

## PLYMOUTH SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP

### SAFEGUARDING ADOLESCENTS STRATEGY

#### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 There is increased recognition across the sector that the child protection system is not working effectively enough for adolescents. Safeguarding services have traditionally been designed around younger children and their families, and not around the needs of adolescents experiencing risk of harm outside the family home. The strategy is for young people aged 11 to 18 years and up to 25 years for vulnerable adults and care leavers.
- 1.2 Contextual safeguarding is an approach to understanding and responding to young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools, peer groups and online can feature violence and abuse. The term was first used in 2015 to describe an ambition for how to advance practice and policy responses to extra-familial harm and risks.
- 1.3 Extra-familial risks include child sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, missing children, gangs, county lines, radicalisation, modern slavery, serious youth violence, harmful sexual behaviour, peer on peer abuse, teenage relationship abuse, trafficking and online abuse. These extra-familial threats might arise at school or other educational establishments, from peer groups, or more widely from within the wider community and/or online.

## Contextual dynamics of abuse, vulnerability and risk (Firmin, 2015)

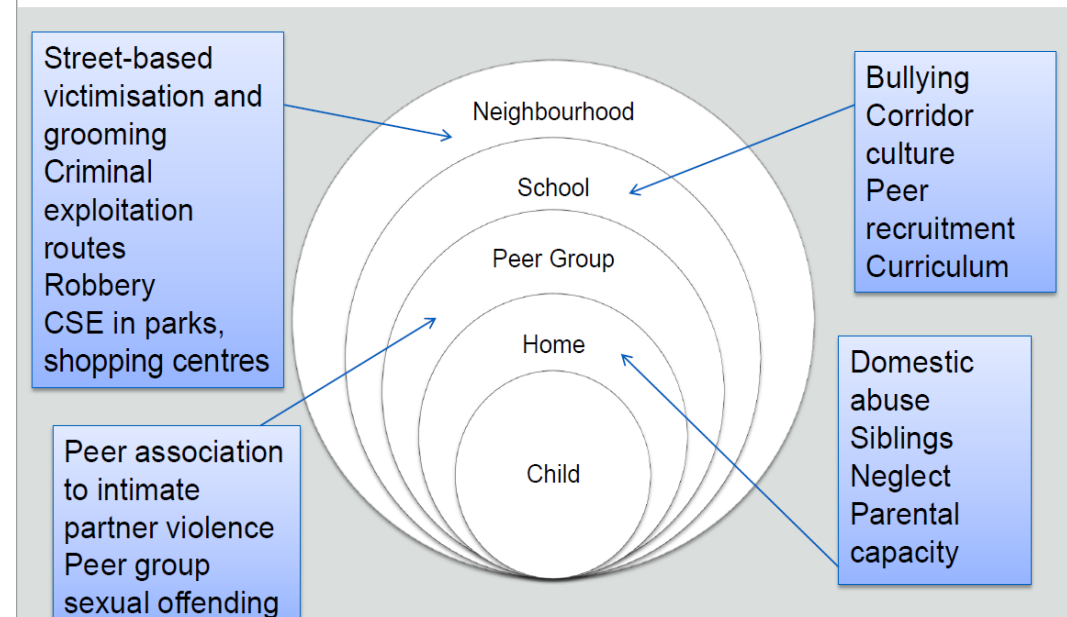


Figure 1: Contexts of Adolescent Safety and Vulnerability (Firmin 2013:47)

