

MODULE 2 · LEARNER GUIDE

RISK ASSESSMENT — THE FOUR-STEP PROCESS

Identifying hazards, rating the risk, and deciding what level of risk is acceptable before your event goes ahead.

PLAN AND PREPARE

Whatever you plan to do with students, you need to plan for it. Planning that reflects current good practice sits on two pillars — **risk assessment and supervision structures**, and **standard operating procedures**. This guide focuses on the first: how to identify what could go wrong, rate how serious it could be, and decide how to manage it.

1 KEY TERMS
HARM

Illness, injury, or both — including physical and emotional harm. It is the outcome of being exposed to a hazard (for example, a broken leg or a student's distress after a near-miss).

HAZARD

Anything that does or could cause harm. Hazards are what you manage and manipulate to prevent harm from occurring — the river, the rock face, the weather, the bus, the group.

RISK

The likelihood that death, injury or illness might occur when exposed to a hazard — in other words, the chance of the hazard actually causing harm to your group on this particular event.

CONTROLS

The management strategies you put in place to lower the chance that things go wrong, or to reduce the harm if they do. Some controls are far more effective than others.

2 WHERE THIS MODULE SITS IN THE RM PROCESS

You met the full **RM process** in Module 1 (and on the Mod 1 reference card). This module zooms into **Step 2 — Assess**: rating likelihood and severity, the 5 × 5 matrix, and the difference between absolute and residual risk. Steps 3–4 are covered in Mods 3, 5 and 6.

1 · Identify

2 · Assess — this module

3 · Develop controls

4 · Manage & Monitor

3 HIERARCHY OF CONTROLS — PICK THE STRONGEST CONTROL YOU CAN

Not all controls are equal. When you develop controls in Step 3, follow this hierarchy — **eliminate the hazard first if you can**, then work down. PPE (helmets, lifejackets, etc) is the *last* line of defence, not the first.

Strongest
Eliminate

Remove the hazard entirely. Change the route, the site, or the activity so the hazard isn't there.

Strong
Engineering

Physical solutions — barriers, anchors, ropes, equipment that isolates the hazard from people.

Moderate

Administrative

Procedures, briefings, supervision structures, operational limits, training and competency checks.

Weakest

PPE

Helmets, lifejackets, harnesses. Last line of defence — used *with* the controls above, never instead.

4 ABSOLUTE RISK VS. RESIDUAL RISK

Best practice rates the risk **twice** — once before controls, and again after. Rating it only once treats all risks as equal and leaves you putting as much energy into preventing blisters as preventing drowning. Rating it twice lets you see whether your controls are actually doing their job, and whether the risk that's left is acceptable.

ABSOLUTE RISK

The risk rating **before** any controls are put in place. Tells you which hazards need the most planning attention and the strongest controls.



RESIDUAL RISK

The risk rating **after** controls are applied. This is the rating you use when deciding whether the level of risk is acceptable to proceed.

DECISION POINT — IS IT ACCEPTABLE?

The whole purpose of this process is to give you information to support your decision making: **do you accept the residual level of risk, or not?** A high residual rating doesn't automatically mean the activity can't proceed — but it does mean the controls must be strong, well-rehearsed, and in place every single time. If the residual risk is unacceptable and can't be lowered further, the activity shouldn't go ahead.

5 RATING THE RISK — THE 5 × 5 MATRIX

Rate each hazard by its **likelihood** (how often the event could occur) against the **severity** of harm if it does. Where the two meet on the matrix gives you a risk level: Low, Medium, High or Extreme.

↑ Likelihood Severity →	INSIGNIFICANT No / minor injury	MINOR First aid	MODERATE Medical treatment	MAJOR Extensive injuries	CRITICAL Fatalities
ALMOST CERTAIN	Medium	Medium	High	Extreme	Extreme
LIKELY	Low	Medium	High	High	Extreme
POSSIBLE	Low	Medium	Medium	High	Extreme
UNLIKELY	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	High
RARE	Low	Low	Low	Medium	High

6 RISK LEVEL DESCRIPTORS & ACTION

LEVEL	DESCRIPTION	ACTION
EXTREME	Considerable potential for fatalities, serious injuries or illness, or post-traumatic stress.	Stop — look for alternatives. Unacceptable level of risk; don't do it.
HIGH	Moderate potential for injuries, illness or stress requiring hospitalisation, therapy or counselling.	Control to eliminate the risk where possible. Do something to eliminate or minimise it.
MEDIUM	Some potential for injuries, illness or stress requiring medical treatment and support.	Control to minimise the risk as far as reasonably practicable.
LOW	Minimal potential for injuries or illness (above simple first aid), stress or embarrassment.	Continue — retain the risk but stay vigilant that the level doesn't rise.

7 MEDIUM-TO-HIGH RISK EVENTS

These events carry risk exposure greater than what's typical at school. Flag them early — their controls need more planning, rehearsal and review.

- Adventurous activities
- Hazardous environments — water, speed, height, chemicals, technical equipment, animals
- Extreme weather conditions
- Unpredictable environments

For these events it can be difficult to push the residual rating below high or medium — that's the nature of the work, not a failure of planning.

8 WHAT GOES IN A RAS

The EONZ **Risk Assessment & Supervision Form** (Toolkit Form #2) is the planning tool that pulls everything together:

- Harms, hazards & controls
- Operational limits / triggers
- Site-specific planning
- Risk ratings pre & post
- Past incidents & learning
- Additional-needs support

