Guide to Measuring Contextual Outcomes

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Measuring Contextual Outcomes: Guide to the Framework

Introduction

Welcome to this guide to measuring contextual outcomes, which accompanies the Contextual Outcomes Framework (published separately). This guide explains what we mean by measuring outcomes contextually and offers support on how it can be used in practice. You will find a link to the Contextual Outcomes Framework at the end of this document (in Appendix 2) while the guide sets the scene to its development and explains how it can be used - so please use the guide and framework together. Both resources are designed for anyone involved in the implementation of Contextual Safeguarding responses to extra-familial harm, to support you in your efforts to understand the impact of your work. It has been developed in partnership with practitioners through two research projects: the Scale-Up Project (2019-2022) and Responses and Outcomes (2023-2024).

Contextual Safeguarding is a framework for responding to harm faced by young people beyond their family homes, made up of four domains and six values. Collectively, these guide professionals to identify the conditions causing or allowing harm within a context, by working closely with young people, families and communities. Having understood the cause, we work to build safety into contexts - through strengthening relationships, increasing resourcing, changing policy and making physical changes. In Contextual Safeguarding, responsibility for change sits with services and communities rather than with young people and families.

The focus of this guide is on how professional can measure the outcome of their efforts to change contexts, which is a requirement of the fourth domain of Contextual Safeguarding which asks us to:

> **"Monitor outcomes of success in relation to contextual, as well as individual success"**

What is a contextual outcome?

This is not an easy question to answer. Traditionally, we measure the success of safeguarding responses at the individual child level. Once we determine that a child is no longer at risk, we close or 'step down' their case. But, when it comes to extra-familial harm, this approach can mean that we miss important information about the wider conditions within a context and the safety of other children who are linked to that context. For example, we might be trying to safeguard a child who is being harmed in their school. We move the child to a different school, and they tell us that they are no longer being harmed. If we measure only at the individual level, we would close the case. But, if we haven't changed anything about the conditions at the original school, it's possible for another child to 'replace' the first child and the harm continues. This is exactly what happened in the study that led to the development of Contextual Safeguarding, by Carlene Firmin (Firmin, 2015).

Another focus of traditional safeguarding is on changes that parents make to create safety. Sometimes, when it comes to older children, this

focus can shift onto the behaviour of young people. For example we ask them, often as individuals, to make different 'choices' to 'keep themselves' safe. The problem with this is that it can fail to consider what is really causing the harm. For example, a young person may be carrying a knife. In response, a social worker asks their mother to 'set boundaries' at home (through rewards or punishment), hoping it will change the child's behaviour. The young person might stop carrying the knife and the case is closed – the outcome has been a 'success'. But, again, the measure (the child not carrying the knife) might actually turn out to not be an indicator of safety at all. If the reason for the young person carrying the knife is because they feel scared, then the intervention will have done nothing to change this. If this is the case, the young person will be just as scared as before, maybe more so. And, on top of this, the intervention might have undermined the relationship between the young person and their parents, which could actually make them less safe in the long run. So, this points to the need to think differently and more contextually about how we measure the success of our safeguarding work.

In summary, to measure outcomes contextually, we:

Shift from measuring success based solely on:	Shift towards measuring success based on:
What is happening for a child in isolation from their context	Changes in the context for any young person that is linked to it
Changes that parent/carers and young people are making to reduce harm	Changes that professionals, services and other adults make to build safer conditions

