

Contextual Safeguarding and policy review

A guide for education and youth settings

June 2022

How do youth and educational settings bring Contextual Safeguarding into their policies? Here we guide you step-by-step through the review process. It will help you to create policy that takes into account peer-on-peer abuse and other extra-familial harm.

This guide covers 3 areas:

- 1) Things to think about as you do a Contextual Safeguarding policy review
- 2) A 'how to' table to help you think about what's in your policy framework, think about what you could add in if you want to follow a Contextual Safeguarding approach and asks questions to help you get there

Extra-familial harm

Risk of harm to young people outside the family home, includes (but is not limited to):

- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)
- Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB)
- Peer-on-peer abuse
- Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) including 'County Lines'*
- Young people impacted by serious violence
- Online abuse (e.g. cyber bullying, peer-on-peer grooming)
- Relationship abuse/ intimate partner violence/ bullying
- Radicalisation

*The coercion and exploitation of young people by criminal gangs into the sale of illegal substances to rural locations such as seaside towns, commonly called 'County Lines'.

Please refer to your local child protection procedures for definitions and further information about these forms of abuse

- 3) Information about resources available to support you, beyond this guide

First, is a short introduction to the Contextual Safeguarding framework and what we mean by extra-familial harm.

The Contextual Safeguarding framework

Contextual Safeguarding (Firmin, 2015) is a framework for safeguarding children beyond their families. While traditional safeguarding is focused on working with parents, this approach is all about seeing and understanding harm in places and relationships beyond the family home. The approach is all about working with young people and partners (including education and youth settings!) to keep young people safe when they are out and about having fun with their friends or learning.

Contextual Safeguarding does not replace existing safeguarding. It builds on it. Contextual Safeguarding approaches to extra-familial harm have been included in Keeping Children Safe in Education (2022) and Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018).

1) Key things to think about

Think 'safeguarding' and 'welfare' in all your policies

Traditionally, education and youth settings talk about child safety in their safeguarding policy. Often this is seen as very separate from the behaviour policy, which talks about how staff should respond to problematic behaviour. There tends to be an emphasis on how unwanted behaviour can be 'managed'. This might be through punishments and sanctions - from a verbal response to exclusion.

But when there is peer-on-peer abuse the separation between safeguarding and behaviour is less clear cut. 'Problematic behaviour' could be a safeguarding issue within a peer group and needs a safeguarding, not a punishment /behaviour focussed response. Friendship groups can be a cause of harm and protection, and, in the same group, children can be 'victims' of harm and cause harm to others. There are lots of complex reasons for this that need to be unpicked and understood (see the Peers section of the toolkit for more information). One reason could be that the 'rules at play' in a peer group might make a young person feel that they need to harm others as a way to protect themselves.

We are also learning all the time about how social structures, like poverty, racism and sexism impact young people's behaviour. We need to be sensitive to what its like to be a young person living within oppressive structures and how this can restrict the 'choices' that young people have.

An example of this is the way that some groups of people - such as young Black boys - are disproportionately represented within exclusion figures. Because of these things, it does not make sense to 'manage behaviour' as if it is a separate issue from the disadvantage and wider welfare/safety needs of young people.

So, we encourage you to think about your safeguarding and behaviour policies as related to each other. Your behaviour policy should talk about how young people are influenced by their contexts. It should say how you will review how the setting itself needs to change after incidents happen, as well as any action that a young person must do. You'll find more practical guidance on this below.

Beyond individualised responses

When responding to need, harm or risk within extra-familial contexts (e.g. schools, peer-groups, neighbourhoods etc.) individual work with young people and families will of course continue. But, alongside this, within a Contextual Safeguarding approach, the focus of attention can equally be on the context itself, rather than or alongside individuals linked to it. For example, a youth setting might partner up with a school to work with a peer group to bring about safety in the peer group dynamics. Another example is a safeguarding response that targets the setting as a whole - like changing a misogynistic culture where gender-based peer-on-peer abuse is common. In that situation, although it may have been triggered by an incident, the response can have a preventative element, by changing the culture for all young people who spend time in the setting.

2) 'How to' table for reviewing your policy

The tables below are designed to support policy reviewers to make changes to existing policies in the light of Contextual Safeguarding. The suggestions are meant as additions to existing policy, not replacements. The first set of tables are about operational policy and the second set is about strategic policy. In each table:

- The first column describes a usual feature of existing policy
- The second column describes a Contextual Safeguarding addition
- The third column offers questions to ask about your existing policy so you can review what you have and see what needs to change

Reviewing operational policy

Usual safeguarding policy

We talk about the safeguarding needs of individual children. We refer individual children to social care. Our response plans are for individual children

Contextual Safeguarding policy

We also talk about the safeguarding needs of peer groups. If it is possible, we refer groups that we are worried about to social care. When its needed, we are part of safeguarding response plans for peer groups

We think how the locations and physical spaces where harm has happened (e.g. stairwell, park or school) and if these need a safeguarding response

We ask how contexts can be safer for any young people linked to them. This sits alongside, but is different from, work with individual young people linked to a context

To get you there, reflect on

Does your policy talk about peer groups and locations or does it only talk about individual children?

Does your policy talk about using tools like Safety Mapping to find out where young people feel safe or unsafe. Does it talk about what you will do to make sure your physical spaces are safe?

Does it say what you will do when things happen off site? Is the response a safeguarding one or about behaviour management?

Usual safeguarding policy **Contextual Safeguarding policy** **To get you there, reflect on**

We support existing Child Protection processes for when there are safeguarding issues linked a child's family situation

We support local processes for safeguarding adolescents experiencing extra-familial harm

Does your policy talk about how you will contribute to increasing safety for young people when the harm is beyond their family homes?

