

Contextual Safeguarding in Scotland – learning event by MS Teams 26/11/20

Introduction – PRE MEETING CIRCULAR

Thank you for attending this structured discussion about Contextual Safeguarding. The session has been set up collaboratively by all contributors.

Contextual Safeguarding is an ecological and flexible approach to policy and practice rather than an intervention, model or a technique. It emphasises the need to understand, work with, and intervene with harmful interactions between young people, their families, peers, schools, and neighbourhoods, including online, in order to enhance safety. The approach was designed to enhance responses to abuse and significant harm in extra-familial settings. It can add value to various stages of practice including engagement, assessment, planning and intervention as well as prevention.

The purpose of this online meeting is to share early learning about the application of contextual safeguarding in Scotland. In May 2019 and December 2019, Dr Carlene Firmin and colleagues from University of Bedfordshire led seminars in Edinburgh about the application of contextual safeguarding. These were also collaboratively organised and well attended by practitioners, managers, policy leads and academics,

The timing of this meeting . The past 6 months have been dominated by the impact of Covid-19 on individuals, families, communities and nations. This meeting falls at a time when we must consider how some forms of risk, (technology assisted and in the community) may have been accentuated. Understanding and adapting practice to the context of risk during the pandemic is acutely relevant. Within Scotland there is likely to be a long term structural and policy drive relating to family support, 'relationship based' work and preventative building of strengths in communities, arising out of the Independent Care Review. It is likely that contextual safeguarding could sit well within the pillars of 'the Promise', published earlier this year. (www.carereview.scot/conclusions/independent-care-review-reports/)

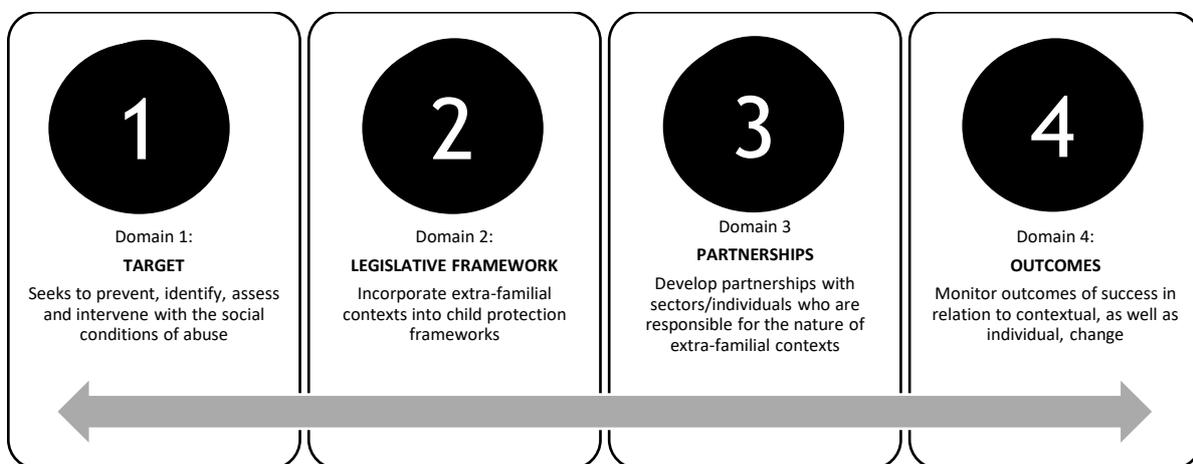
. Characteristics of contextual safeguarding

The approach is not a regimented and kite marked model. However, there are distinguishing characteristics. When a system, service, team or practitioner adopts a Contextual Safeguarding approach they:

- Target contexts (and social conditions) in which a young person is experiencing harm – for example a high street where they have been groomed into drug dealing, or a school where they have been sexually

assaulted by peers. As opposed to only working with the young person and their family to increase parental capacity.