So, if we want to measure outcomes contextually, we need to first understand what the contextual issues are and be clear what we are seeking to change.
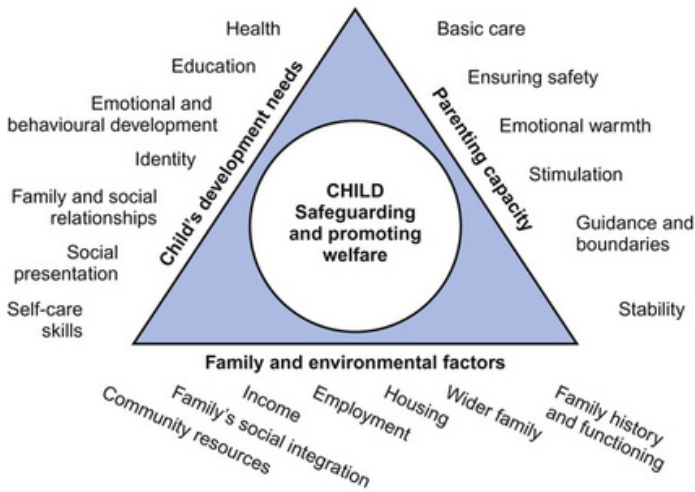
Setting goals

You can't know if you have changed a context if you are not clear on the changes you are trying to make. So the first step is deciding on your goals. The Outcomes Framework associated with this guide has been written to support you to first determine the specific goals of your contextual response before you go ahead and measure its success.

What kind of goals are we aiming for? In Contextual Safeguarding we are working within a social care model. This means our broad goals are increasing safety, welfare, support for and to young people by meeting their needs. The goals in the outcomes framework have been developed using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), which is "a standardised approach for the assessment of children and their families, to facilitate the early identification of additional needs and to promote a coordinated service response". In the CAF there are three areas to take into account when doing assessments: 1) Child Development Needs; 2) Family and Environmental Factors; 3) Parenting Capacity – which are displayed as a triangle (image below).

The CAF was designed for the assessment of children's needs within their families, i.e. the context of the family setting and home (although 'extra-familial contexts' were added in 2023). The Contextual Safeguarding research team has developed Context Assessment Triangles by using the CAF indicators and applying these to different contexts. There is a Peer Group triangle, Schools triangle and Neighbourhoods triangle (see Appendix 2).

As you can see from the Neighbourhoods assessment triangle, the three areas of focus have been retained and translated for context work: 1) Young people and peer group; 2) Environmental and community factors and; 3) Guardianship capacity. Next to each of the areas are 'indicators' – things like 'identity', 'ensuring safety' and 'use of space'. We developed the goal statement for the new contextual outcomes framework by turning the indicators in each area into goals statements. For example the indicator 'identity' became 'Young people have a positive identity in this area'. We then condensed some of goals so that there are 6 or 7 goals for each of the three areas.

Contextual Data

The intention of the framework is that once you have concluded your assessment or initial scoping process, you select the goal statement that best fits the needs of the context. The way that you arrive at this information will vary, but the important thing is for it to be grounded in young people's views and experiences and involve the relevant partners who have influence and responsibility for the context. We have a range of tools for assessing contexts on the Contextual Safeguarding website (look for the

Scale-Up toolkit and then follow the type of context you are assessing). The first column on the framework gives you space to explain how you know that this should be a goal for the context – in other words, what 'data' are you drawing on. This could be, for example, reports from professionals or information about harm that young people have experienced in a context, but it should also include evidence from young people affected. Making sure we hear the views and experiences of young people affected is not the same thing as the focus in traditional case work on individual young people (although this sort of work might be going on alongside a context-based response). Incorporating how young people see the world is very important for shaping goals because this will also shape how we measure success. In other words, it is not enough to measure success based on what professionals and adults do and say about a place. Young people have to agree that the context is safer too. What we are setting out in this context outcomes framework is a way of measuring outcomes that is specific for each context.

It might be useful to draw on other forms of data, like whether there are fewer arrests in a place for example, but this cannot be the main or primary type of data that we draw on to show contextual success. It can be tempting to prioritise this sort of data but it's important to remember that this data has not been gathered for the purposes of safeguarding and can often tell you very little about why numbers have risen or reduced anyway. If you use the framework as we intend it, you will develop a much better understanding of how change has happened and why it has happened.

Setting meaningful measures

Once you have set your goals and written in the first column how you know that this is a goal, the next step is to think of some 'SMART' measures. These are the things that will be happening that will indicate that you have reached your goal. The most straightforward way of framing this is to say that you will re-run the activities that led to you setting your goals (e.g. your assessment methods) and get different results.

