

SAFEGUARDING ADOLESCENTS

AGENCY PROCESSES

Agency Process: Child First

Introduction

A Child First approach sees adolescents as children first

A Child First approach treats adolescents as children first and foremost and enables agency responses to be more appropriate to their status as a child, to their relative powerlessness and lack of voice, and acknowledging that adolescents are still developing physically, psychologically and emotionally.

Professionals working with adolescents must adopt a child first approach in their practice by:

- Prioritising adolescents' best interests, recognising their particular needs, capacities, rights and potential.
- Promoting their individual strengths and capacities to develop positive behaviour, positive identity, social acceptance, and friendship identity to help divert adolescents from anti-social/offending behaviour.
- Encouraging adolescents' active participation, engagement, and wider social inclusion.
- Promoting a childhood removed from the justice system, using pre-emptive prevention, diversion, and minimal intervention.

To achieve these professionals should ensure that:

- Work with adolescents is child-focused, developmentally informed, and acknowledges structural barriers.
- Work is constructive and future-focused, built on supportive relationships that empower children and young people to fulfil their potential and make positive contributions to society.
- Work is a meaningful collaboration with adolescents and their parents/carers, family, and significant people in their lives.
- Work minimises situations that may lead to anti-social/offending behaviour and associated stigma.

Child centred policing

A core role for policing is to protect the vulnerable in society, and recognising vulnerability is an important part of this work. Child centred policing aims to improve the quality of policing for children and young people and acknowledges their differences, recognising their vulnerabilities, and meeting their needs.

Adolescents can be at risk of becoming victims and suffering harm. Child centred policing works with children, adolescents, their parents, carers and families and wider community to intervene early and prevent harm.

Child centred policing acknowledges that adolescents are not “mini-adults”, and effective policing will enable them to make positive choices in the future. This must be balanced with criminal consequences in appropriate circumstances.

There are many different schemes which educate and rehabilitate young people, rather than criminalise them. There will be circumstances where prosecution is appropriate. Never before, with the increase in serious violence, bullying, online crime and exploitation etc, has it been more important to drive work forwards to educate children and young people and prevent them from becoming victims, offenders, or both.

Hampshire Constabulary

[Hampshire Constabulary](#) has a clear purpose in delivering SAFER communities. Children and young people make up a hugely significant community in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight with over 400,000 children living across both counties.

Hampshire Constabulary continue to improve the quality of policing for children and young people by acknowledging their differences, recognising their vulnerabilities and meeting their needs by:

Treating children as children first

1. **Treating children as children first** - Adolescents are not the same as adults. They do not think or behave the same as adults, and they have greater vulnerabilities no matter how they might look or act. The fact they are children must be respected.

Voice and lived experience of the child

2. **Voice and lived experience of the child** - Always take the opportunity to ask about and listen to the views of adolescents. This is not just when they are the victim or the offender, but also when they are impacted by another’s crime or behaviour, such as with domestic violence. It is also not just about what is ‘said’. It is also observing behaviour and interactions and seeing what is “not said” – especially with children who are non-verbal.

Every interaction is an opportunity

- Every interaction is an opportunity** - Every interaction with a child or young person is an opportunity to truly understand what is going on for them and to make them safer. Even if previous attempts have failed, it is important, as a professional, to persevere. Adolescents who have experienced trauma and challenging childhoods find it hard to trust. One day a listening ear, acknowledgment or action could be what makes a difference.

Child First Practice and Effective Safeguarding

See children as children

Develop a pro-social identity for positive outcomes

The Lived Experience of the Child

Collaborative working and decision making

Promote diversion

Managing Risk and Uncertainty

What is the impact on safeguarding adolescents?

Every interaction with an adolescent is an opportunity to engage, build a relationship and understand what is going on for them and to make them safer. Even if previous attempts have failed, it is important, as a professional, to persevere. Adolescents who have experienced trauma and challenging childhoods find it hard to trust and may push professionals away. It is only by breaking through these barriers that professionals can have a positive impact on the future of an adolescent.

Effective practice when working with adolescents:

- By professionals acting accordingly, recording effectively, and ensuring there is appropriate intervention, trust is built with adolescents and needs can be met effectively.
- Always remain professionally curious, think beyond the immediate situation presented and be able to recognise risk and neglect faced by children – record explicitly, share appropriately and respond effectively.
- Listen, observe, and respond to the voice and lived experience of the child to ensure adolescents are empowered and their concerns, wishes and perspectives are fully understood. This produces better outcomes from interactions and interventions with children who are at risk.
- Continue a shared multi-agency approach to building a workforce that understands the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and ensure the services built are trauma responsive.
- Working in partnership, identify, understand, and address what drives children to go missing to prevent this happening and, by tackling those who would seek to exploit them, reduce their vulnerability when they are missing.
- Work in partnership to ensure professionals, communities and families recognise the signs, report concerns and work together to prevent children being drawn into extreme ideologies or terrorist related activities.

Additional Resources and Information

[Child Centred Policing: When to Call the Police](#) - Guidance developed by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) for schools and colleges.

[Child First Justice | Criminology, Sociology and Social Policy \(Loughborough University\)](#) - 'Child First' Justice is a rights-based approach, whereby children coming to the attention of the Youth Justice System are seen as 'children' rather than as 'offenders'. Includes evidence-based research.

[Child Centred Policing – Safe4Me](#) - The Safe4me website provides educators, service providers and parents with information and resources to help keep children and young people safe. Includes the Hampshire Constabulary Child Centred Policing Strategy.