Wirral Safeguarding Children Board

Contextual Safeguarding

Briefing for Professionals
Safe Learning Environment

• Housekeeping
• Respect for the views of others
• Give everyone space and time to express their opinion/make a contribution
• Punctuality
• All questions are valid
• Active participation
• Confidentiality
• Clarify all jargon and acronyms
Aim of Course

• To introduce the concept of contextual safeguarding to multi-agency professionals and to explore how the approach can particularly help safeguard adolescents
Learning Outcomes

- to develop an understanding of contextual safeguarding and how the approach can be applied to safeguarding practice in Wirral
- to use case studies to explore how a contextual safeguarding approach can support development of new approaches to safeguarding young people
- to understand how extra-familial environments, the home and family, school environments and peer groups interact in terms of risk and safety
- to understand the influence of peer groups and peer on peer abuse
Starter

• Fold your A3 sheet in half to create two A4 spaces
• In one space write down 12-15 safeguarding concerns/risks facing children and young people
• Divide the other space into 3 columns and title them: **Parents Can Protect; Parents Probably Can Protect; Parents Probably Can’t Protect**
• Now move your safeguarding concerns/risks under the appropriate heading
• **What do you have in the Probably Can’t Protect column?**
What is Contextual Safeguarding?

- Contextual safeguarding seeks to identify and respond to significant harm and risk posed to children and young people from beyond their family.

- It is particularly important in respect of adolescents who naturally begin to spend more time out of their home and under the influence of peers.
The Teenage Brain

Prefrontal Cortex
- planning and reasoning
Adults – fully developed
Teens – immature, prone to high risk behaviour

Parietal Lobe
- responsible for touch, sight, language effectively
Adults – fully developed

Amygdala
- emotional core
Adults – rely less on this
Teens – more impulsive

Hippocampus
- hub of memory and learning
Adults – fully functional
Teens – on steep learning curve

Ventral Striatum
- reward centre
Adults – fully developed
Teens – more excited by reward than consequence
Development

• Contextual safeguarding has been developed by research led by Dr. Carlene Firmin at the University of Bedfordshire over the past six years to inform policy and practice approaches to safeguarding adolescents.

• It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse.
Contextual safeguarding is now referenced in key statutory guidance:

“As well as threats to the welfare of children from within their families, children may be vulnerable to abuse or exploitation from outside their families”

Working Together 2018
In Statutory Guidance

“Safeguarding incidents and/or behaviours can be associated with factors outside the school or college and/or can occur between children outside the school or college. All staff should be considering the context within which such incidents and/or behaviours occur. This is known as contextual safeguarding, which simply means assessments of children [including social care assessments] should consider whether wider environmental factors are present in a child’s life that are a threat to their safety and/or welfare”
Video – What is Contextual Safeguarding?

Link to video on YouTube

Video produced by the Contextual Safeguarding Network
Influences

School/ College -> Peer Group -> Young Person -> Neighbourhood -> Home/ family

Each context influences and is influenced by each other context
Weight of Influence
...of the Peer Group

Influenced by level of protection and risk
What is Peer on Peer Abuse?

“Sometimes the people that you chill with want you to do certain things that you don’t want to do, but you have to do it because you’re part of that crew, you’re part of it”

(Participant in study, 13 years old) (Firmin 2011)
Peer on Peer Abuse - Definition

4 Key Definitions:

- Definition for **domestic abuse** (Home Office 2013) relates to young people aged 16 and 17 who experience physical, emotional, sexual and/or financial abuse, and coercive control, in their intimate relationships.

- Definition for **child sexual exploitation** captures young people aged under-18 who are sexually abused in the context of exploitative relationships, contexts and situations by a person of any age – including another young person.
Peer on Peer Abuse - Definition

4 Key Definitions:

• Definition for young people who display harmful sexual behaviour refers to any young person, under the age of 18, who demonstrates behaviour outside of their normative parameters of development (this includes, but is not exclusive to abusive behaviours)

• Serious youth violence is defined with reference to offences (as opposed to relationships/contexts) and captures all those of the most serious in nature including murder, rape and GBH between young people under-18
Peer on Peer Abuse – Who does it Affect?

