

Best questions – Harm Outside the home

Applying our practice model to assess and respond to harm outside the home

Questions are asked about the young person’s experience both within and outside the family home to actively seek to understand the contexts in which harm may be occurring, and their varying weight of influence on a young person’s safety.

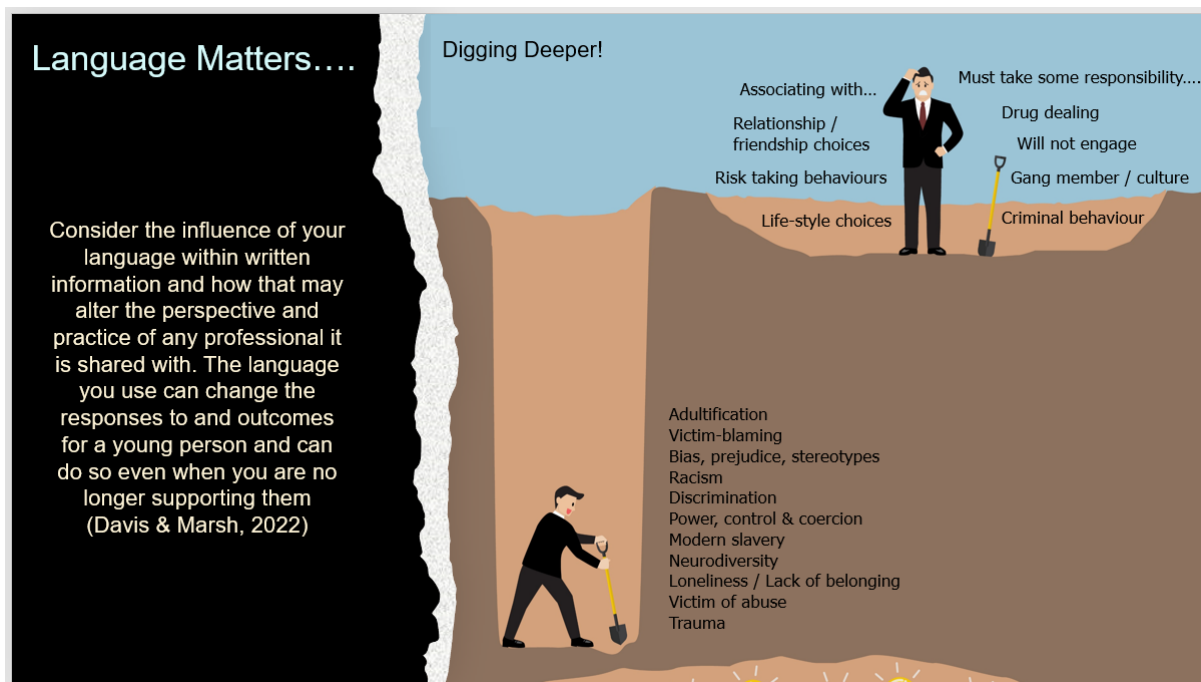
This might be within their friendships and peer group relationships, in education (school/college) or work settings, within their community, neighbourhoods or their online world.

Signs of safety mapping guide

Thinking about the young person/peer group, their family and the contextual factors in this situation:		
<p>What are we worried about?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Young person</i> • <i>Family/home circumstances</i> • <i>Friends/peer group</i> • <i>School/college</i> • <i>Neighbourhood/on-line community</i> <p>HARM – what are the worrying behaviours that have caused/are causing harm – first, worst, last incident, severity, impact?</p> <p>COMPLICATING FACTORS – what is happening for/or around the young person and their context that is making it harder to keep the young person/peer group safe?</p> <p>FUTURE DANGER – what are we worried could happen to the young person/their peer group/family if nothing changes?</p>	<p>What’s working well?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Young person</i> • <i>Family/home circumstances</i> • <i>Friends/peer group</i> • <i>School/college</i> • <i>Neighbourhood/on-line community</i> <p>EXISTING SAFETY – actions that people have taken that have kept the young person/peer group safe even when things have got difficult or dangerous</p> <p>EXISTING STRENGTHS – people, things and actions that make life for the young person/peer group stronger and positive. Plans about how the young person/peer group can be kept safe when the danger is present</p>	<p>What needs to happen?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Young person</i> • <i>Family/home circumstances</i> • <i>Friends/peer group</i> • <i>School/college</i> • <i>Neighbourhood/on-line community</i> <p>SAFETY GOALS – what the young person/peer group/family/professionals would want to see happening for them to feel confident that the young person/peer group was safe</p> <p>NEXT STEPS – the things that people will do to move this situation forward</p>
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(Graphic above from: Firmin et al, 2021, P.8).