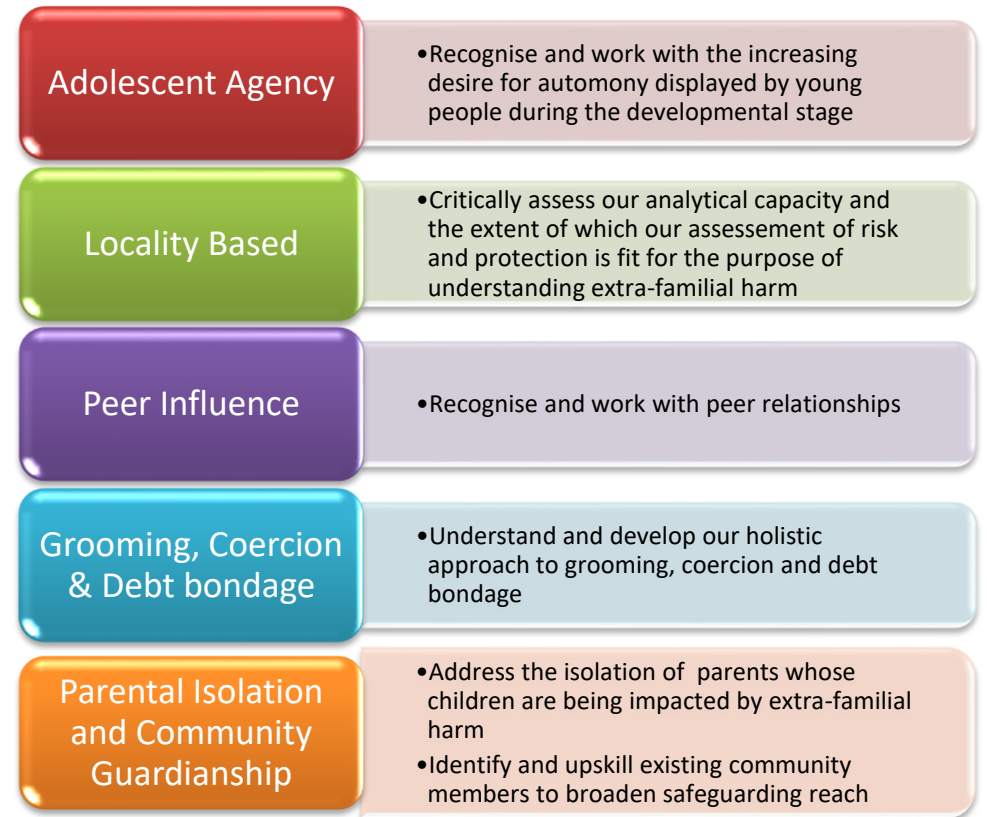
- 1.4 Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 includes the need for the safeguarding community to come together to be able to assess risk to children and young people outside of the home, and to be able to consider whether wider environmental factors are present in a child or young person's life and if they are a threat to their safety and/or welfare.
- 1.5 The Adolescent Safety Framework (Appendix A) is Plymouth's response to extra familial forms of abuse and this Strategy documents our strategic commitment and priorities to ensure that Plymouth partners are effective in responding to these risks and supporting young people, parents and carers. This builds on the work already undertaken within the Plymouth Safeguarding

Children Partnership.

## 2 Purpose and Scope

2.1 This Strategy's core purpose is that by clear and robust multi-agency working young people are kept safe within the contexts that influence their lives – home, school, peer group, neighbourhood and community. This includes online activity which young people simply see as part of their usual world – they do not separate the two.

2.2 The Strategy's scope is to address risks faced by vulnerable adolescents, by recognising and ensuring that the following key factors support a holistic approach to extra-familial safeguarding practice<sup>1</sup>



2.3 The PSCP shall ensure the effective coordination of its multi-agency activity and oversee developments to the above approach to ensure that a positive difference is being made to young people's lives. This will look and feel different to each young person.

## 3 Principles

3.1 Drawing on effective national and local practice, the PSCP and practitioners will promote an adolescent-centred approach applying

<sup>1</sup> Contextual Safeguarding and Child Protection 'Rewriting the Rules' Carlene Firmin 2020

the principles proposed by the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and Research in Practice (RiP)<sup>2</sup>;-

- **Work with adolescent development:** particularly perception, autonomy, aspiration and skills
- **Work with adolescents as assets and resources:** e.g. drawn on strengths to build confidence and resilience
- **Promote supportive relationships between adolescents and their family and peers**
- **Prioritise supportive relationships between adolescents and key practitioners through service design**
- **Take a holistic approach to both adolescents and the risks they face:** e.g. avoid labelling adolescents according to the risks they face
- **Ensure services are accessible and advertised:** respond to adolescent autonomy, advertise the benefits and provide outreach
- **Equip and support our workforce;** develop a multi-agency workforce development plan that empowers practitioners and organisations to understand and respond to contextual safeguarding concerns.

3.2 The PSCP shall also apply the Plymouth Trauma Informed lens to its understanding of levels of need and risk faced by adolescents. The PSCP recognises that for some young people the environments they grow up in, the people they relate to, and the experiences they have are adverse, and have a potentially traumatic and lifelong impact on their development, physical and mental health, and ultimately their way of life.

