

**Quick Risk-Assessment Tool for Lawyers  
Representing Separating/Divorcing Parents  
To Help Determine the Necessity of Family Professional Support and/or Intervention**

Notwithstanding the issues common to every separation/divorce, there are specific issues that heighten concern in terms of the outcome for the parties and their children. These are known as *risk factors*. Risk factors can impede settlement generally and achieving an appropriate parenting plan more specifically. In the presence of multiple risk factors, the likelihood of poor outcomes increases exponentially. Poor outcomes can vary from minor to major and may include: contested divorce; loss of relationships; undermined development and success of the children; injury and death of any family member(s).

The tool herein offers the legal practitioner a quick and simple method to assess risk and determine the necessity of family professional intervention or support. This is not meant to supplant a consultation from a family professional however and is only meant as a general guide for the legal practitioner.

Legal practitioners may engage their client in a discussion of these risk factors to determine the presence and severity thereof. Total severity is a measure of presence plus intensity, frequency and duration of the risk factor. In other words, one can have a mental disorder that waxes and wanes and is easily managed by medication or alternately, when active, it requires hospitalization, occurring on an annual basis. Hence by this example, the actual severity is differentially assessed.

**Scoring:** Rate *Presence* as a 0 if the risk factor does not apply and a 1 if it does apply. Rate *Intensity*, *Frequency* and *Duration* on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating the lowest severity and 5 equalling the greatest severity for the category. Clearly these are subjective measures based upon your client's response. However, as the total score accumulates the wisdom of seeking family professional support or intervention increases. Please note, the presence of any one risk factor may be enough to warrant family professional support or intervention.

<b>Risk Factor</b>	<b>Presence 0 / 1</b>	<b>Intensity 1/2/3/4/5</b>	<b>Frequency 1/2/3/4/5</b>	<b>Duration 1/2/3/4/5</b>	<b>Total Severity</b>
Mental disorder, presently or historically					
Criminal activity, presently or historically					
Overly passive, docile personality disposition					
Overly dominant, aggressive/angry personality disposition					
Domestic violence, presently or historically					
Child abuse, presently or historically					
Alcohol abuse and/or drug abuse, presently or historically					
Extra-marital affair					
Cold, uncommunicative behaviour					
Conflicting religious beliefs					
Restrictive beliefs, social or religious practices					
Multiple job loss(es)					
Learning disability (parent or child)					
Physical or developmental disability (parent or child)					
Any other special needs on the part of a child					
<b>Totals</b>					

Developed by Gary Direnfeld, MSW, RSW. This tool is not intended to replace input or guidance from a family professional. It is meant only as a guide to the legal professional. If you believe any of the risk factors indicated to be present, please consider a consultation from a duly qualified family professional.

Date of completion of this form:

Your data can help in the development of this tool. If you practice family law, please complete the form below, using the form above to determine the total risk assessment score on your past 3 closed files.

Enter the total score, as would be calculated in the table above, in the bottom right box in bold. Then place a check mark in the box most suggestive of how the case was settled.

Case Number	Total Risk Assessment Score. (Enter the number calculated from above.)	Settled through negotiation between lawyers. No court involvement.	Required third party intervention (mediator or other family professional involvement)	Required Court intervention and process, but not a trial. Process may have included assessment and/or failed mediation.	Required a trial to settle matters.
1					
2					
3					

Please next indicate in your view, whether each of the same three cases was low, moderate, high or severe conflict (place a check mark to indicate your response):

Case Number	Low Conflict	Moderate Conflict	Hi Conflict	Severe Conflict
1				
2				
3				

Any comments on the use of the Quick Risk-Assessment Tool:

Click in this box if using MS WORD:
-------------------------------------

About yourself (at your discretion):

Name	
Years of practice	
Email address	

Please fax or email this form only to: Gary Direnfeld, MSW, RSW

Fax: 905 627-0802

Email: [gary@yoursocialworker.com](mailto:gary@yoursocialworker.com)

THANKS!!!