- Use a child-welfare, and child protection, lens in response to extra-familial forms of abuse, and the contexts in which this abuse occurs– rather than solely managing risk in these settings through a community safety agenda
- Form and use partnerships with individuals and organisations in extra-familial contexts – for example, with those working in retail, parks and recreation, housing, waste management services and education - in order to increase safety
- Measure impact contextually, to understand if the support offered is increasing safety in the places and spaces where harm has occurred, and going beyond any single individual identified as being affected in that place at a given time



‘2 levels’

As we may hear today from services developing the approach, it can be adopted at two levels (Firmin, 2019), which can be helpfully interwoven.

At Level 1, every opportunity is taken to ensure that context is considered in work with children and families. So, if a young person is stabbed, sexually assaulted, or groomed into drug dealing in extra-familial contexts, when they are referred into children’s service the location where they have been abused (when known) is recorded on the referral in addition to their home address logged on the system. When assessing a young person’s needs, practitioners seek to work with the young people involved to map (Nykaro, 2018) the physical spaces (both online and offline) where that young person spends their time and where they feel safe or unsafe. Mapping can help to inform a young person’s plan.

At Level 2 practitioners identify, assess and respond to the contexts in which abuse is occurring. They might assess a young person’s peer group if abuse has occurred in that context, or protection could be sourced there. Using resources,

such as a peer assessment framework (Contextual Safeguarding Network, 2019), practitioners can explore a group's dynamic (who leads and follows, where are the positive relationships, what do they offer each other); the 'guardianship capacity' around the group: their parents, a youth worker, teacher, member of the community or other adult they trust who has a caring investment in the group's needs and other aspects of the context of risk, including the way group behaviour may change in a certain location .

Such an approach can help practitioners identify the partners needed to increase safety in schools, public places and peer groups, and source collective and contextual solutions.

Theoretical, research and policy support. The timing of the meeting follows after and falls between a sequence of publications and developments which may resource initiatives. These include:

- Contextual Safeguarding Network, 2019. *Context Assessment Triangles*. Luton: University of Bedfordshire
- Firmin, C. 2017. *Abuse between Young People: A Contextual Account*. Oxon: Routledge
- Firmin, 2019. *Contextual Safeguarding: A Briefing for ADCS*. ADCS
- Firmin C (2020) Contextual Safeguarding and Child Protection. Rewriting the Rules. Routledge
- Henderson G, Kurlus I, Parry R, Baird N; Dagon D, Kirkman M (2020) Sexual exploitation of children involved in the Children's Hearings System Scottish Children's Reporter Administration/Barnardo's Scotland
- Nykaro, 2019 *Safety Mapping Exercise*. Luton: University of Bedfordshire
- Orr D (2020 forthcoming) Contextual Safeguarding – Child protection for the 21st Century. IRISS Insight Briefing
- Contextual Safeguarding is referenced in Part 2b of the Revised National Guidance for Child Protection which is open to public consultation for 13 weeks from 13/10/20'
- The approach is assumes an ecological consideration of the relationships in the child's world and as such fits well with the GIRFEC practice model

From suggestions and questions in December 2019 – where are we now ?

There are active pockets of interest in Scotland but exploration and testing is at an early stage.

- There was support for in setting up a community of practice of individuals/organisations who wanted to begin using CS resources.
- However it was also recognised that a strategic group may be needed to identify routes to policy implementation and whole-system testing

- Reference to the CS framework in revised national guidance for child protection would facilitate inclusion in social work teaching and wider curriculum – particularly relevant for PQ social work qualification.
- The Care Inspectorate might play a positive role in posing questions about how context is considered in family support, child care and protection
- The Children’s Hearings might play a positive role in expecting, exploring and encouraging consideration of context when children are referred
- Family group decision making services saw opportunities to link the approach. ‘Community conferences’ might be an option in some circumstances
- The congruence of the approach with the GIRFEC practice model (and the adaptability of the ‘My World Triangle’ to a contextual approach) was recognised
- The need for sharp awareness of lawful information sharing in safety mapping exercises was acknowledged and English legal advice notes with interest.

From the morning we hope to identify some of the challenges and some of the opportunities apparent in Scotland to improve the protection of children from abuse and exploitation using a contextual safeguarding approach.

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