Understanding the function and purpose of behaviour, digging deeper....



Think about a behaviour you are worried about or want to understand in more depth:

- What is the behaviour? What does it look like?
- How does this behaviour look like in relation to other children / young people of their social, emotional, developmental and chronological age?
- When did the behaviour start, first appear, and how frequently does the behaviour occur?
- What is the child/young person's relationship with the behaviour? Where might they have seen it, learned it from, developed it, needed it?
- Why might the behaviour have started at the time?
- What might be the story and history of the behaviour, and how, and why might it have developed?
- Where does the behaviour occur? Are there differences depending on the context?
- What other variables and factors do you think might influence and impact the behaviour? Are there particular patterns or themes of the behaviour? (it can be helpful to map out and/ or diarise the behaviour patterns)
- What happened before, during and after the behaviour?
- What triggers, hotspots, factors (e.g. environmental, sensory, autobiographical, physical, cognitive, relational, emotional and contextual) make the presenting behaviour bigger, smaller, absent, present etc?
- What fuels /amplifies / changes / calms the behaviour?

- What happens when these triggers occur? What do they look like? What is the impact of them? Are there ways in which the child / young person could reduce the triggers? How might other be able to support them on reducing and responding to these triggers?
- What happens in the times when the behaviour is absent or less? What is different and why? How can these times be noticed, increased and celebrated?
- What is the impact of the behaviour on the child / young person and those around them? (Consider self-care, sleep, eating, mood, education, relationships, learning, social life, daily living skills and self-esteem)
- What is the presenting behaviour making trickier or stopping the child / adults from doing?
- What function/meaning/purpose might the behaviour be communicating and having for the child/ for their relationships/ for their coping; and why? When might the behaviour be the child's 'friend' or be useful to them?
- What might be the story and hidden messages be behind the behaviour and underneath the surface?
- What different responses, reactions, and feelings does the behaviour evoke in different people? What clues does the way they / we feel when at the receiving end of this behaviour give us into the child/young person's feelings and inner world?
- If the behaviour could talk, what do you think it might say and sound like?
- If the behaviour was a puzzle, what pieces it might be made up out of and what picture might it form when put together?
- What might it look like / feel like (advantages and disadvantages) if the behaviour disappeared or was absent?
- What is the young person's sense-making. Meaning-making, attributions, explanations about the behaviour? How are these similar or different to other surrounding people's conceptualisations of the behaviour? How stressful is the behaviour to the child and/or team around the child?
- What strategies / interventions have been tried already? What bits of these were helpful or less helpful and why? What responses / reactions from others has the child had when showing the behaviour?
- What skills are needed to understand, modify and shift the behaviour? (Think about the young person's experience of relational and developmental trauma, their survival strategies, their developmental stages, cognitive skills etc.)
- How does knowing a bit more about what the behaviour might be communicating shape your feelings/thoughts, conceptualisations, descriptions about the young person and the presenting behaviours? How does the behaviour change when viewed from a different angle and lens? How might this lens impact on your way of understanding, responding and supporting change?

- Is there a particular behaviour that really pushes your / others' buttons or gets under your / their skin? Which of your / their values/beliefs are being challenged by the behaviour? What if anything is being triggered, resurfaced or pushed in you?

Past harm / worrying behaviour:

- When was the first time anyone had a worry about [young person] getting hurt outside the family home?
- What was happening at that time? How did this impact on [young person]?
- What has been the worst incident where [young person] got hurt?
- Who else was involved? Who did what? What was the impact on [young person] and anyone else who was there?
- What has been the most recent incident?
- How have all these things that have happened affected [young person]? How do you know?
- How did seeing and hearing their dad seriously hurting their mum have an impact on [young person] and [sibling], both at the time when this happened, but also over the past 10 years as they have been growing up?

