

# SAFEGUARDING ADOLESCENTS

## STRATEGY GUIDE

### Theme: Contextual/Extra Familial Safeguarding

#### Introduction

“Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, adolescents’ experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that adolescents form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Parents and carers have little influence over these contexts, and young people’s experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships.

Therefore, children’s social care practitioners, child protection systems and wider safeguarding partnerships need to engage with individuals and sectors who do have influence over/within extra-familial contexts, and recognise that assessment of, and intervention with, these spaces are a critical part of safeguarding practices. Contextual Safeguarding, therefore, expands the objectives of child protection systems in recognition that adolescents are vulnerable to abuse beyond their front doors” (Contextual Safeguarding Network, 2020).

Contextual safeguarding recognises that as children grow and develop, they are influenced by a whole range of environments and people outside of their family, for example, in school or college, the local community, their peer groups or online.

#### What is the impact on safeguarding adolescents?

As children move from early childhood and into adolescence they spend increasing amounts of time socialising independently of their families. During this time the nature of young people’s schools and neighbourhoods, and the relationships that they form in these settings, inform the extent to which they encounter protection or abuse.

#### Peer Relationships

Peer relationships are increasingly influential during adolescence, setting social norms which inform young people’s experiences, behaviours and choices and determine peer status. These relationships are, in turn, shaped by, and shape, the school, neighbourhood and online contexts in which they develop.

If young people 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.

Safeguarding concerns and risk to vulnerability may arise via:

Peer group/s and from the people they are associating with

Through the online content that they are accessing, which may be influential to their behaviour or action

From a dangerous location they may be frequenting, which could put them at risk

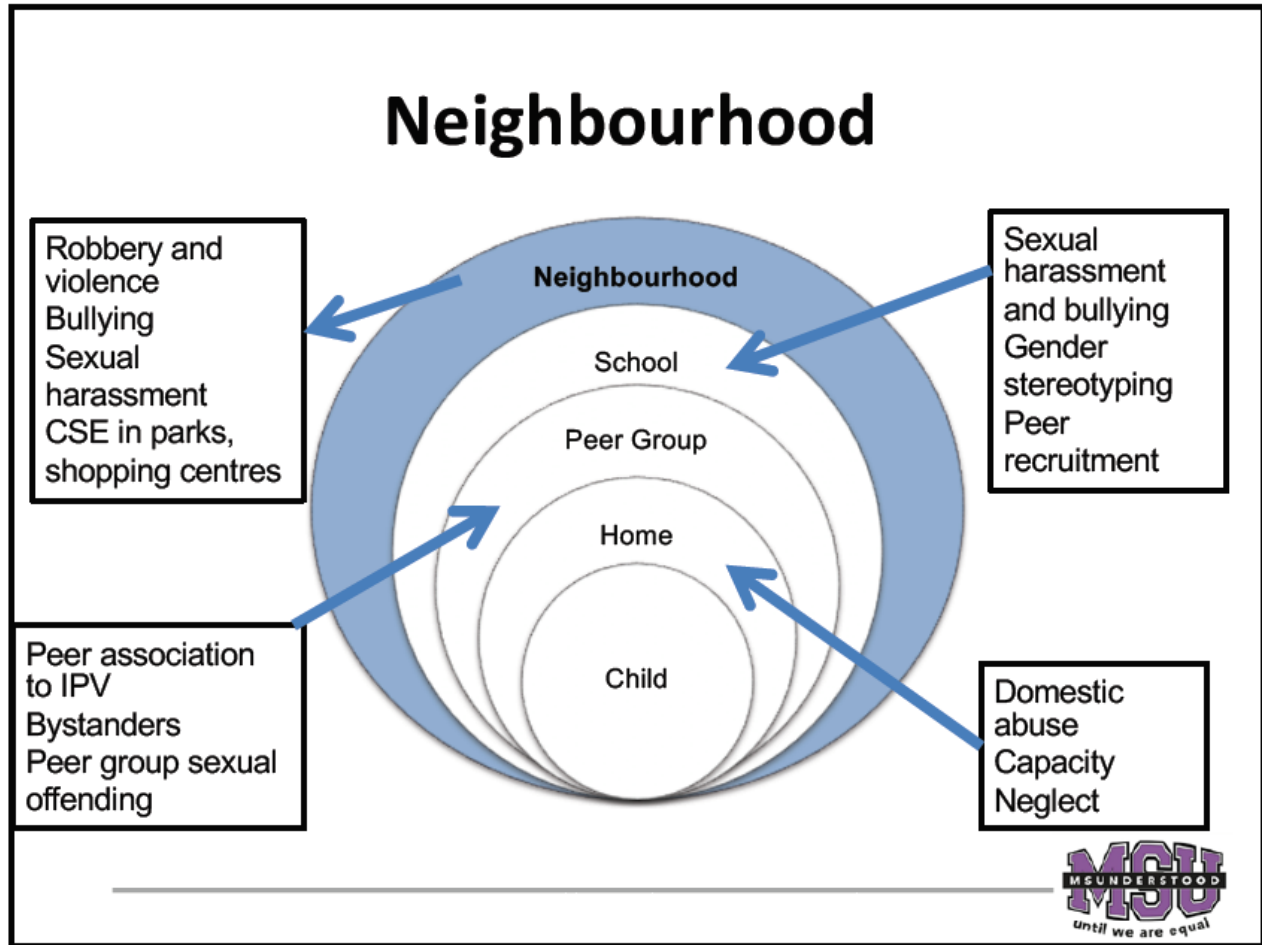
### Contextual Safeguarding – areas of risk

