

Contextual Safeguarding

Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Parents and carers have little influence over these contexts, and young people's experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships. Therefore young peoples & children's care practitioners need to engage with individuals and sectors who do have influence over and within extra familial contexts, and recognise that assessment of, and intervention within, these spaces are a critical part of safeguarding practices. Contextual Safeguarding, therefore, expands the objectives of child protection systems in recognition that young people are vulnerable to abuse in a range of social contexts...

Young people's engagement in extra familial contexts can also inform, and be informed by, what is happening in their homes. Therefore, when young people are exposed to violence or exploitation in their school, community or peer group this may fracture their family relationships and undermine the capacity of their parents/carers to keep them safe. Likewise, if young people are exposed to harm within their families such as domestic or physical abuse this can impact their behaviour. They may learn and adopt harmful social norms which inform their peer relationships. Or young people in these situations may avoid their home altogether and spend time on the streets or community settings where they may experience criminality, violence and exploitation. Given this contextual nature of safety and vulnerability during adolescence, systems and services are designed to keep young people safe.

Peer relationships are increasingly influential during adolescence, setting social norms which inform young people's experiences, behaviours and choices and determine peer status. These relationships are in turn shaped by these settings and relationships, so if young people socialise in safe and protective communities and education settings they will be supported to form safe and protective peer relationships. However, if they form friendships in contexts characterised by violence and/or harmful attitudes these relationships too may be anti-social, unsafe or promote problematic social norms as a means of navigating, or surviving in, those spaces.

<https://www.wirral safeguarding.co.uk/contextual-safeguarding/>

Figure 1:

