



# Contextual Safeguarding and Policy Development

## Key messages for multi-agency partners

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# Policy Development in Contextual Safeguarding approaches

## Introduction

Contextual Safeguarding is an approach that supports practitioners to recognise and respond to the harm young people experience outside of the home.<sup>1</sup> This policy development guidance forms part of a wider contextual safeguarding implementation toolkit and has been developed by The University of Bedfordshire with Hackney Children and Families Service. This toolkit has been designed to help children's social care, and wider multi-agency partners, as they make changes required to systems, processes, policies and practices when implementing Contextual Safeguarding. To access the full toolkit, please click [here](#).

This briefing provides an introduction to policy development for a broad and general multi-agency audience. Further work has been undertaken to develop policy work in specific sectors; this can be accessed in the [Systems and Structures section of the implementation toolkit](#).

## Background

This guidance is intended to support a range of multi-agency partners involved in implementing a Contextual Safeguarding approach in their local area. This contribution from multi-agency partners is crucial for the successful implementation of a Contextual Safeguarding system that can:

1. **Target contexts** (peer groups, schools, public places as well as family homes) and social conditions in which young people have experienced harm (identify them, assess them, plan and intervene with them)
2. Respond to these extra-familial contexts through **the lens of child welfare** and child protection (rather than solely in relation to crime reduction and anti-social behaviour)
3. Leverage **partnerships** between those who have led on child protection (children's social care, policing and health for example) and those who may have a reach into extra-familial contexts (housing, local businesses, community groups, schools, young people, parents, sports and leisure services, transport provision, waste management, parks and recreation)
4. Measure impact on, and **outcomes for, contexts** as well as individuals associated to harm

As a first step, organisations can review and update their internal policies to ensure they support the approach. Policies and procedures can help to provide an organisational climate in which contextual practice is permissible and encouraged.

This briefing outlines three possible approaches to policy review:

1. Ensuring that policies align to the four features of Contextual Safeguarding outlined above.
2. Ensuring that policies support partner agencies to work together to address a contextual concern
3. Identifying key policies to review and key questions to ask of specific policies during review.

Examples are provided throughout. The approaches are complimentary, and may all be used within a single organisation. We recommend that the third approach may be the easiest place to start.

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<sup>1</sup> Visit [www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk](http://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk) for more information.

**Policy Review Approach One – Ensuring that policies align to the four features of a Contextual Safeguarding system**

|  |                      | Do your policies:   |
|--|----------------------|---|
| Contextual Safeguarding system features: | Targeting contexts   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Guide staff to recognise that places and groups (contexts) are relevant to how your organisation identifies and records abuse? For example, do you note the need to flag locations in or around your buildings where young people might be vulnerable?</li> <li>b) Guide staff to record information about places and do you have a way to flag concerns about places with partner agencies – as well as any individuals you identify as vulnerable in them?</li> </ul>   |
|  | A Child Welfare Lens | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Clearly state that extra-familial forms of abuse are child protection issues?</li> <li>b) Include a safeguarding policy which acknowledges that ‘anti-social behaviour’ might be a sign of adolescent vulnerability and require a safeguarding, rather than solely enforcement or behaviour management, response? Or are all such safeguarding issues managed solely through behaviour or crime prevention policies?</li> <li>c) Support staff to understand and respond to adolescent development? Being clear about the needs and experiences of young people during adolescence can provide a route to avoid people viewing a vulnerable young person being as a ‘troublemaker’ or a ‘risk-taker’</li> <li>d) Reflect, and respond to the needs of young people who spend time in your organisation or area where you provide a service? How do you ensure this? For example, do you build policies and strategies solely from crime reporting data or do you seek the views about safety from young people and wider community members in other ways to understand what might be needed locally?</li> </ul> |
|  | Partnerships         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Support staff to provide information about locations or groups with partner agencies who may have concerns about the welfare of young people associated to them? For example, do you have information sharing agreements in place that could support this?</li> <li>b) State the responsibility that your staff have to safeguard the welfare of young people in the places and spaces where your organisation has a presence? Does it guide staff to understand that this may be more than making referrals about individuals? For example, your staff could: raise concerns about places where young people are vulnerable; or if they run a shop, clean the streets or work in the park they could engage positively with young people so they feel welcome in the areas where your staff have a presence. Creating a welcoming environment for young people contribute to safeguarding them.</li> </ul>   |

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|--|----------------------------|--|
|  | <b>Outcomes and impact</b> | a) Do you have ambitions for the places and spaces that you can influence – or are they solely focused on the individuals who use those places and spaces? Do you want young people and wider community members to feel safe and included in the spaces you manage and what could you do – from the actions taken by staff to the design of the buildings you use – to help this happen? |
|--|----------------------------|--|

**Policy Review Approach Two – Ensuring that policies support partner agencies to work together to address a contextual concern**

|                   |                           | The Situation  |
|-------------------|---------------------------|--|
|                   |                           | An example: Young people have been approached in a local park and groomed by adults into carrying and selling drugs  |
| Partner agencies: | Substance misuse services | Where in your policies could direct/support staff to record locations where young people are using or accessing drugs? If they suspect a trend of harm occurring in the park, such as the grooming of multiple young people, how could they record and share this information? |
|                   | Parks and Recreation      | Have park gardeners noticed adults approaching young people in the park? If they have, how would they raise this as a welfare concern? Would staff in the park feel confident to talk to young people in the park – potentially involving them in positive activities?         |
|                   | Youth service             | On what grounds can detached youth work, or an outreach offer, be made into the park? Are services allocated on crime reports or are there other ways to identify where young people may feel vulnerable?  |
|                   | Community organisations   | How would your organisation become aware of the concerns in the park? How could you inform statutory services that you are able to assist and run some positive activities in the park?  |
|                   | Waste Management          | Have you noticed an increase in drugs paraphernalia in the park? How could you record this? How could you raise this pattern about the park as a safeguarding concern?   |

### **Policy Review Approach Three – Identifying key policies to review and key questions to ask of specific policies during review**

A range of policies documents may facilitate the development of a Contextual Safeguarding system (addressed in Policy Review Approach One), and Contextual Safeguarding practice (see Policy Review Approach Two). These may be: health and safety, staff development, safeguarding, behaviour management and exclusions (schools), crime and anti-social behaviour, equalities policy and so on as detailed in the table below. Key factors to consider when reviewing these documents include:

- **The language used:** do policies make reference to safeguarding young people or are they focused on crime and behaviour? Are young people described as 'choosing' to be involved in exploitation for example or as being exploited?
- **The partners named:** do policies signal which partners may be engaged to respond to extra-familial concerns, and how best to connect with them?
- **The commitments made:** do policies commit organisations to contributing to safety in the local area or are they solely committed to referring concerns about young people to children's social care?

Asking these key questions throughout will help you assess your policies against the four features of the Contextual Safeguarding approach.

| Key policy documents  | Key questions to ask   |
|---|--|
| Equalities  | - Does the policy recognise that vulnerable young people may be perceived as 'risky' or 'troublemakers' and make a commitment to address this?   |
| Health and Safety   | - Does the policy acknowledge that young people's physical safety can be compromised by design features of an area/building or by (in)action by staff? How is the organisation monitoring and addressing this? |
| Crime prevention / anti-social behaviour / behaviour management | - Does the policy note that anti-social behaviour or crime prevention issues may be a sign that adolescents are at risk of, or experiencing harm?  |
| Child protection and/or safeguarding                            | - Does the policy name extra-familial harm as a form of abuse or are all child protection issues framed as occurring within families?  |
| Information sharing protocol or procedures                      | - Does the protocol guide staff on how to record and share information about places, trends and groups as well as individuals?   |

**Final note:**

The three policy review approaches outlined above may be helpful to your organisation in different way and at different times. We suggest that the third approach may be the most accessible when first starting out on policy review.

In addition to policy documents you may also want to consider practice tools or other paperwork that bring these policies to life. For example, forms that are completed to record concerns (such as driver incident reports on buses, behaviour logs in schools and housing officer reports) would also need to be aligned to these policy changes. Tracking the documentation that flows from a policy framework and into practice is important for supporting staff to implement the vision that the policies set out for organisations.

We hope this has been a useful introduction to help you think about updating your policies to align to a Contextual Safeguarding approach. Should you take this work forward, please keep in touch with the Contextual Safeguarding Network and send any exemplar documents that you would be happy to share with others.