For example, if your original goal is 'young people will have a positive identity in the context', and you know this is a goal because you did a survey and young people said that they think adults in the area look down on them, then a measure could be that, once you have done your response, you will re-run the survey and young people will say that they no longer feel adults look down on them. We do not cover how to choose the right context-based response in this guide, but you can find support for this in the Scale-Up toolkit on the Contextual Safeguarding website, in the section on 'Responses and Outcomes', which includes a Responses Catalogue with over 30 examples of contextual responses that you could adapt and also a webinar on what makes a successful contextual response.

We have also developed a 'Context Weighting Tool' which is designed to support setting goals that target the cause of harm in a context (see Appendix 2). Importantly however, our latest research shows that how you deliver your responses is just as important as what you do.
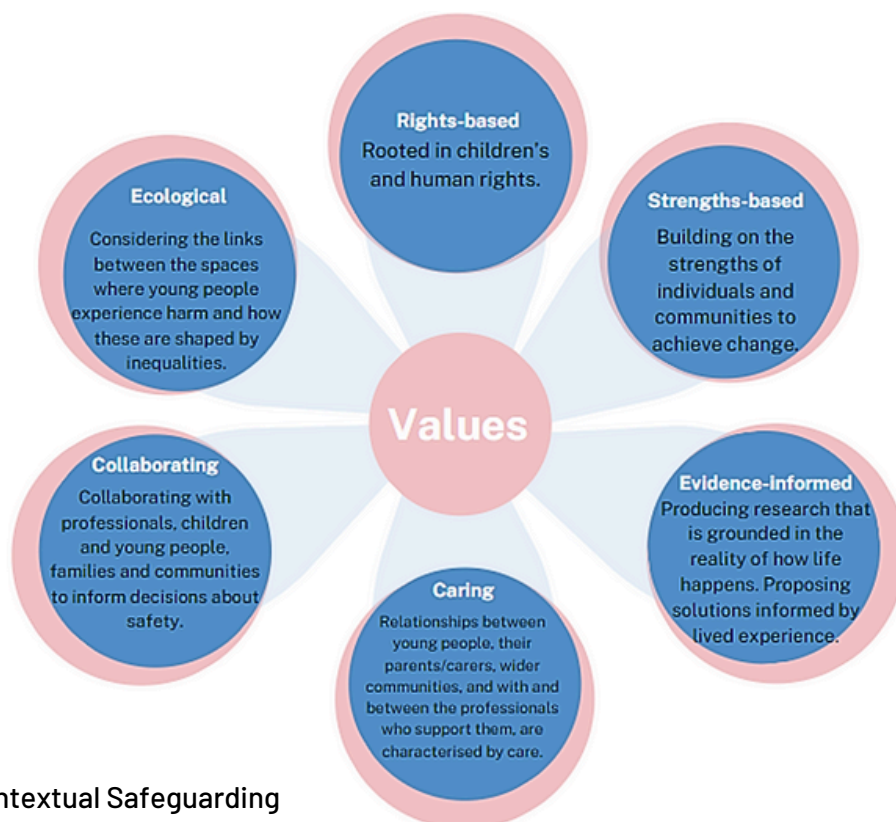
The values of Contextual Safeguarding

We have seen how inequalities shape safeguarding responses and therefore shape what we measure and how. When setting measures, we need to be alert to the intersecting inequalities and differences that young people experience. The ways we measure changes to contexts should be diverse, to mitigate assumptions and discrimination. To help with this, build the values of Contextual Safeguarding into your goals and outcomes measures (see diagram above).

When to close

The final column of the Outcomes Framework Table is for after you have run your methods to measure changes. Here you record the changes you have found. This process will help you determine whether you have built safety in the context or whether the work needs to carry on, with a new set of modified goals. Remember - to be confident that you have built safety into a context, you need all data from three areas. For example, it is not enough to say that you have created new guardians in a context if the only evidence you have for this is that some adults seem to have shifted their attitude towards young people. Although this would be part of measuring change, it cannot be the only thing you use. You also need to know if young people experience more guardianship. As many of us are not trained in setting outcomes and measuring them we have made a table to help you know if what you're thinking about is an outcome measure or not (see Appendix 1).

