



Guidance and tools to support assessment and planning for young people at risk of or suffering harm outside the family home

What is contextual safeguarding?

Contextual Safeguarding has been developed by Carlene Firmin at the University of Bedfordshire over the past seven years to inform policy and practice approaches to safeguarding adolescents. Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm outside of the family home. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Parents and carers have little influence over these contexts, and young people's experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships.

Communicating with young people

[The Appropriate language: child sexual and/or criminal exploitation guidance for professionals supports appropriate use of language](#) when referring to young people who are being exploited. It helps to avoid victim blaming.

Assessments

When young people are experiencing extra familial harm, social work assessments should include assessment around 'contextual factors'. Where risk is 'extra familial' consider the areas below in addition to other categories on the assessment framework.

- Peer group identity;
- Peer group dynamics and known risky associations;
- Risk of harm outside the family home;
- Risk relating to specific locations;
- Risk relating to online contexts;
- Parenting capacity to ensure safety outside the family home;
- Guardianship capacity of School/Trusted adults/Community.

Traditionally approaches to child protection have focussed on children and their families. As such, the frameworks and methods used when assessing children have focussed predominantly on individual children and their families. In Working Together Child and Family assessments are supported with an assessment triangle which outlines three key elements of assessment: The Child's Development Needs, Parenting Capacity and Family and Environmental Factors.

In Contextual Safeguarding, we are asking practitioners to consider contexts beyond individual children and their families. At tier two, assessments consider different issues, such as those related to schools, peer groups and neighbourhoods. As such, practitioners need frameworks that support them to consider factors that may be different to those in a traditional child and family assessment.

[The context assessment triangles guidance will provide you with very clear questions](#) which you can use as prompts throughout your assessment.

Peer group mapping with an individual

Peer group mapping can be used to better understand groups of young people that we are worried about in order to understand their connections. The exercise below can support ongoing assessment planning and intervention with individual young people by helping us to understand peer networks and dynamics.

[This Peer group map exercise tool can be used with the young person and in Core Groups and CIN meetings](#) to better understand the risks and to build safety around the young person.

Local area safety mapping

Safety mapping helps practitioners to understand young people's experiences of places they feel are safe and unsafe and supports practitioners to create a safety plan with young people.

Working with a young person, practitioners can print, or use an online version, of a map of the young person's local area. Using the map, the practitioner can guide discussion about areas that the young person feels safe and unsafe, colouring in the map in red, amber and green. This can then form the basis of a discussion with the young person about how to stay safe when in red areas, track safe routes and consider which trusted adults or safe places they can go to if they feel unsafe.

Please note: A young person may engage with you and colour the map in and highlight the red areas but may not want to disclose why the areas are red, this can at times be due to fear of reprisals.

The discussion will form the basis of a safety plan. In addition, when multiple practitioners use the safety mapping tool with young people, they can gain a better picture of areas young people feel unsafe which should then form the basis of an intervention into that place to make it safer. This exercise helps to get a better understanding from young people's own experiences of different places.

[See the Children/young people \(CYP\) safety mapping using Google maps and Microsoft \(MS\) Word guidance](#) on how to do this using your computer and for examples of how this might look.

All around me tool

[The All around me tool should be used directly with young people](#) as a way for them to explain to you the strengths and risks the different contexts have and how these impact on their daily lives. Initials or 'street names' can be used if this makes the young person feel more comfortable. [Please read the All around me - a contextual mapping tool by Kayleigh Broughton \(2018\) for more information.](#)

Online risks

Any young person who uses the internet can be at risk of online abuse. The online platform should be considered as a context. [Please refer to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection \(CEOP\) website.](#)

Context weighting

When you start to incorporate contexts into assessments, you then need to think about how to prioritise contextual interventions. One way to achieve this is thinking about which contextual factors – and contexts themselves – have the greatest influence over the problem you are trying to address. In other words – what context needs to change first for things to start to get better for that child, family, peer group, etc.? Working through this challenge is what we call 'Context Weighting'. For more information, please see [Context Weighting \(contextualsafeguarding.org.uk\)](#) and [Context weighting guidance.](#)

Working with parents to increase safety

The information which parents and carers hold can be essential. [The Supporting parents to share information on CSE briefing paper outlines actions parents can take to help in keeping their child safe.](#)

Disruption

[This nwg disruption toolkit aims to provide guidance for relevant agencies to combat exploitation.](#) It will provide a menu of options to consider in developing disruption plans. This should not be viewed as an exhaustive list and where new and creative options are used, we would urge you to share this practice widely.

National Referral Mechanism (NRM)

Modern slavery, including child trafficking, is child abuse. When an agency comes into contact with a child who may have been exploited or trafficked, Local Authority Children's Services and the police should be notified immediately. A referral into the NRM does not

replace or supersede established child protection processes, which should continue in tandem.

All children, irrespective of their immigration status, are entitled to safeguarding and protection under the law. Referrals to the NRM should be for all potential victims of trafficking and modern slavery, who can be of any nationality, and may include British national children, such as those trafficked for child sexual exploitation or those trafficked as drug carriers internally in the UK.

Closing summary

It is important to always remember that young people will often not recognise when they are being exploited and may be resistant to engage with professionals. It is our role to adjust the way we are working to suit young people and work to build their trust.

Young people can often be involved in criminal activity, but it is important to recognise them as victims and to see their vulnerability despite the risks they present to others.

To improve the safeguarding of the young person it is important to look at the bigger picture and not place the responsibility solely on the young person of changing their behaviour as they may not be in a situation where they are able to do this.

[For more information regarding contextual safeguarding click on Contextual Safeguarding.](#)