3.3 Adverse childhood experiences are defined as highly stressful events or situations that occur during children and/or adolescence. It can be

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<sup>2</sup> [S Adolescent-centred approach principles – ADCS and RiP](#)

a single event or incident, or prolonged threats to a child's or young person's safety, security or bodily integrity. These experiences require significant neurobiological, psychological, and behaviour adaptations to survive. We can best understand these adaptations to be children's and young people's attempt to:

- Survive in their immediate environment;
- Find ways of mitigating or tolerating the adversity, by using the resources available to them;
- Establish a sense of safety or control
- Make sense of the experiences that they have had.<sup>3</sup>

3.5 The PSCP works to ensure that trauma informed practice is **Everybody's Business** and shall apply the trauma informed lens in its work by using the Plymouth Trauma Informed Network principles which:

- **REALISES** what trauma is and how it can have wide spread impact for, young people, families and communities.
- **RECOGNISES** the signs and effects of trauma in individual young people and families, groups and communities. This includes the PSCP multi-agency workforce.
- **RESPONDS** by integrating knowledge regarding trauma informed approaches into safeguarding policies, procedures and practice.
- **RESISTS** re-traumatising young people, families and communities by actively seeking to avoid situations where traumatic memories might be retriggered and seeking to deescalate and diffuse potentially traumatic interactions when they occur.
- **RESILIENCE** is promoted in supporting young people, families and communities to cope with and adapt to adversity, and have the strength to challenge situations where it might occur.

<sup>3</sup>Adversity and Trauma Informed Practice by Rebecca Brennan, Dr Marc Bush, and David Trickett with Charlotte Levene and Joanna Watson.

- 3.6 When professionals are discussing levels of need and considering appropriate responses to those needs they should support the 5 Core Values for a trauma informed Plymouth:
- **SAFE** - There is consideration of the psychological safety of those involved in and impacted by safeguarding decisions and arrangements. When meeting, engaging and working with children, young people, families, communities and professionals all efforts shall be made to establishing trusting relationships.
  - **PERSON CENTRED** - Understanding the lived experience of children, young people families and communities and the circumstances which led to their involvement within safeguarding services. Voices of the child, young person, families and communities shall be listened to and heard with respect.
  - **COLLABORATIVE** - Children, young people, families, communities and professionals are treated wherever possible as equal partners in safeguarding decisions, arrangements, planning and interventions.
  - **EMPOWERING** - There is an overriding expectation that safeguarding decisions and arrangements shall make a genuine difference. All involved, engaged or working within safeguarding services deserve to know that their contributions have influenced real change.
  - **KIND** - Ensure that language is appropriate and mindful of victim blaming or falling into judgement. There shall be understanding that traumatic circumstances may evidence behaviour that is considered challenging and the trauma lens shall be applied to try to understand the underlying cause of this. There shall be kindness, clear transparent and compassionate communication and engagement. This is outlined in Plymouth's Trauma Informed Lens.<sup>4</sup>

## 4 SHARED LANGUAGE

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<sup>4</sup> Produced by Simon Hardwick, Anna Moss & Shelley Shaw for the Trauma Informed Plymouth Network

4.1 Exploitation is never the victim's fault. It is abuse. In September 2016 Ofsted published their report 'Time to Listen'<sup>5</sup> - a joined up approach to child sexual exploitation and missing children and highlighted that in a small number of care and police records inappropriate language was being used by professionals that easily conveyed to the young person that they were responsible for their abuse. It is known that language used by our safeguarding professionals remains very important. Language must reflect the coercion and lack of control young people have in abusive relationships or exploitative situations. Victim blaming language may reinforce the perpetrators' message of guilt and shame, and prevent young people from disclosing their abuse for fear of being blamed by professionals.

4.2 This strategy requires the PSCP to eliminate language and responses that blame and stigmatise young people. The PSCP will challenge fixed/uninformed and victim blaming language.

## 5. PRIORITIES

The priorities of this strategy are held and overseen by the Chairs' Group of the PSCP. It is their role to ensure that the priorities set out within this Strategy and the implementation and development of the Adolescent Safety Framework is successful.

