will act on these thoughts? • Have you had any legal orders relating to violence? • Do you use alcohol or drugs? • Have you been violent when under the influence of alcohol or drugs?
Vulnerability A range of examples for different topics/issues are provided.	Relationships/Domestic Violence (from the Level 1 Adult domestic and family violence routine screening tool) Note: Inform the person that the following topics may be difficult to discuss, and it is OK to discuss only what they feel comfortable sharing. Questions relating to domestic violence should not be asked if the person using or suspected of using violence is present. • Are you currently dating, sexually active or in a relationship(s)? • Tell me about your current relationship. • Are you fearful of [X] and/or do you feel unsafe or controlled by [X] and/or your family? • Have you been threatened with harm in any way by [X] and/or anyone in your family? • Is there anyone else in the family who is experiencing or overhearing these things? • Have you ever experienced any domestic violence in a previous or current relationship? • Can you help me understand this better; can you tell me more? • Are you feeling safe in your current relationship? When do you feel less safe? When do you feel safer? • Are you worried about your immediate safety, or anyone else close to you, including your children? • Do you have somewhere safe to go today? • Are you already connected to support services?

Risk domain	Question prompts
Vulnerability (continued)	LGBTQI+ • How would you identify your gender or sexual orientation? • Do you have concerns related to your gender or sexual orientation? • Can I ask how would you like to be referred to? • Is there anything about your experience that you would like to discuss? Social economic status (SES) • You mentioned you felt stressed. Money is a common issue to worry about – is this an area of stress currently? • How comfortable do you feel in your current living situation? Cultural background • What would you like me to know and talk with you about today? • If you feel comfortable, could you share with me important things you would like me to know about your culture? • Do you identify as a specific ethnic, cultural, religious, group within your country of origin? • Can you help me understand the issue from how it's viewed in your culture? • What sort of help and treatment are you familiar with? What would you like me to help you understand about treatment in Australia? • If you had stayed in your country of origin, what sort of help and treatment would you have been provided? How would you have dealt with this issue in your country of origin? • Are you able to talk with your family about your problems? Family • Who would you turn to when feeling stressed? • Is your family a source of support? • Is there someone in your family you can share your thoughts and feelings with? Disability/physical health • How well are you currently feeling? • Do you have any problems with your body that make things tricky day-to-day? • How does your health condition affect you day-to-day? • Are you taking any medications for other health conditions? • What would need to change for your health to improve? • Do you prefer any different ways of communicating or working together? E.g. language difficulties, sign language, visual cues. Cognitive/IQ/processing • How comfortable are you with what we are talking about today – can you follow me easily? • How do you find learning new information? • How well can you remember what you have talked about with people? • How about remembering events? How well can you recall details – like who was there ... what you did... or what you talked about?

Risk domain	Question prompts
Vulnerability (continued)	- Thinking back to when you were at school (or currently at school), tell me about your experiences at school with learning? Medication effects - You mentioned you are on medications, what have you noticed since taking them? - What kinds of reactions to medications do you remember having in the past? Substance use - How do you manage when you are overwhelmed? How do you relax? - Some people drink beer or smoke to relax. Do you ever use alcohol or drugs to relax? - Do you ever use alcohol or drugs when you feel overwhelmed? - What else do you use when feeling 'stressed out'? - If you were unable to use, how would you feel? - When was the last time you had ...(drug/alcohol)? - Are you currently taking drugs or alcohol? Trauma - Have you ever experienced events that were frightening or overwhelming? - Can you tell me a little more about this? - Are you currently experiencing any frightening events? - What needs to happen for you to feel safe? - Can you tell me more about what is making you feel unsafe? - Is anyone else in your family unsafe? * NB caution to only illicit information regarding previous trauma which does not re-traumatize, that is, non- detailed information. Sexual health and safety Note: It is recommended to introduce the following topic before questioning the person. For example: 'I am going to ask you a few questions about your sexual health. I understand that these questions are personal, but they are important to understand your overall health. If you aren't comfortable to answer, just let me know.' - How is your sex life going? Are you currently involved in any sexual or intimate relationships? - Do you know what I mean by sexual health? - Is it OK culturally for us to talk about this? (e.g. staff member and consumer different gender). - Are you experiencing any problems in this area? - Do you have any concerns that you would like to talk about? - Has anyone ever done something sexual to you which you were uncomfortable with or made you feel unsafe? - If you don't want to talk about your sexual health and safety now, would you like me to let you know about people you could contact to help you?
Treatment adherence/ Absent without approval	- Have you had involuntary care before under the Mental Health Act? If yes: - When was this? - What is your memory of this time?

Risk domain	Question prompts
	- Why do you think you were treated involuntarily? Other: - What has been your experience with mental health services? - Would you be willing to work with us in the future? - Have you ever discharged yourself against medical advice?
Parental status/Carer responsibility	- Do you have any children? - Do you have any children in your care? - Do you have childcare responsibilities? - What are the children's names and age? - Where are they now and who is caring for them? - With all that you've been through, how are you coping with caring for children? - Who is a good support for you and your children? - How can we support you as a parent/caregiver? - Do you have responsibility for a dependent adult child? - Do you have responsibility for a dependent adult or older adult? Additional information that might relate to questioning about the impact of mental health on children and families and child safety. The Emerging Minds, <i>PERCS Conversation Guide</i> summary is helpful: https://d2p3kdr0nr4o3z.cloudfront.net/content/uploads/2019/01/31063803/PERCS-Conversation-Guide-Summary-Jan2019-r1.pdf If child safety issues are suspected, the online <i>Queensland Child Protection Guide</i> provides a decision-making tool for reporting child safety concerns: https://secure.communities.qld.gov.au/cpguide/engine.aspx

Further courses to assist with questioning techniques.

Queensland Centre for Mental Health Learning

<https://www.qcmhl.qld.edu.au/index.php>

QC2 Engage, Assess, Respond to, and Support Suicidal People

QC14 Fundamentals of Assessment, Formulation and Planning

QC23 Forming the Therapeutic Alliance

QC24 Working with Strengths in Recovery

QC28 Youth: Engage, Assess, Respond to, and Support Suicidal People

QC30 Violence Risk Assessment and Management

QC31 Supporting a Suicidal Young Person

QC52 Cultural Capability for Mental Health

Insight

<https://insight.qld.edu.au/>

[Brief interventions toolkit](#)

Screening and brief interventions eLearning

The ASSIST: alcohol, smoking and substance involvement screening test eLearning