Contextual Safeguarding is applicable to a wide range of risks which can potentially cause significant harm to children and young people where the prime cause of harm is outside of the family, for example:

- Peer on peer and relationship abuse
- Criminal / sexual exploitation / online abuse
- Missing episodes
- Risks associated with gangs
- Risks associated with radicalisation
- Safeguarding risks in public spaces
- Trafficking and modern slavery



Diagram of potential contextual risks (MsUnderstood, 2016)



KEY	
<b>CSE:</b>	Child Sexual Exploitation
<b>IPV:</b>	Intimate Partner Violence

Individual and [Peer Assessment and Mapping](#) can be used to better understand groups of young people that professionals are worried about in order to understand their connections and to understand peer networks and dynamics.

Adolescents will not always recognise when they are being exploited and may be resistant to engage with professionals. As professionals, it is our role to adjust the way we are working to build their trust.

Young people can often be involved in criminal activity, but it is important to recognise them as victims and to see their vulnerability despite the risks they present to others.

To improve the safeguarding of the young person it is important to look at the bigger picture and not place the responsibility solely on the young person to change their behaviour as they may not be in a situation where they are able to do this.

## Additional Resources and Information

[Contextual Safeguarding – An Overview NSPCC](#) - An overview of what contextual safeguarding is and why it matters.

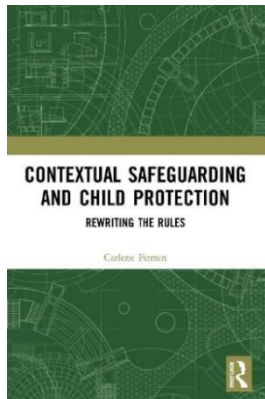
[Contextual Safeguarding](#) - Information and research for practitioners.

[The Contextual Safeguarding Network](#) - Provides further information, learning and practical toolkits.

[Practice Resources | University of Bedfordshire \(beds.ac.uk\)](#) - A collection of practical resources on contextual safeguarding.

[Contextual Safeguarding Network: Practice briefings](#) - A collection of practice briefings from the Contextual Safeguarding Network.

### **Contextual Safeguarding and Child Protection: Rewriting the Rules – 1 Sept 2020 by Dr Carlene Firmin**



Dr Carlene Firmin's book 'Contextual Safeguarding and Child Protection' offers a complete account of Contextual Safeguarding theory, policy, and practice frameworks. It highlights the particular challenge of extra-familial routes through which young people experience significant harm, such as child sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, serious youth violence, domestic abuse in teenage relationships, bullying, gang-association, and radicalisation.

## References

Contextual Safeguarding Network, University of Bedfordshire (2020). [What is Contextual Safeguarding? \(csnetwork.org.uk\)](#). Accessed 22 November 2021.