

**Plymouth Adolescent Safety Framework**

**Frequently asked Questions**

**What is Contextual Safeguarding**

Contextual Safeguarding has been developed by Carlene Firmin at the University of Bedfordshire over the past six years to inform policy and practice approaches to safeguarding adolescents. Simply put, rather than just focusing on individual children, contextual safeguarding directs us to shift our focus so we also tackle situations and influences, i.e., the context of harm outside of home in which harm occurs. The Adolescent Safety Framework will support multi-agency practitioners to understand, assess and reduce the risk of harm to our young people outside of the family home.

**What is a context?**

We need to be able to recognise the interplay between a child, their family, school, peer group, community, neighbourhood and online. Contextual safeguarding aims to disrupt, prevent or limit harm occurring our children within these contexts.

**Where can I found out more about the Adolescent Safety Framework (ASF), including supporting guidance, tools and resources?**

All of the relevant documents and resources are available through the Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership website and can be accessed by any professional. These can be found at the following link[**Plymouth Adolescent Safety Framework**](http://www.plymouthscb.co.uk/?page_id=2931&preview=true)

**How do I know whether to complete a Safer Me Assessment or MASH Referral? Is there an occasion when I might have to do both?**

No, you should not be completing both. The Safer Me Assessment should be completed instead of the MASH referral when the primary threats to a young person’s safety are from outside of their home in the form of a peer group, neighbourhood, location or school and/or a person of concern (any age). All other types of referrals, e.g. concerns regarding neglect, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse within the home/family will continue to be submitted using the existing MASH referral form. Please see [Making a Referral - (plymouthscb.co.uk)](http://www.plymouthscb.co.uk/making-a-referral/)

The Safer me Assessment contains a revision of the existing child exploitation screening tool as well as a referral. There have been some amendments to enable additional focus on locations, peer groups and persons of concern. This means that practitioners do not have to complete multiple forms and can collate all of their information and concerns in one place. As well as its functions in terms of beginning the ASF process through the MASH, the Safer Me Assessment will continue to function as a risk assessment tool to assist decision making and planning.

**Do I need to obtain parental consent to send a Safer Me Assessment into the MASH?**

Parents/carers are key partners in keeping young people safe where contextual issues are concerned and should be involved in decision-making and planning at all stages.

If you are looking to refer an individual young person into MASH then you must discuss the referral with the parent/carer and seek consent unless to do so will place the young person at serious risk of harm. If parents/carers decline for the referral to be made and your concerns are at a significant harm level then you must still make the referral. .

There will be occasions where you or your service may not be working with all of the young people linked to the context that you are concerned about. For example, young people connected to a location of concern. In these instances, you must make every attempt to ensure that the parents/carers of all young people involved are aware of the concerns surrounding their children, however, it is understood that this will not always be possible and the priority needs to be the safety of the young people. On occasions, the presence of consent will be looked at within MASH on case by case basis.

**Do I still complete a Safer Me Assessment if it is an open case?**

Yes. If your concern relates to the individual needs of a young person you are working with, you would complete the Safer Me Assessment in the same way you would previously have used the Child Exploitation Screening Tool, i.e. to inform your wider assessment of that young person, decision making and planning. If your concern is about a neighbourhood/location, school or peer group and you are of the view a response is required in relation to that context, you would refer this into MASH using the Safer Me Assessment. At this point, it will be triaged by the Exploitation Hub to determine whether a Context Conference should be convened.

**What do I do if I’m unsure about whether I need to complete a Safer Me Assessment?**

Guidance on completing Safer Me Assessments is available within the ASF supporting documents on the PSCP website [**Plymouth Adolescent Safety Framework**](http://www.plymouthscb.co.uk/?page_id=2931&preview=true) You will also need to liaise with you manager or safeguarding lead for guidance as you would with any other safeguarding concern. If you are still unsure, you can contact the MASH consultation line where you will be able to access advice from a MASH social worker or directly from a manager within the Exploitation Hub.

**Is MASH and the Exploitation Hub the same single point of entry or separate hubs?**

The MASH and Exploitation Hub are one in the same and are co-located. It is a single point of entry. MASH enquiries for individual young people where harm is external to the family home will continue to go directly to MASH. This will also be the point of access for referrals that relate to a specific context of concern, i.e. location, peer group, school or person of concern (usually an adult).

**Do I send the MASH referral to the Gateway email inbox and Safer Me referral to the Exploitation Hub? Is there a separate email address?**

There is no separate email address. All enquiries are received through the Plymouth Gateway at gateway@plymouth.gov.uk. If there is additional action required in relation to contextual concerns, information will be forwarded internally to the Exploitation Hub.

**What is the Exploitation Hub and where is it?**

The Exploitation Hub sits as part of the MASH and works closely with them. It currently consists of an Exploitation Hub Co-ordinator to help oversee referrals and activity in relation to the ASF.

**How can I challenge the decision making if I don’t agree? Is there a resolution process and what is it?**

You should discuss this with your own manager or safeguarding lead in the first instance and following this, if you are of the view that a decision made within the MASH and Exploitation Hub is not the right one for the child, family or context, then please ask for the member of staff to review this with another Social Worker within the MASH team. If, following a discussion you are still unsure that the right decision has been made then please ask for the Duty or Exploitation Hub Co-ordinator to review this.

**What is meant by a ‘Safer Me’ approach?**

Safer Me Early Help reflects an Early help approach, Safer Me Child In Need reflects a Child in Need approach and Safer Me Plus reflects a Child Protection Conference. The processes and procedures that underpin these different levels of response will largely remain the same as existing frameworks. The difference will be the focus of the discussion, assessment, planning and intervention will shift to the issues external to the home. That is not to say difficulties within the family should not be considered as there will be an interplay between the two that needs to be understood. Participation of parents/carers is key and there will be a focus on creating ways of trying to engage the young person, so they remain central to decision making and planning around their safety.

