

Desistance Table

Supporting Guidance

Desistance essentially means 'ceasing and refraining from offending or other antisocial behaviour among those for whom offending had become a pattern of behaviour' (McNeil et al, 2012 and Weaver et al. 2008)

The AssetPlus desistance table is designed to support focus within intervention planning on addressing the young person's needs and behaviours. By successfully plotting information into the table it allows the practitioner to visually bring together the key factors for and against desistance in the young person's life – the 'pushes' and 'pulls' – which should inform priorities for intervention planning. It also recognises that there will often be competing pressures, motives and incentives in a young person's life with regard to offending/desistance and that these will fluctuate over time. Because these factors are often dynamic practitioners' views of which are relevant may change during further analysis and can be updated.

The emphasis within the AssetPlus framework is on assisting young people to build on the positive factors identified as a means of enabling or encouraging change and this approach can be also be adopted by using the AssetPlus desistance table alongside Asset. This is also inline with the movement toward a reliance on a mechanised scoring process (i.e. Asset scores) and the increase of professional judgment influential in AssetPlus.

The Desistance table should be completed during the analysis phase of Asset assessment and planning i.e. after information has been gathered on the young person (domain areas completed) and prior to planning the intervention.

Using the two versions of the tool

As well as using the printable version the tool it can also be filled out electronically, so that practitioners can select drop-down options and save the completed table in the young person's case record. To complete electronically:

- Use the 'please select' boxes to enable the drop-down options from the relevant lists (see guidance below on the list of values).
- Select the Excel cell when entering text for the young person's name, desistance factor or in the text box.

Some guidance to support answering questions in the tool:

It is important to record the young person's name, date of birth and date of completion of the tool at the top of the document.

Thinking about the future, use the table below to identify and compare the key factors for and against desistance in the young person's life:

The table should be completed in the order of:

1. Identifying the FACTOR from the assessment information to date
2. Assigning a CATEGORY (from the list below) to this factor
3. Finally, applying a RATING to as to the strength/influence of the identified factor

FACTOR

Factors are entered next to the categories as free text and as many as are felt relevant can be entered for the young person. They should reflect any areas that may be influential to the young person's offending in future (even though the relationship may be historic) and should be worded as simple statements of 'what' may influence their offending and not 'how' it will do so (e.g. 'both parents are supportive', 'involved in a gang').

Factors can be on both sides of the table at anyone time (e.g. parents may be supportive but also involved in offending themselves, learning martial arts may be a positive activity but also potentially increase the risk of harm to others). They can also be associated with multiple areas of the assessment and, if this is the case, should be listed once against the most significant category (e.g. substance misuse).

Some examples of factors for desistance:

Although some of these examples given are specific, what is really wanted is the exploration, in general, of what was going on for the young person during any period of desistance and what factors contributed to it.

Individual factors for desistance:

- Education/training/work experience that enhances confidence and self-esteem (e.g. good at certain subjects, demonstrates practical skills, recognition of achievements)
- Has obtained qualifications that will help him/her to obtain employment
- Has some friends who are not involved in offending, model positive social behaviour etc.
- Positive and constructive things to do in his/her spare time
- A sense of self-efficacy (e.g. that she/he can take action to change things, displays optimism)
- A goal, ambition, sense of direction or something to 'aim at' in life
- Opportunities for 'turning points' (e.g. change of school, moving to a new area, new social opportunities)
- Resilience (e.g. copes well with difficulties, knows where to seek help, seems to spring back quickly from adversity)
- Has engaged well with previous interventions (e.g. from YISP, YIP, Positive Activities or other initiatives, interventions by other agencies)

Family factors for desistance:

- Strong, stable relationship with at least one parent or other family member
- Parent/s or carers who value education/training/employment
- Family members or carers who model pro-social behaviour and norms.

Community factors for desistance:

- Professional help/support, e.g. receiving support/counselling, other agency involvement with family
- School is interested in the young person's progress, keen to get involved and help
- Strong, stable relationship with an adult outside of the family home (e.g. teacher, youth club leader, neighbour)
- Community offers opportunities for the young person to get involved with activities (e.g. youth centre, sports facilities that caters for the young person's interests, other interest groups)
- If applicable, young person receives strong support from cultural and ethnic communities.