### Priority: PREPARE

#### Why is it a priority?

The PSCP will prepare its multi-agency partners to ensure risks to children, young people and families are considered in the contexts and social rules of

<sup>5</sup> Ofsted 'Time to Listen' 2016 [Take the time to listen to vulnerable children, say inspectorates - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/544212/Time_to_listen_to_vulnerable_children_say_inspectorates.pdf)

which they live, learn, and grow. We shall understand local intelligence, demand and need regarding child exploitation, share intelligence effectively and be able to identify young people at risk of experiencing exploitation. All partners shall recognise the valuable contributions of families, schools, neighbourhoods and communities to help make young people safe. **Safeguarding is everyone's business.**

#### How we will make a difference?

Our safeguarding framework and systems will be underpinned by visible strong leadership and a welfare focused multi-agency approach to working with and preventing child exploitation. Co-designed frameworks and systems shall enable reach and analysis into peer groups, schools and community contexts and will work with and for young people, parents and practitioners.

### **Priority: PREVENT**

#### Why is it a priority?

Organisations and communities shall develop a culture that recognises the causes of child exploitation, the signs and risk indicators and do all they can to tackle them. Each agency, organisation and community within the PSCP shall proactively highlight the issue of child exploitation and inform its employees, workers and other partners on how to identify signs and risks and know the pathways to share information.

#### How we will make a difference?

The safety of our children and young people shall be prioritised across all of our partnership. Our children and young people shall benefit from the city's Children and Young People's Plan: "A Bright Future." The three priorities are for all children and young people to be happy and healthy, to be safe, and to achieve and aspire. This means that all partnerships, political and community leaders shall have prioritised these aims and reflect them within their own respective corporate and strategic planning and commitments. Early help builds resilience and prevents vulnerabilities escalating into social or educational exclusion, neglect and abuse. A universal culture of recognising and working with adverse childhood experiences is fostered. All agencies can mobilise early help multi-agency interventions, focused upon children and young people at risk of experiencing adversity arising from exposure to familial violence, abuse or neglect, poverty, parental mental health or substance misuse or from being excluded from school. Trusting relationships will have been built between partners and families and children to hold and support risk, providing training and build awareness to keep children and young people safe online, in their homes, schools and neighbourhoods. Schools deliver consistent high quality PSHE with a whole school approach to gender equality, safeguarding and preventing exploitation. This follows Ofsted's Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges in June 2021.<sup>6</sup>

### **Priority: PROTECT**

#### Why is it a priority?

Children and young people who are at risk of child exploitation as well as those who are experiencing child exploitation or survivors of child exploitation will be supported. Agencies shall be able to identify and

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<sup>6</sup> Ofsted's findings and recommendations on sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online sexual abuse. [Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/94422/sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges-2021.pdf)

protect these children and young people and provide a rapid, trauma informed and welfare driven multi-agency response and support for the child or young person, their family and wider community. All agencies shall cooperate and collaborate to build a clear and accurate picture of a child or young person's circumstances and daily lived experience and know who can be involved to provide protection.

How we will make a difference?

All multi-agency professionals will be confident and competent in their knowledge of risk and vulnerability factors as they relate to the exploitation of children and young people. Multi-agency information and intelligence will be gathered and shared to identify children and young people who are vulnerable to exploitation. Hotspots will be mapped, trends known, missing episodes understood responded to and reduced, and professionals shall readily identify victims, perpetrators and criminal activity involving children. The Plymouth Operational Missing and Child Exploitation Group shall ensure that risks and needs in our area can be identified at the earliest point and measures put in place to protect children and our families. Children and young people shall be recognised and supported as victims.

**Priority: PURSUE**

Why is it a priority?

Perpetrators of child exploitation will be pursued using all legislative opportunities at our disposal and target specific risks, ranging from warning notices to offence charges and community protection order, and ultimately leading to prosecution of those response. We shall ensure that there is effective risk management of perpetrators within our City and wider south west peninsula region.

How we will make a difference?

