University of Bedfordshire

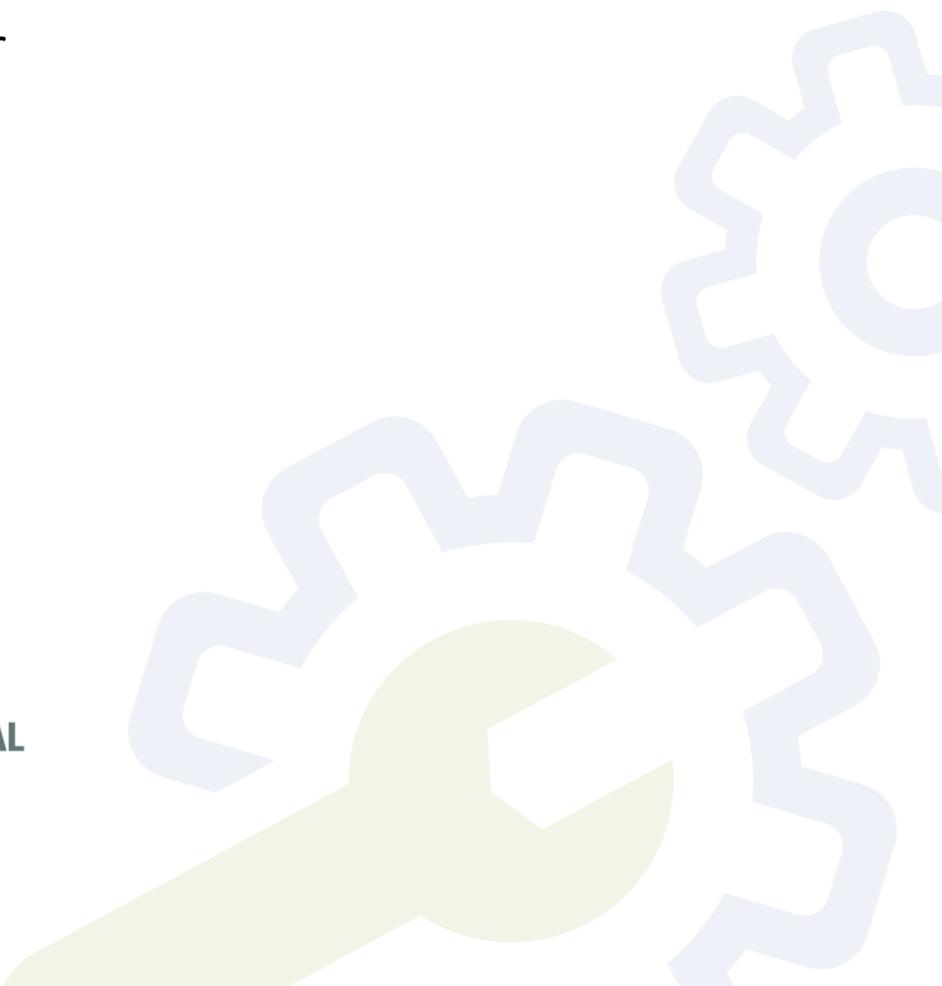Contextual Safeguarding Network

CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING
IMPLEMENTATION TOOLKIT

Embedding Contextual Safeguarding in Assessments

Things to consider

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Assessments should recognise and respond to extra-familial risks that might impact a child and family. Within a Contextual Safeguarding system, assessments can be conducted at two levels:

Firstly, a child and family assessment should identify and assess extra-familial risk, engage young people and families in discussions about safety outside of the family home and plan for interventions that address extra-familial risk or harm.

Secondly, a Contextual Safeguarding system should be able to assess these extra-familial contexts and develop and deliver plans to target risk and increase safety in these contexts. This means that practitioners should be able to assess and plan for interventions in peer group, school, community and online contexts. By assessing and targeting the actual contexts of extra-familial risk, a Contextual Safeguarding approach does not just limit its assessment to parental capacity to safeguard, but considers the safeguarding duty and capacity of individuals and agencies responsible for those contexts.

In order to assess extra-familial risk across these various contexts, consideration should be given to the following matters:

1. *Identifying extra-familial risk in a child and family assessment*

    a) Does the assessment of children and families – particularly questions about parental capacity – consider extra-familial contexts? Are there any familial issues which may be contributing to extra-familial harm?

    b) Do assessment methods that are used support practitioners to capture this information?

2. *Intervention planning as part of a child and family assessment which is targeted at the context of harm*

a) Is there work directed at an individual child to reduce their risk outside of the home?

b) Is there work directed at a wider context (location, school, peer-group) to bring safety for the child under assessment (such intervention should, hopefully, make the context safer for other young people)

3. *Conducting assessments of extra-familial contexts*

    a) Can the service directly assess extra-familial contexts by conducting neighbourhood, school or peer group assessments?

    b) Do assessment methods allow practitioners to capture information from key stakeholders within these contexts? In a neighbourhood assessment, for example, this could include community and safety mapping with young people, families and community members, business or resident surveys, observations, and various forms of community engagement. In a school assessment, this could include student and parent/carer surveys, staff and

student engagement, and reviewing behaviour logs. In a peer group assessment, peer associations and dynamics within peer groups can be assessed using peer mapping.

4. *Identifying risks, vulnerabilities, and strengths in each context assessed*

In a contextual assessment, it is important to differentiate between a pre-existing vulnerability (such as a learning difficulty or disability), or a risk factor (i.e. exploitation), which is the consequence of behaviour, and which when combined increases the harm experienced. Taking this approach avoids seeming to unfairly label a disability (or other vulnerability) as a universal risk in itself, and also supports more nuanced intervention planning.

5. *Context Weighting*

When incorporating contexts into assessments, practitioners should think about how to prioritise contextual interventions. This can be achieved by looking at contextual factors – and context themselves – which have the greatest influence over the problem they are trying to address. The more 'weight' a context has, the greater the level of risk located in this context. Thinking about where risk is located and 'weighted' can also help practitioners identify issues which overlap in more than one context. The Context Weighing tool, available in this toolkit under *Assessment Tier Two*, is a useful tool for visualising this.