Future danger / worries:

- What are the specific issues that the worker, child / family or others are worried about?
- What are we concerned might happen if we don't 'do' something?
- What will happen to the child/ren if nothing in their circumstances changes?
- What would [young person] say are his biggest worries right now?
- What would say has happened that has led them to be most worried about [young person]'s safety? What have they seen or heard? What happened, who did what and how did this impact [young person]? How did this affect and/or the family?
- Who else would they say is worried about [young person]? What has happened for them to have this worry?
- What are the places that they think are most dangerous for [young person]? What has happened there for them to be worried? (neighbourhood)
- Who are the people around [young person] or their family that they are most worried about? What has happened for them to have a worry? (neighbourhood/peer group)
- Some of [young person]'s friends are thought to have been exploited and/or involved in drugs, what were they doing, what happened for people to have this worry?
- What were professionals most worried about? What would [young person] say he was most worried about when this was happening? (peer group)

- What would Children's Services, Police, Housing etc. say most worries them now about [young person]'s relationship with his brother, [sibling]? What do they think could happen to [young person] or his family because he is visiting them at home?
- What would Children's Services, Police, Housing etc say they are most worried about in the area where [young person] and his family are living?
- How might this affect [young person] and how he spends his time or his relationships with friends?

Complicating factors

- What would say are the things that are happening or have happened in [young person]'s life, that maybe making things more difficult to deal with right now?
- What else might be making things more difficult or harder to deal with?
- Have you experienced any racism or discrimination in your life?
- What information is missing? What do we not know? How significant could this be?
- How might the family's class, culture, ethnicity, immigration status, economic status, etc. influence their story?
- Have we considered wider social factors in our discussion such as race, culture, disability, experience of oppression within the community, poverty, unemployment, or health disparity?
- Who holds power in the young person's relationships? What kind of power? How is/was this power used? By who?
- In what ways was/is the young person / family powerless?

Strengths:

- What would [name] say are the best things about his/her/their life right now?
- Who are the people he/she enjoys spending time with? What does he/she like most about them?
- What would [name] say he/she does to relax, have fun and feel good about their life?
- Who are the people [name] talks to if he/she has a worry about things at home/in his/her family/outside home? What is it about them that means he/she feels safe enough to confide in them and/or that he can trust them? What are the best ways they have helped or supported him/her?
- What would [name] say are the best ways he/she has been able to keep in touch with his/her friends and other important people?
- What is one thing that happened that surprised you in a good way?
- How is the child/family coping? What keeps them going?

- What are you noticing about the child/family's ability to move ahead despite what's happened?
- What would the child/family say is helping them right now?
- What have you learned about the young person/family that you have been surprised by?
- What have you seen or noticed that gives you hope that things will get better, and we might get to where we all want to be with regards to safety / wellbeing / healing?
- What are the most likeable things about this child, their parent/ carer or extended family members?
- Who are the people that have stuck with you at your best and worst moments in life?
- Can you tell me about someone in your life who you really felt understood you?
- What would the family / child / parent say if I ask them to describe what life at its best would look like for their family?
- Who are your friends and what sorts of things do you enjoy doing with them?
- Who has been the person that surprised you the most when you needed help getting through a difficult time?
- Who did you consider to be the most important people in your life right now and as you grow older?
- Who is your go to person when life gets tough?
- In what way is/was the young person / family powerful?
- What would [young person] say he likes most about his family?
- What would say they like most about [young person]? What are his best qualities? What do they like most about the times they spend together as a family?
- What would (Mum, Tony, [sibling]...) say are the best ways that [young person] manages any worries or difficult feelings?
- Who would Mum say are the people who have been supportive of her and her family over the last few years?
- When [young person] was stabbed, who were the people who were most helpful? What did they do? What difference did it make?

Peer Group:

- Who would [young person] say are his closest friends? How do they spend their time together?
- Who would [young person] say are the people he feels most safe to be with when he goes out? What is it about them, that helps him to feel safer?

- What would [young person] say the best ways he's been able to keep in touch with his friends?
- What would say they like most about [young person]'s friends? In what way would they say his relationships with those people are good for [young person]?
- What are the best ways [young person] that manages his relationships and contact with others when he's online?

School/college:

- What would [young person] say he enjoys most about school/college?
- Who would say have the most important person for [young person] in school/college? What have been the best ways they've kept in touch with him whilst he's been out of full-time education?
- What have been the best ways that anyone has supported [young person] to stick with his education? And to get a place at college?
- What are the best ways [young person] would say he's managed in school since he was diagnosed with ADHD? Who or what has helped him most with this?
- What helps [young person] to feel safe in school/college?