Policing responses to perpetrators shall be robust and criminal investigations shall run alongside plans to support and respond to child exploitation. The information sharing between agencies and shall be accurate, timely and effective, and routinely use intelligence led disruption in relation to any local businesses, neighbourhoods, schools, or online arenas as well as individuals or groups linked to or associated with child exploitation. All agencies shall be responsible for and flexibly applying the full range of disruption activities available to them both via criminal and civil processes. These shall include exercising all powers available in relation to licensing, health and safety, fraud, housing provision and other related statutory powers and legislation. Robust offender management processes, planning and strategies shall reduce the risk presented by identified perpetrators.

**Priority: ENGAGE and EMPOWER**

Why is it a priority?

Engagement with children, young people, families, and community leaders and members is important to raise awareness of child exploitation and promote safeguarding community guardianships. We will listen to children, young people, families and communities in our continued development and implementation of services, support and systems. We will work with peer relationships wherever possible rather than dismantling them.

We will support survivors of children exploitation with a trauma informed approach which ensures that their needs are met.

How we will make a difference?

Our approach to safeguarding adolescents shall be informed and shaped by the realities of our young people across the various contexts of their lives. Young people shall be able to tell us about their views on safety in Plymouth and be integrated into project planning and developing solutions to some of the problems that they face or witness within their local schools, groups and neighbourhoods. Key leaders and practitioners shall, as business as normal, frequently engage and discuss with young people the work that they do, and how they can better support and empower them so they have the resilience, self-confidence and skills to be aspirational young adults.

Young people shall feel supported to report what is happening or happened to them and to receive positive responses which ensures their experience does not define their future. Young people will be treated as victims and shall be supported within any resulting criminal justice processes or systems. Young people shall receive the right support, at the right time and from the right service for them.

## APPENDIX A

### THE PLYMOUTH ADOLESCENT SAFETY FRAMEWORK

1.1 The Plymouth Adolescent Safety Framework (ASF) has been developed to:

- Ensure that young people feel and are safe outside of their homes and for parents to feel reassured;
- Improve the quality of coordinated multi agency safety planning when an adolescent is at risk for which their parents are not culpable in respect of significant harm;
- Ensure consistent safety planning support when key risks are identified;
- Identify adolescents of concern early to intervene as a partnership to reduce risk and prevent further harm;
- Ensure evidence-informed and consistent multi-agency interventions;
- Ensure linkage between strategic and operational issues affecting adolescent risk.

1.2 It provides a coordinated method for professionals to assess, plan and intervene in extra-familial risk, using a child welfare lens, by working with a range of community providers to keep children safe within the spaces and places they use.

1.3 The ASF is a strength-based multi-agency safeguarding approach to managing risk that is primarily found outside of the home, supporting young people aged 11 to 18 years (up to 25 years for vulnerable adults and care leavers) and their families to increase safety. The approach is focused on our collective capacity as professionals and communities – not just the family – to keep young people safe from exploitation and harm.

1.4 The framework provides a single and holistic approach to referral and assessments of individual children, peer groups, neighbourhoods, locations or persons of concern.

- Assessment focuses on where the risk comes from and considers adolescent development, impact of trauma and collective responsibility to protect.
- Assessment analyses risks outside of the family, as well as identifying strengths to maximise the participation of the young person, their families and social networks.
- Practitioners complete relevant sections of the assessment appropriate to the pathway and/or context they are concerned about and that they consider to have the greatest impact on safety.

1.5 The exploitation hub provides coordination through the Children's Gateway which will ensure timely individual safeguarding, threshold stability, analysis and support. This also enables different contexts (e.g. people, situations and



locations), as well as individual children, to be referred into Children Social Care with the same consideration to level of need.

- 1.6 The ASF uses existing safeguarding frameworks and thresholds within Early Help and Children Social Care to ensure planning safety planning via an individual pathway. It provides an alternative approach to Early Help and Targeted Support, Children in Need, and Children in Care and Child Protection Conferences to focus on extra-familial harm. The meetings adopt a collaborative and strength based relational approach.
- 1.7 Intervention is focused at a wider level on the context where the abuse has occurred – creating and increasing safety in the places where young people spend their time through partnerships with the wider community and agencies. This is achieved through planning via the context pathway in Peer Group, Neighbourhood, and School Context Conferences. Adult Persons of Concern will continue to be addressed via the Operational Missing and Child Exploitation Group. These forums are not designed to focus on individual planning but intervening to increase the safety for young people by focusing on locations, environments, activity, groups and persons of concern.