

SAFEGUARDING ADOLESCENTS

AGENCY PROCESSES

Agency Process: Engagement and Relationships

Introduction

‘No one cares what you know, until they know how much you care’ – Theodore Roosevelt

Relationships are key to everything we do. The stronger the support network around you, the better your ability to manage whatever life presents you with, whether that be professionally or personally.

Relationship based practice is not new but in its current, modern sense it is an approach to practice rather than a model. It is built on a value base of respect, understanding of power in the relationship and that those who you are working with have expertise in their own lives. It is not just about having a relationship but about the type of relationship that exists. That requires professionals to have a sense of self in that relationship and know how that impacts on the other.

For professionals working with children and young people, good-quality relationships are fundamental to their work.

What is the impact on safeguarding adolescents?

Depending on the experiences of children and young people they may not trust professionals.

Relationships with adolescents are key to developing trust. It can take time for a professional to get to know a child or young person so that they really have an understanding of their experiences.

Taking time through more informal activities, such as going for a coffee, or going for a walk can help children and young people feel relaxed, without the pressure of being at home or school. This supports professionals to have a collaborative approach with the child or young person.

Relationships can be an intervention in themselves. Various methods that contribute towards the ability to connect and support change with adolescents include:

- Getting to know the child or young person’s world.
- Being alongside them in sharing information as well as appropriate relatable aspects about yourself.

- Letting adolescents feel that you hold them in mind, even when you are not physically present.

Adolescents with few good quality relationships in their lives often find that entering into informal relationships with adults who respect, accept, like and really listen to them is a new life experience. These relationships can offer these adolescents new perspectives on approaching, developing and managing quality relationships of their own.

The 4 Stage Relationship Model

To develop the ability to understand how relationships evolve, there are four stages of development when working with adolescents that is engaging, negotiating, enabling and endings (*McMullin, 2017, p.20, cited in McColgan & McMullin, 2017*).

Stage 1: Engage

The first stage is the start of the relationship building process and engagement. This can be done by using 'soft skills' such as sharing ideas and thoughts and building a rapport.

Stage 2: Negotiate

This stage is about negotiating and agreeing expectations; discussing limits and boundaries to the relationship and contracting, for example addressing consent and confidentiality. This involves skills such as explaining what you will be doing, how you will work with the child and why you are involved in their lives.

Stage 3: Enable

This is about the process of enabling change; giving information, choice and advice. There needs to be open communication that is realistic, positive and reflects on progress. Discuss interventions and resources including inhibitors and enabling factors. This stage is about building confidence and self-esteem and encouraging and motivating.

Stage 4: Endings

This involves introducing endings and valuing the ending process as much as the start of the relationship building process. There needs to be reflection and evaluation on what has worked well, strengths for the future and coping strategies, as well as sign posting to other services for further support.

Professional's attributes

Fullerton, Bamber and Redmond (2021) describe the attributes of professionals who are able to secure and sustain relationships with children and young people:



Additional Resources and Information

[Working With Adolescents](#) - Greenwich Safeguarding Children's Partnership provides a model and suggestions of good practice in working with adolescents.

[Developing effective relationships between youth justice workers and young people: A synthesis of the evidence](#) - This 2021 research undertakes a systemic review of evidence, outlining the skills and attributes of professional relationships that make the difference for young people's outcomes. The title is youth justice, but this will be of interest to all professionals working with children and young people.

[Essential Skills for Working with Adolescents \(YouTube\)](#) - Compass Rose Academy webinar that gives helpful practical advice as well as theory.

[Professional relationships with young people](#) – A free course provided by The Open University that explores different approaches in developing relationships and working practices which can inform work with young people.

References

Fullerton, D, Bamber, J and S Redmond (2021). [Developing effective relationships between youth justice workers and young people: A synthesis of the evidence](#). University of Limerick. Accessed 16 November 2021.

McColgan, M and McMullin, C. (2017). Doing Relationship-based Social Work, A Practical Guide to Building Relationships and Enabling Change. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, ISBN 978-1-78592-014-1.