Neighbourhood:

- Where are the places that [young person] would say they feel most safe? What is about those places that mean they feel safe there? What helps them to feel safe?
- What would say have been the best ways that the workers involved (Police, Housing etc) have helped them deal with their worries? What did they do? How was this helpful? What difference did it make?
- What would ([young person], say are the best things about living in their house/area?
- Given everything that's happened, what helps them to feel safe here right now? What would (Police) and (Housing) say would be happening differently if [young person] and their family were relocated that would mean [young person] and his family would be safer than remaining in their current home?

Existing safety / wellbeing:

- Who would the child/young person say are their 'go to person' when they are worried?
- Have you solved problems like this before / have you successfully handled a similar situation before?
- Think back to a day when you were having a really tough time. Who was there to support you?

Young Person:

- [young person] — you've said you feel safer outside when you're in a car or on your moped. What difference does this make? How does this help you to feel safe?
- What other things have you done to help keep yourself safe when you go out? What or who has helped you most to stay safe?
- You said you can keep yourself safe — what are all the other ways you and your friends keep yourselves safe?
- What have you learned to do differently to make yourself safer since you nearly got run over?
- Who have you called when you were out as you felt unsafe and they helped you feel safe? Talk me through how did they help you feel safe?
- What strategy have you used in the past that managed to help you avoid trouble as things were kicking off, even getting out of hand, how often have you used this strategy?
- What have you learned about how to keep yourself safe from getting attacked and how have you put this learning into practice?

Family/Home

- [young person] — give me an example of a time you were in trouble and a family member stepped in and got you away from that trouble? How did they manage to do that?
- When [sibling] has visited the family home, what has he or anyone else done to make sure that [young person], Jade and Sarah are safe from anyone who might want to hurt him or his family?
- What would (and others close to the family) say have been the best things that they, or anyone else, have done to help keep [young person] safe since the time when he was nearly run over by the car? And since he came home from hospital after being stabbed? What did they do? What difference has this made — how did this keep [young person] safe?
- On a scale from 0 to 10 where 10 is being at home keeps [young person] 100% safe from attack and 0 is it's just as dangerous as the street, what number would you give it? Who does what to bring it up to this number?
- Of all the great things that all family members are doing to help keep [young person] safe, which are the most important? How come?

Peer Group

- What would (social worker, police, housing worker...) say that [young person], his family, friends or others have done to help make sure that [young person] has not been hurt again since he came out of hospital 5 weeks ago?

- [young person] — what would your friends say they see you doing to keep yourself safe?
- When you are out with your friends, which ones say or do things which keep you all safe? What do they say? What do they do? What difference does it make?
- Give me an example of the last time you were out and one of your friends noticed trouble was about to kick off and helped you avoid something bad happening to you?
- Who is your friend? What difference did they make for you?
- Which of your friends would say are best at keeping safe? What would they say they do? How do they know? When have they done these things?
- When you are out with your friends, what are the things you all know to do/not to do — your 'street-smarts' — which lowers your chances of running into danger?
- Out of all your friends, who do you know always has your back? Looks out for you, and helps you avoid getting into arguments big fights when you are out? Tell me the last time this happened? School/college
- On a scale from 0 to 10 where 10 is school is a place where there's no chance of getting attacked or anyone threatening an attack and 0 is it could easily happen, what number are you? What brings you up to this number?
- What happens in school which keeps you safe from attack or being threatened with it?
- Tell me about a time when things were unsafe in school but something happened, maybe someone did something which made it safe.
- When has someone from school kept you safe in situation where you could have been in danger? What did they do?
- What would your teachers say are the most important things they are doing which keeps you safe?

Neighbourhood

- Where are the safest places to be when you are out with mates? What makes them safer? When do you keep to these places rather than 'trouble spots'?
- How do you manage to avoid being in unsafe places? Tell me about a time when you could easily have ended up in an iffy place but you didn't? How did that happen?
- When you are in places which are dodgy, what do you do to stay safe? Tell me about times when you have done stuff like that.
- How do you know when things are starting to become unsafe/feel dodgy — what are the warning signs? What have you — or anyone — done when that's happened to stay safe?

