



Completing Assessments Taking a Contextual Approach Practice Guidance

Introduction

University of Bedfordshire describes Contextual Safeguarding as, '*an approach to safeguarding that supports practitioners to recognise and respond to the harm young people experience outside of the home.*' Traditional child protection and safeguarding processes have predominately focussed on individual young people and their families.' Contextual safeguarding approach looks at risk and harm beyond the family home, peer groups, locations and people of concern. It is important that practitioners recognise that parents and carers have little influence over these contexts, and children's experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine the relationship between parent and child. We should work with parents as safeguarding partners.

This guidance is for social workers and family support workers undertaking assessments, family plans and care planning for children and families whereby there are concerns around exploitation. It is also relevant for children in care (UASC), children leaving care and children with disabilities.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with BCT 's Cultural Competence, Good practice in assessment planning and intervention, disruption planning guidance and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018.

An assessment taking a contextual approach should:

- Be culturally competent and consider Social GRACES (Gender/identity, Race/religion, Age/ability and appearance, Culture/class, Ethnicity/education and economic background, Sexuality /sexual orientation) and impact of family values.
- Should keep the child at the centre of everything you do.
- Where appropriate contain an up to date photograph on the child's record.
- Consider risk in the context of what is viewed as teenage behaviour.
- Be rooted in an understanding of teenage brain /child development.
- Consider the context in which the abuse is occurring (schools, neighbourhoods, public spaces).
- Consider the locations/areas where risk is increased (public transport, parks, gang- related violence on streets, hotels, online bullying, social media platforms, drill video)

- Consider and risk and harm associated with harassment from school-based peers and abuse within their intimate relationships.
- Consider peer relationships and groups (both positive and negative) whilst considering, if children socialise in safe and protective schools and community 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.
- Consider the wider implications of harm to the family and any younger siblings (transference of risk)
- Consider all health risk, sexual (should include plugging drugs) physical(stabbing shooting serious injuries) , emotional harm and trauma.
- Consider any missing episodes and locations of where children are found (a clear chronology demonstrating this) and significant events should also be completed to inform the assessment.
- Contain full, concise, relevant and accurate information.
- Capture what children and family members say and avoid victim blaming language and dehumanising language.
- Consider any intelligence and ensure that FIB is completed.
- Consider with parents around any extracurricular activities and educational status (child excluded/not in education, out of school settings/private tutor/faith groups; increased vulnerability).
- Consider any special educational needs or disabilities (increased vulnerability) and the wider impact the need for OT assessment and equipment when a child is seriously injured and has life changing injuries.
- Consider the family's history (Adverse childhood experiences and trauma) and social context. Be critically reflective and evidence based, forming hypotheses and testing them against the evidence.
- Consider multiple sources of information.
- Take a holistic view and not be solely preoccupied by the most visible or pressing incident or presenting problem.
- Lead to open problem-solving dialogue with family and where necessary a clear plan around safety and disruption.
- Consider referral to National Referral Mechanism. It is important to see children exploited as victims and not to just focus on the behaviour, but what might be driving that behaviour.
- Consider the positives and not just negatives aspects of child – risk assessments generally do not leave room for this.
- Consider working in partnership with wider community – risk assessed (contextual safeguarding)
- Consider that traditional methods of disruption may not be feasible i.e. child may be experiencing abuse in school corridor – place teacher in corridor to monitor – as opposed to removing the child and impacting their education as a result.

In looking at your assessment consider **How does the child feel, what do they want, and what is day-to-day life like for them? Is the immediate safety of the child assured?**

What needs to change for us to be less worried, and are changes happening quickly enough? What would life be like for the child in the long-term if things do not change?

In looking at your analysis consider the Anchor Principles **A five-question framework for analytical thinking:**

What is the purpose of the **assessment?**

What is the story?

What does the story mean?

What needs to happen?

How will we know we are making progress?

(Anchor Principle, Research into Practice)

Disruption Planning

A good disruption plan is based on information gained from a good assessment. Disruption planning meetings are brought together with the wider support partner agencies to enable the partners to respond consistently and appropriately to individual, family and context where there are needs or risk of harm. The development of the plan utilises the POLE disruption model (Person, Object, Location, Event) and in addition victim, location, offender) whilst looking at preparation , protection , prevention and pursue).The disruption plan will review current risk level following submission of a screening tool and will consider further mapping exercise/deep dive learning and /or consideration to evoke Complex Strategy discussion (following a mapping exercise).

Lead practitioners should always consider bringing the family and connected persons together to support safety planning using the Family Group Conference. They should also consider diversionary tactics, identify the child's interests, push and pull factors and recognise parents as safeguarding partners. Educate parents on contextual safeguarding and what they can do to work with us to help prevent and /or reduce the risk to their children.

How to Intervene

It should be acknowledged that building a positive and trusted relationship with children who have being exploited can be very challenging and difficult. A trusted, consistent relationship between a practitioner and a child is associated with better outcomes for children who have being exploited. Taking a relational approach,

practitioners need to ensure that they are able to reflect (where appropriate) on their own shared experiences, identify strengths in children and give compliments. In addition, challenge children appropriately using safe topics to discuss, be genuine and compassionate, give choice and control whilst being open and transparent about the worries, risks and concerns and involve children in the decision making. Authenticity and trust reinforce support to build relationships and are some of the core values that underpin an effective helping relationship.

Additional Links:

<https://www.csnetwork.org.uk/assets/documents/Peer-group-assessments-FINAL.pdf>

<https://www.csnetwork.org.uk/assets/documents/Neighbourhood-assessment-framework.pdf>

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