

# **Safeguarding work with multiple, connected young people**

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## **Practitioner reflections and the PEACE team peer group referral form**

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## Preface

Informed by Contextual Safeguarding, the PEACE team aims to understand and work with the significant peer relationship in a young people’s lives. This has various purposes:

1. To connect with groups of young people directly
2. To understand how individual young people referred to the team are connected to each other
3. To provide positive activities such as sports and drama to groups of young people

The below reflections, and the peer group referral form, relate to the first of the above. If you’re interested in peer interventions more generally, these [resources](#) from work with Safer London may be of interest too.

The potential value to having a peer group referral form became apparent through practice. In her reflections below, Farzana Wangde – a practitioner in the PEACE team – describes case work with a friendship group that preceded the creation of the referral form.

Similar to the PEACE individual referral form, the peer group referral form includes guidance for practitioners as the top of the form, and uses the following colours in relation to relevant contexts:

Information about the individual young person	Information about peer relationships	Information about the school context*	Information about relevant neighbourhood locations	Information about the young person’s home / family
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\*This is should be information about the school’s ability to provide safety and protection, not whether or the young person is attending school

## Reflections on working with peer groups – Farzana Wangde, PEACE practitioner

Can you give an example of a referral that led to the PEACE team working with a group of young people together?

We received a referral from a school for four young women aged 13-14. Their teachers were worried about Child Sexual Exploitation. Another practitioner in the team and I went to see the young people at school.

We used Barnardo's tools to begin the discussion about romantic and sexual relationships, and potential abuse within them. After we had built rapport during the first session the young women were more forthcoming in the subsequent sessions. We completed a total of three sessions.

The young women spoke about some experiences of sexual harassment that they had faced in their local area. From listening to the young people, a pattern emerged about sexual harassment outside a specific fast food restaurant near to their school. None of the young women had reported any incident to the police or other professionals, and in some cases had not even discussed it with their parents. Though they did not believe it to be acceptable, they also thought it was to be expected. We sought in our conversations to challenge the normalisation of this within the group.

How is working with young people in groups different to work with young people individually?

Working with young people in groups helped me to understand the group dynamics. Individuals may come across totally differently in one-to-one sessions compared with groups. It is important to see where the individual sits in the midst of the group dynamic. Young people's opinions are often shaped by their peers. The peer group may even function like a surrogate family. Group work can help look at who is the group leader and influencer and getting that young person on board can help to shape and influence the group as a whole. For example, if they are taking risks together, they may start a positive activity together only if the 'group leader' thinks it's OK. Having a safe space to discuss how young women might be groomed and discussing what is acceptable in their contexts helped to develop and change their views. We were also able to share what would be a safe way of reporting their concerns.

What are some key things to consider when doing this work?

I would suggest meeting with young people individually before to explain the reason for the group and ensure that they are consenting to attend the group and check if there are any underlying gripes that might surface within the group. Group rules that are mutually developed are also very important. The limits of confidentiality needed to be explained: what information needs to be shared, what would raise concerns, and how the group can promote a culture of safe sharing. We agreed the content with the group members. In the PEACE team we planned our sessions to focus on shared experiences outside the home, rather than experiences of home and family, which were more likely to be unique to individuals.

What changes have you made to support working with groups of young people?

The PEACE project has produced a Peer Group Referral form which enables a whole group to be referred on one document and was helpful in identifying the links between members of the peer groups. As professionals we often sit in teams where different members of the same group are being referred but we are unaware of their connections. In the PEACE team we have started to give attention to significant peer connection in a way similar to how we look at family relationships. We try to think about young people within their peer relationships even when we are not working with the young people directly in a group.

How does working with young people together relate to Contextual Safeguarding?

When I have previously worked with groups, the group was formed by professionals to bring clients together to address a certain issue. One of the key things that differed for me in this work in the PEACE team, was working with groups that already exist amongst the young people themselves. Because the young people were already connected, had shared experiences and trusted each other, they were able to share information about their contexts in a safe way, and the young people helped each other to acknowledge what was safe and what was unacceptable. Additionally, because we maintained a focus on changing harmful contexts rather than changing young people, we responded to the experiences the young people shared with us by raising the sexual harassment reports with the restaurant and local police.

## PEACE Peer Group Referral Form (including guidance)

### The PEACE project and referral guidance.

The PEACE project works to understand, assess and intervene with the social conditions of extra-familial harm for young people\*. We accept referrals for individual young people (1:1 outreach), peer groups, schools, community organisations, and neighbourhood locations.

When appropriate, the PEACE project can offer one or more of the following:

Tailored work with schools to address extra-familial harm	Consultation / advice for professionals	Community Outreach	1:1 outreach advocacy for young people at risk	Family Therapy	Support groups for parents / carers	Work with a peer group
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To refer for any of the activities shaded **grey**, you do not need to provide personal information about any young people, parents or carers. In this case, simply email [peace@hounslow.gov.uk](mailto:peace@hounslow.gov.uk) with an outline of your reasons for contacting the project, or request a call back.

If you are referring an individual young person or peer group, please seek their and their carer's consent to refer, complete the appropriate form (individual or peer group), and return it to the same email address. **The below form is for use to refer peer group.**

If you are referring a peer group, please discuss the group referral with the young people and their parents, to check that they are willing to be referred together.

If you do not have consent to make a referral, please consider requesting a consultation: we may be able to suggest work you can do with the young person to build understanding of context (home, peer groups, school, neighbourhood, online), and it may be appropriate for the PEACE to work with young people's school or neighbourhood, without working directly with them.

Family therapy and parents support groups are generally offered to the parents / carers of young people open to the project. However, please do get in touch if you would like to refer a parent only, and we will consider this.