We look out for, consult about and refer in to children's social care when we notice children are risk of harm from their parent/s or carer/s or because of their family set up

We look out for, consult about and refer in to children's social care when we notice children who experience harm in peer groups. We do the same when we see children exploited by adults outside their family. We understand how siblings can be affected by harm outside the home and respond to this

Does your policy support staff to see harm that comes from beyond the family home and support them to know what to do?

Does it make clear that children face both harm and protection from their peers and that those who cause harm are also harmed in the process?

We talk about how our main role is to send referrals to social care and support their work when there are safeguarding worries about a child

We talk about safeguarding as a shared process that goes beyond making referrals. We are committed to an anti-discriminatory culture and know how this is linked to safeguarding. We understand how important it is that young people have adults they trust in our setting. We work hard at building respectful relationships with young people. If an assessment of our setting happens, we put forward a lead person, take part in meetings and are active in response plans

Does your policy talk about a range of partners you work with to build safety for young people?

Does it say how you will become more anti-discriminatory by monitoring racism, sexism, homophobia etc.? Are discriminatory language and behaviours recorded and addressed consistently?

Does your policy say how you will support respectful and trusting relationships and explain the links between this and safeguarding?

Usual safeguarding policy

Our behaviour policy is not linked to our safeguarding policy. It focuses only on the personal responsibility of the person who has 'misbehaved'.

Contextual Safeguarding policy

Our behaviour policy talks about how the context of a young person's life impacts the choices available to them. It recognises the strong pull of peer dynamics.

Unwanted behaviour is thought about in terms of the welfare needs of the young person involved. It sets out how staff in the setting will work hard to understand the motivation and meaning behind unwanted behaviour by a young person. Responses are directed at meeting addressing these things.

To get you there, reflect on

Does your behaviour policy discuss the link between unwanted behaviour, the context that it took place and the safety needs of the young people involved? Does it support staff to think about these things before they respond. Are these built on restoration to build relationships, or punishment?

Our behaviour and safeguarding policies talk about young people as being either 'perpetrators' or 'victims'.

All our policies recognise how the divide between the person causing 'harm' and the person being 'harmed' can be fluid, especially in peer groups of young people, and often changes according to the context. For example, young people may instigate or get involved in causing harm to their peers as a means of protecting themselves.

Does your policy talk about how children who harm and who are harmed both need a welfare and safety response?

Does it encourage staff to think about the context of harm to help them to make sense of what has happened and why? After something has happened, does the policy say staff should listen to young people about what has happened and take on board their ideas for how things can be made better?

Reviewing strategic policy

Usual strategic policy

Our safeguarding training programme focuses on abuse and neglect of children at home

We have a system in place to review and monitor children who are referred to children's social care

We talk about having a culture of learning, hard work, good behaviour and respect

Contextual Safeguarding Policy

Our safeguarding training programme includes peer on peer abuse and other forms of harm outside the home

We have a system for reviewing the profile of children who we refer for safeguarding processes and the children who are punished under our behaviour policy. This helps us look for bias and discrimination based on gender, ethnicity etc.

We talk about what staff need to do to challenge discrimination and harmful norms

We also talk about the importance of staff promoting a culture that is promotes gender equality, is anti-racist and anti-homophobic

To get you there, reflect on

Does your training programme cover extra-familial harm and how it is impacted by the context it happens in?

Is there a review process in place to help you know if there is an over-representation of certain groups of children in safeguarding and disciplinary processes, compared to who attends the setting? If groups are disproportionately represented, is it clear what you need to do to stop this from happening?

Does the policy make clear the link between the culture of a setting and how safe children are likely to be there?

Are the programmes in place to support staff to create an anti-discriminatory culture?

Usual strategic policy

We commission providers who work with individual children

Our recruitment focuses on traditional understandings of safeguarding

Contextual Safeguarding Policy

We commission providers who can work with peer groups of children and who understand the importance of contexts

Our recruitment includes asking about candidates' understandings of peer-on-peer abuse. It asks about their attitudes and values in relation to unconscious bias and anti-discriminatory practice and finds out if they understand how these are linked to safeguarding.

We are prioritise recruiting staff who like young people, can talk respectfully to them, listen to young people and have a history of developing good relationships with young people

To get you there, reflect on

Does the organisation have a mix of commissioned providers who focus on both individuals and contexts?

Can you commission a provider who understands and uses a Contextual Safeguarding approach?

Does the recruitment policy talk about how you will find out about the values and attitudes of candidates?

Is there a review process in place ensure that recruitment is equitable?

Are efforts made to ensure that the staffing group is reflective of the make-up of the community it services? Are the senior leadership aware of, and able to mitigate the potential effects of any imbalance in this area in relation to behaviour and safeguarding?

Before you go....

We hope this guide gets you started in applying Contextual Safeguarding to your policy framework. We have lots more to support you to adopt Contextual Safeguarding on the Contextual Safeguarding Network.

Beyond Referrals toolkit

This is a guide to assessing and intervening with Harmful Sexual Behaviour. It was developed through a research project in schools. There is a traffic-light tool for dealing with Harmful Sexual Behaviour in schools and a self-assessment tool.

Available on the Contextual Safeguarding Network:

<https://contextualsafeguarding.org.uk>

Scale-up Toolkit

There are lots of sections that are relevant, but some highlights are:

- Schools section - in there you'll find inspiration for how other settings have responded to harm in schools
- Individual young people section - this will support you to bring context into work with individual children. There's a guide to using language and terminology that helps you to avoid suggesting young people are responsible for their own harm
- Systems change section - here you'll find a webinar about changing policy and also a 'system review' toolkit for settings wanting to assess their progress in embedding Contextual Safeguarding
- Peers section - have a look at the guide to working with peers - at the end is a summary of how we can bring peers into individual and group work with young