Using the framework

The Context Outcomes Framework is designed to be adapted for your situation. For this reason we have not included timelines, specific measurement outcomes or additional columns for recording your intervention/responses. Please feel free to adapt it by adding in more columns for this purpose.

Thinking about changes to a context is a significant

shift for most social workers and related practitioners. It's important that you acknowledge this and treat your next steps into measuring outcomes for context as an ongoing, learning process and not as something that you expect to feel straight forward or fall easily into place. It will be an ongoing process of reflecting and reviewing, of going back to the Contextual Safeguarding values to check that the goal setting and measurements are guided by what matters to the young people affected, alongside their experiences, views and needs. This work will be greatly aided if senior leadership are invested in this process as a long-term development. It is easy to get confused when doing this work, and to confuse tools for doing Contextual Safeguarding (like peer mapping) and the responses aimed to changing contexts (like doing detached youth work) as an outcome in itself. This is why we need each other, to ask questions and be critical friends, to ask each other if something is an outcome or not.

Conclusion

This Contextual Outcomes Framework is focused on context-based work. In time we hope to also develop an equivalent for individual child and family work. As a research team, we are committed to supporting the sector to build the skills and confidence needed to set contextual goals and create safety in contexts. To find out more about the background to this framework, we have a book chapter (Lloyd and Owens, 2023) and have recorded a podcast (see Appendix 2).

References

FIRMIN, C. E. 2015. Peer on peer abuse: Safeguarding implications of contextualising abuse between young people within social fields, professional doctorate thesis, Luton: University of Bedfordshire.

LLOYD, J. & OWENS, R. 2023. Developing outcomes measurements in Contextual Safeguarding: explorations of theory and practice. *Contextual Safeguarding.* Policy Press.

Appendix 1: Defining your outcome

How can you tell if your outcome is aligned to Contextual Safeguarding? What is the difference between an outcome and an activity designed to create change? This table will help you see the difference and guide you to get it right.

Outcome	Not an outcome
"The peer group can name adults who they trust in this context where they spend their time"	"We have mapped the peer group" (Clue: A peer map might help you understand who is friends with whom, but it doesn't tell you the needs of the group or make them safer)
"There are adults who live in this context who used to be hostile towards young people and who now feel positively towards them – they know their names and look out for them"	"We made an information sheet so people can share concerns about young people" (Clue: it's good to share information, but to count as a contextual outcome you would need to know 1) if it is being used and 2) if people are reporting with a caring intention or to increase the surveillance and punishment of young people)
"Young people report that they feel that they belong in their school and feel safe there"	"The school have brought in a zero tolerance policy to weapon carrying" (Clue: this might decrease disclosures but not necessarily experiences of harm and it can disproportionately penalise some young people over others)
"Young people can safely access the internet in public spaces"	"We have switched off the wifi" (Clue: this is an activity designed to disperse young people not make a place safer for them. It could increase their risk and undermine any positive relationships with adults who work in that space)

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Appendix 2: Tools and resources

Here is a list of helpful resources that you could use to support your work to measure contextual outcomes and links to where they can be found on the Contextual Safeguarding website.

Resource	What it is
Measuring Outcomes Framework	A tool to help you measure changes to contexts
Context Weighting Tool	A tool to weigh up what is influencing the harm experienced by young people to help you set goals and target the context of the harm
Location, Schools and Peer Group assessment resources	A range of resources from the Scale-Up toolkit
Engaging young people	A range of resources to support participatory work with young people
Context Assessment Triangles	Context assessment triangles for schools, neighbourhoods and peers to support context assessments and building responses
Responses and Outcomes Catelogue	Contains over 30 examples of safeguarding practice responses
Podcast: Measuring outcomes	A discussion with a professional from involved with testing CS within one of our Scale-Up sites
Webinar: Successful responses	A talk through some of the key features of successful Contextual Safeguarding responses

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