

1. What is Contextual Safeguarding (CS)?

Contextual safeguarding is an approach that aims to identify and respond to various harms and abuse posed to children and young people from outside their home. These may occur from peers, at school, in their community or neighbourhood or on the internet.

2. How is a CS approach different?

Traditional child protection approaches have focused on risks and interventions inside the family and home, rather than addressing peers, places and groups in which children/young people spend time. A CS approach aims to disrupt harmful extra-familial contexts rather than move young people away from them. It seeks to identify the ways in which professionals, adults and young people can change the social conditions of environments in which abuse has occurred.

3. Why is it important?

As children move into adolescence, they spend increasing amounts of time socialising independently of their families. The nature of the relationships that they form in these settings, inform the extent to which they encounter protection or abuse. If a young person forms friendships in contexts characterised by violence and/or harmful attitudes these relationships are likely to be anti-social and unsafe.

4. What are the risks?

There are a wide range of potential risks where the prime cause of harm is outside of the family. This list isn't exhaustive but includes criminal and sexual exploitation; online abuse; peer on peer abuse; sexual harmful behaviour; missing episodes; gang involvement; female genital mutilation, radicalisation; trafficking and modern slavery.

5. What are the indicators?

Some potential indicators of exposure to extra-familial risks in young people include poor mental health; missing episodes; breakdown in relationships with caregivers; problems with attendance and attainment in education; substance misuse issues; anti-social behaviour and offending; being linked with places where there are concerns about safety; concerns about exploitation; or concerns about sexual behaviour and involvement with gangs.

6. What should agencies do?

Identify the ways in which the social conditions where abuse has occurred can be changed and intervene where possible. Engage with individuals and sectors who have a bearing on social contexts, i.e., shopkeepers, local policing, community leaders, youth clubs etc. to make environments safer. Refer concerns about young people and contexts of risk into the MASH/Front Door team.

7. What Barnsley Council are doing:

Referred cases will be discussed at the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Meeting (MACE) and scored on a risk assessment tool. Assessment and interventions will be recommended based on risk and need. We also link with other agencies to map unsafe locations and plan on how to intervene as a multi-agency team to make these safer.

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