- What would ([young person], Mum, dad say have been the best ways that the workers involved (Police, Housing etc) have helped them to stay safe? What did they do? How was this helpful? What difference did it make?
- What would they say anyone else has done to help or support them to keep [young person] safe, given what has already happened to [young person]? Who has done what? How was that helpful?

Young person/family goals

- [young person] — imagine a time in the future where you, your family and friends are feeling safe, no-one is getting hurt and you are enjoying your life, what might a typical day look like for you? Who would be around you? What would they be doing?
- What would say they would want to see happening for them to feel less worried? And if that was happening, what difference might this make for them/[young person]/their family?
- What would ([young person], say they would see social workers and police doing that would mean they could trust them?
- What has changed since your first appointment/home visit/family meeting?
- What did you notice differently this time that could have been helpful?
- What would other family members say is different about their level of worry now?
- What would the young person / family say they are doing that's making things better?
- What changes do you want to see in the child and family's life?
- What would you have expected to have happened in the last three months?

Next steps:

- What's the smallest behaviour you need to see that tells you the family/young person is getting somewhere?
- How do you plan to motivate yourself when obstacles arise? What are some ways to motivate yourself to get started?
- Is there a difference between what you think should happen next and the family's views? What do you attribute this to?
- What does each child or young person in the family think about what should happen?
- What about the parent/ carer(s), what do they think the next steps are?
- What does the child think need to happen next? Who is best placed to meet this? How will they do this?
- From all the information you have gathered what do you think is most likely to happen next, what will deliver the best outcome and how will the child/ parent/agency judge how well things are going for them?

- Have you shared your reasoning and the plan with the child and family and with other professionals? What do each of them think about the plan and do they have views about what this should focus on?
- Who in your life, if they were here right now, would help you feel like it is a little more manageable? Can we call them to come here?

Scaling:

Scale 0-10:

- 10 means that [name] is managing any difficult feelings or worries in a safe way, everyone knows what to do and how they can help when things get difficult;
- 0 is [name] is upset or stressed most of the time. They don't know what to do or how to let their parents, family, school or friends know what they're feeling or needs from them. They may be hurting themselves or going missing and no one knows how to help them to be safe and well.

Scale 0-10:

- 10 means whatever else may be happening around them, there is a tried and tested safety plan in place so that everyone knows who will do what, every day, to keep [young person] and their family safe, whilst also enabling them to live their life and maintain the relationships that are most important to them;
- 0 is no-one knows what to do or how to help [young person] in this situation and it's only a matter of time before he will be hurt again or even killed.

Best questions - assessments:

- Can you help me understand what isn't acceptable to you in a relationship?
- I'm wondering what the relationships you've seen within your family have been like?'
- What are the different stories held by different professionals working with the family?
- What are the views and ideas of each family member about what is happening?
- What is the family's story about what is going on?

Best questions - networks:

- Can you tell me about someone in your life who you really felt understood you?
- Who has been the person that surprised you the most when you needed help getting through a difficult time?
- When you think about your past, who has been most supportive of you in the choices you have made?

- Tell me a story about a happy time in your life. Who was there with you?
- When you think of all the people you have been close to in your whole life, whether family or friends, who has taught you the most about yourself as a person?
- When something difficult happens to you, how are you likely to respond?
- Who do you trust the most?
- Who do you call on a good day?
- Who will you call in the middle of the night when you need help? Who is your go to person when life gets tough? What is it about that (those) person (people) that lets you know you can count on her/him (them)?
- Please think about all of the important people in your life right now. So if I were to come to you 10 years from now and ask who has been the most unconditionally caring person in your life over the last 10 years, which of the people you know now would you most want to describe to me?
- Who would be the people that you see in your life sharing your birthday 5 years from now?
- Who do you call on a bad day?
- How does what's happening in your life right now fit with the way you see yourself as a person?
- If nothing changes in what's happening now, what sort of person will you become?

Resources:

Carlene Firmin, Tracey Hill, Wendy Hill, Andrew Turnell, Penelope Turnell and Joanne Walker February 2021, Signs of Safety® and Contextual Safeguarding Key Messages for Practice. Elia. [Signs of Safety and Contextual Safeguarding - Signs of Safety Knowledge Bank](#)

Treisman, K. Behaviour as Communication – The Behaviour Kaleidoscope. [\(safehandsthinkingminds.co.uk\)](http://safehandsthinkingminds.co.uk)