Any young person can be affected but some groups are more vulnerable:

- Young people aged 10 upwards, with those being abused generally being slightly younger than those who are abusing them
- Girls and young women are more frequently identified as those who are abused by their peers, and report it having a negative impact on their lives
- Black and minority ethnic children are often under-identified as victims and over-identified as perpetrators
- Young people with intra-familial abuse in their histories, or those living with domestic abuse
- Young people in care, and those who have experienced bereavement
Peer on Peer Abuse – Environmental Influences

- Violence in young people’s peer groups has been linked to the abuse of their partners and peers
- Young people experience violence and sexual harassment in schools where they are exposed to harmful social norms related to gender, relationships and consent
- Exposure to violence on the streets has been routinely linked to young people’s involvement in street gangs, and young people have been sexually exploited in parks, transport hubs, shopping centres and other public spaces
Peer on Peer Abuse – We Must Consider Whether:

- Environmental influences are sufficiently accounted for in risk assessments and interventions
- We are confident in our understanding of consent, and recognise the ways in which environments, contexts and relationships can limit the safe choices available to young people
- Our interventions attempt to control young people’s choices or open up safer choices for them to consider
Case Study - Dean

Consider the Case Study about Dean

• What are the ‘contextual safeguarding’ interventions which you think will be successful?

• What agencies/individuals should be involved/ be subject of these interventions?
Activity

1. On your tables order your context strips from **safest** to **least safe**

2. For each young person, consider where they are most protected and where they are most vulnerable.

3. Note down key points to assess the young person and the context under consideration (so you will be assessing the nature of their homes, peer groups, families and neighbourhoods).

4. For your young person, note down under each of the headings the interventions that should take place, including which organisations should be involved.
Contextual Safeguarding and Child Protection Systems

• Traditional CP systems focus on protecting children from risks posed by their families or where families have reduced capacity to protect

• Therefore, traditional responses support increasing families capacity to safeguard their children

• A Contextual Safeguarding system supports the development of approaches which disrupt/change harmful extra-familial contexts
Capacity to Safeguard

- This therefore gives safeguarding responsibility to those who deliver services in extra-familial spaces.

- And, would extend the concept of ‘capacity to safeguard’ beyond families to those individuals and sectors who manage extra-familial settings where young people encounter risk.

- Extending the ‘capacity to safeguard’ has implications for current CP and safeguarding processes and structures raising a number of questions:
Conclusion

In summary, Contextual Safeguarding provides a framework against which to design safeguarding systems that address extra-familial risk. In doing so it:

• Recognises the weight of peer influence on the decisions that young people make
• Extends the notion of ‘capacity to safeguard’ to sectors that operate beyond families
• Provides a framework in which referrals can be made for contextual interventions that, when delivered effectively, can complement work with individuals and families
Seven Minute Briefing

1. What is it?
Contextual safeguarding seeks to identify and respond to harm and abuse posed to young people outside their home, either from adults or other young people.

2. Why is it matters
Traditional approaches to protecting children/young people from harm have focussed on the risk of violence and abuse from inside the home, and don’t always address the time that children/young people spend outside the home.

3. Why it matters
As children move from early childhood and into adolescence they spend increasing amounts of time socialising independently of their families. The nature of young people's relationships, that they form in these settings, informs the extent to which they encounter protection or abuse.

4. Peer relationships
Research tells us that peer relationships are increasingly influential during adolescence. If a young person forms friendships in contexts characterised by violence and/or harmful attitudes these relationships will be anti-social and unsafe.

5. What are the risks?
There are a wide range of potential risks where the prime cause of harm is outside of the family. This list isn’t exhaustive but includes: peer on peer abuse; exploitation and online abuse; missing episodes; gang involvement; radicalisation; trafficking and modern slavery.

6. What should we do?
A Contextual Safeguarding approach aims to disrupt harmful extra-familial contexts rather than move young people away from them. The approach seeks to identify the ways in which professionals, adults and young people can change the social conditions of environments in which abuse has occurred.

7. What should we do?
Identify the ways in which young people can change the social conditions where abuse has occurred, and encourage self-responsibility for making these changes. Engage with individuals and sectors who have a bearing on social contexts, i.e. shopkeepers, local policing, community leaders, to make environments safer.
Evaluation

All WSCB agencies have signed up to complete impact evaluations for all multi-agency courses.

This is a three part evaluation process and the expectation of participants is:

• To complete an initial evaluation on the experience of the training.
• Complete an assessment 3 months later to state how training has impacted on work practices
• Take part in a focus group if requested

Thank you!
End of Presentation

https://www.wirralsafeguarding.co.uk/contextual-safeguarding/

https://contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/

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