**What is a Safer Me Plus meeting?**

A Safer Me Plus meeting provides an alternative conference model with the same duties and responsibilities as any other Initial or Review Child Protection Conference. If a young person’s parents/carers are taking all appropriate steps to care for their child but that child continues to experience harm external to the home, a Safer Me Plus model will be considered. A Safer Me Plus approach should be taken in cases where; following a Strategy meeting and enquiries under s47, concerns of significant harm are substantiated and the child is judged to be suffering or likely to suffer significant harm but the primary harm is outside the family home.

**What is the role of the ASF Independent Chair?**

There is a dedicated ASF Independent Chair based in the Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Service in Children’s Social Care. Their primary role will be to chair Safer Me Plus meetings for individual young people and Peer Group Context Conferences.

**What is the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and what is its role in the ASF?**

Community Safety Partnerships are made up of representatives from the police, Local Authorities, fire and rescue authorities, health and probation services (the 'responsible authorities'). The responsible authorities work together to protect their local communities from crime and to help people feel safer. Within the ASF, the CSP will be responsible for convening and chairing the Neighbourhood/location Context Conferences.

**What is ‘context weighting’?**

When you start to incorporate contexts into assessments you then need to think about how to prioritise contextual interventions. One way to achieve this is thinking about which contextual factors – and contexts themselves – have the greatest influence over the problem you are trying to address. In other words – what context needs to change first for things to start to get better for that child, family, peer group, etc. Working through this challenge is what we call ‘Context Weighting’.

**What is a ‘Context Conference’?**

A context conference is a multi-agency meeting that focuses on the situation and environment in which harm is taking place. If concerns are identified in relation to a peer-group; neighbourhood/location of concern; or a school, a Context Conference will be convened. The overarching purpose of the meeting is to explore the identified risks and safety young people experience within a specific context, reduce risks and increase protection and agree an intervention plan accordingly. These Conferences do not plan for individual young people and instead consider broader factors within specific contexts that may impact young people’s safety. Peer Group Conferences will be chaired by an ASF Independent Chair from the Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Service in Children’s Social Care. Neighbourhood/Location Conferences will be chaired by the Community Safety Partnership (CSP). School Context Conferences will be chaired by the Head Teacher or Designated Safeguarding Lead.

**Who would attend a Context Conference?**

In terms of those who are likely to be invited to the context meetings, the following would be considered: What agencies/ practitioners/ community members can provide further detail to the issues raised? Who is already engaged with work within the context? Who has capacity to affect and implement changes that may be suggested in the particular contexts raised? Who has best placed to represent young people’s voices and consider the opinions of those that may be affected by planned interventions?

**What is a Mapping Meeting?**

In order to prepare for a Context Conference and understand the nature of the associations within peer groups and/or links to specific locations, a mapping meeting will be convened by the Exploitation Hub. Key professionals who know the associated young people will be invited and the Exploitation Hub will lead the meeting. This meeting will also provide an opportunity for scrutiny and challenge around which young people should be discussed in the relevant context conference. The Exploitation Hub will then forward a completed network map to the chair of the context conference.

**If young people are part of a context conference, does this mean they will be open to Children’s Social Work?**

No. Remember, the subject of the context conference is the context itself, not the individual young people. Young people connected to the context will be at varying levels of risk and have varying levels of individual need, therefore, this will be reflected in their individual Safer Me or Safer Me Plus meetings and plans.

**What if I have a young person who may need to be considered for an Early Help Assessment, Single Assessment or Child Protection Enquiry but they are also as part of a group where there are exploitation concerns?**

If concerns regarding a young person are such that they require a response to their individual needs and risks, this will continue to happen through the usual processes and there will be consideration within the assessment as to whether the plan needs to focus on harm within the family, external to the family, or both. This will continue to be through Early Help, Child In need and Child Protection. For young people where the harm is primarily external to the family home, the Safer Me approach will be used at each level. The ASF provides an additional set of processes that will also support a focus on the peer group in which the young person may be experiencing harm. The peer group would be considered to be the context. It may be that a number of children within the group require their own individual response alongside there being a focus on the peer group as a whole. There will be exploration as to which workers for the individual children may also have a role in intervening with the wider group as well as identification of other services that may be able to help. Those relevant workers will be invited to be part of the Peer Group Context Conference where information will be shared and a multi-agency plan formulated.

**Will there still be a need for Complex Strategy Meetings?**

 Yes, Complex Strategy Meetings will still exist but will only be convened where complex or organised abuse has been identified. Further information regarding organised and complex abuse can be found at: [Organised and Complex Abuse (proceduresonline.com)](https://www.proceduresonline.com/swcpp/plymouth/p_org_complex_abuse.html)

**What is the role of Operational Missing and Child Exploitation Forum (MACE)?**

The MACE is a multi-agency forum that considers Child Exploitation and missing young people. Primarily this will relate to concerns regarding Child Sexual Exploitation, Child Criminal Exploitation (including County Lines), modern slavery, trafficking and gang association. A key aspect of the MACE will be to provide a focus on ‘persons of concern’ and exploration of the full range of disruption measures available to target perpetrators. The MACE seeks to ensure that agencies and commissioned services work together effectively and consistently to identify risk, prevent and disrupt the exploitation of young people and to reduce the risks faced by those who go who go missing. The MACE collates and shares information in order to understand the nature and extent of child exploitation in Plymouth, as well as enabling the identification of patterns and intelligence gaps. The MACE has an overview of key activity relating the Adolescent Safety Framework and is in a position to determine strategic responses to key themes identified.