\*This is informed by Carlene Firmin's Contextual Safeguarding theory. For more about this, please visit [www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk](http://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk)

If the young person you are referring is experiencing, or at risk of, **significant harm** then contact [Hounslow Children's Social Care](#) in the first instance. The PEACE project is a consent-based support service. Whilst we work with young people who are experiencing exploitation, we do this work alongside allocated social workers and/or youth offending officers.

### 1. Consent

Have the young people agreed to this referral?

Yes       No. If no, please seek consent before proceeding. If in doubt, please contact the team for a consultation.

Has a parent or carer for each young person agreed to this referral?

Yes       No. If no, please seek consent before proceeding. If in doubt, please contact the team for a consultation.

Do the young people and their parent / carer consent to being referred as a group?

Yes       No. If no, please complete individual referrals, where this would be helpful. Please contact the team to discuss.

### 2. Your details

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Contact Details</b>	
<b>Organisation</b>	
<b>Date of referral</b>	

### 3. Personal details for the young people referred

	Young person	Young person	Young person	Young person	Young person
<b>Name</b>					
<b>Date of Birth</b>					
<b>Sex</b>					
<b>Ethnicity</b>					
<b>Religion</b>					
<b>Address</b>					
<b>School</b>					
<b>Contact details</b>					
<b>Why are the young people interested in working with the PEACE project? What would be a good outcome from their point of view?</b>					



**4. Please depict or describe the relationships within the group. [Peer group mapping guidance](#).**

**5. Adult support network for young person / young people referred**

		[Young Person]	[Young Person]	[Young Person]	[Young Person]	[Young Person]
<b>Adult at home</b>	<b>Name</b>					
	<b>Relationship</b>					
	<b>Contact details</b>					
<b>Adult at home</b>	<b>Name</b>					
	<b>Relationship</b>					
	<b>Contact details</b>					
<b>Adult at home</b>	<b>Name</b>					
	<b>Relationship</b>					
	<b>Contact details</b>					
<b>Other significant adult / family member</b>	<b>Name</b>					
	<b>Relationship</b>					
	<b>Contact details</b>					
<b>Other significant adult / family member</b>	<b>Name</b>					
	<b>Relationship</b>					
	<b>Contact details</b>					
<b>Social Worker</b>	<b>Name</b>					
	<b>Contact details</b>					
<b>Youth Offending Service Worker</b>	<b>Name</b>					
	<b>Contact details</b>					

**6. What are you worried about for the young people? Please mark (x) any that apply to you. . Please add details in the following sections. *If the young person you are referring is experiencing, or at risk of, significant harm then contact [Hounslow Children’s Social Care](#) in in the first instance.***

“I am worried for [Young person’s name] because”:

Current experience	[Young Person]	[Young Person]	[Young Person]	[Young Person]	[Young Person]
they are being exploited for sex / sexual activity					
they are being criminally exploited					
they are selling drugs					
they are carrying weapons					
they are in an abusive partner relationship					
harmful behaviours are normalised within their peer group					
they are in an abusive peer relationship / friendship / friendship group					
their friends / peers are involved in criminal behaviour					
they are not safe at school					
harmful behaviours are normalised within the school					
they have experienced harm within their local neighbourhood					
they are experiencing abuse or neglect within their home					
they / their parents need more support at home					
<b>Risk</b>					
they are at risk of exploitation for sex / sexual activity					
they could physically harm someone else					
they could be physically hurt					
they are at risk of criminal exploitation					
they could experience sexual violence, assault or harassment					
they are at risk of abuse or neglect within their home					

**7. Is there anything else we should know about the group, your reasons for being worried for them, or events that have happened in the past?  
Please also include a timeline including the safeguarding response so far.**

**Reasons for being worried about the group:**

**Protective factors around or within the group:**

**Timeline:**

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8. The PEACE project works mainly with young people who are at risk outside of their homes and families. However, if any of the young people do require support at home, in addition to being at risk of exploitation or other extra-familial forms of harm, please highlight this here, by completing the table below, and the team will follow up with you about this.

	[Young Person]	[Young Person]	[Young Person]	[Young Person]	[Young Person]
Requires additional support at home					
As an individual, this young person has additional needs or vulnerabilities that require additional support					

## Final notes and acknowledgments

The above form, which would initiate work with a peer group, is premised on that social group being significant in the young people's lives, either due to protection, risk, or both. So far, these referrals have been completed by teachers or youth workers, who already work with young people in groups and see the significance of these social connections first hand.

The work completed as a result may take a form similar to the work Farzana describes above: group conversations with connected young people. However the team may design a different intervention based on the group choose some combination of: work with the parents together, work alongside the referrer to complete [a peer group assessment](#); or work with (some of) the young people individually.

It is possible also that information contained in the referral leads the PEACE team to make connections between this group and other work in the team – potentially connections to other young people, or to relevant schools or neighbourhoods.

This flexibility is afforded by the variety of forms of work the PEACE team undertakes; this variety is captured in its logic model. Working in this way requires careful and creative screening in response to each referral and consultation. The team does this at weekly screening meetings.

The peer group referral form above is still relatively new and is likely to be adapted as the team and referrers become more accustomed to writing and screening referrals for connected young people.

If you have experience of delivering safeguarding interventions to groups of connected young people, we'd be very interested in hearing your thoughts about resources you use, and how your work relates to Contextual Safeguarding. This is the team email address: [contextual.safeguarding@beds.ac.uk](mailto:contextual.safeguarding@beds.ac.uk)

You can also contact the PEACE team on: [PEACE@hounslow.gov.uk](mailto:PEACE@hounslow.gov.uk)

Thank you for Farzana Wangde for her practice example and reflections, and to the whole PEACE team for developing this work.