CATEGORY

Each category links directly to a sub-heading elsewhere in the AssetPlus framework, such as 'Emotional development and mental health' being a sub-section of the Health area in the Personal, Family and Social Factors section. The AssetPlus categories have been used in this EPC tool, rather than the Asset domain name, in order to familiarise YOT staff with the AssetPlus framework in anticipation of using the new framework in full. The AssetPlus categories are relatively self-explanatory and include:

Attitudes of Offending/Behaviours
Care History
Emotional development and mental health

Engagement & Participation
Family and wider networks
Features of Lifestyle
How the young person relates to others
Learning, Education, Training & Employment
Living arrangements, housing and financial considerations
Parenting, Care and Supervision
Physical Health & development
Resilience and goals
Self-identity
Social and community/ neighbourhood
Speech, Language, Communication & Neuro-disability
Substance misuse
Thinking and behaviour
Young person as a parent

Some factors may sit across more than one category, so you should select the most obvious category. On an individual level it is more critical that the factor is identified, rated and informs the Intervention Plan than getting the accuracy of the category correct.

RATING

Practitioners should provide a rating for how influential each factor will be to future offending. This should be based on each factor independently i.e. they do not cancel each other out.

Factors that are changeable should be recorded/rated with a focus on what you expect to happen in the short term (e.g. if you expect them to have accommodation in the short term but there is a chance they could be made homeless, if circumstances change, then this should be rated as 'potential').

These ratings are important in helping to identify priorities for intervention and can help identify priorities in a similar way to Asset scores yet give a more specific indication of the areas of influence.

The AssetPlus ratings are:

Potential: covers factors which haven't necessarily been associated with previous offending or desistance and are not yet currently occurring but might feasibly happen. For example, a potential family move to a new area or a realistic possibility of a new school/work placement.

Weak: covers factors which have a slight or occasional link to offending or desistance. For example, the young person has started to understand that there might be negative consequences of reoffending (for) or occasional substance use linked to minor offending (against).

Moderate: factors which are sometimes associated with either offending or desistance; and/or factors which influence the occurrence of other factors. For example, positive influences from pro-social friends that the young person spends some time with (for) or their impulsiveness when with certain friends or groups can result in him/her getting into offending situations (against).

Strong: factors which are clearly and directly associated with each occurrence of either offending or desistance. For example, the young person has work which provides both a sense of purpose and a legitimate income (for) or they have a close family member who is criminally active and is involving them in offending (against).

Give reasons for the ratings, particularly where a factor (either for or against desistance) has been identified as 'strong'. e.g. young person has specific reason or motivation to stay out of trouble, deeply entrenched problem, young person has little control over the factor, etc.

It is important to describe the rationale behind the stronger strength ratings, as identified during the information gathering process, as these factors will be the main drivers pushing/pulling a young person towards or away from desistance. Here you are trying to explain how you have arrived at each rating.

Practice points and further resources:

You should consider how identified factors in the desistance table may help the young person achieve positive outcomes. The information contained in this table will be important to keep in mind when completing the young person's Intervention Plan because it can indicate ways in which they could be helped to achieve their goals by seeking non-offending, pro-social secondary goods (for example achieving skills and physical health through involvement in a sports team) as well as paying active attention to their motivation and engagement.

The use of desistance factors and approaches, such as the Good Lives Model, are highlighted in the AssetPlus Model and Rationale Documents (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/assetplus-assessment-and-planning-in-the-youth-justice-system>), as well as in the Assessment and Planning Foundation Training (available on YJLS - <http://yjls.justice.gov.uk/login/index.php>).

If you have any questions or comments on the above contents, please contact assessment@yjb.gsi.gov.uk

References:

Weaver, B. and McNeill, F. 'Giving Up Crime: Directions For Policy'. Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2008)

McNeill, F., Farrall, S., Lightowler, C. and Maruna, S. 'How and why people stop offending: discovering desistance'. The Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS) April 2012

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