

# Watching Over or Working With framework guidance

Understanding trust and surveillance in social work  
innovation in response to extra-familial harm

**June 2022**

# Introducing the Watching Over Working With framework

How can we build trusting, meaningful, ethical, and respectful relationships in our work with young people and communities? What impact does it have on these relationships when our interventions rely on surveillance and monitoring?

Adolescents spend time in contexts outside the home. Sometimes they are at risk of abuse in those contexts. Increasingly child protection systems and their partners are required to assess and intervene in a range of 'extra-familial' contexts to prevent or respond to harm. This can broaden the scope of children's social care assessment and intervention. It can also raise questions about the thresholds for, and legal and ethical parameters of, intervening in contexts beyond the home.

Contextual Safeguarding promotes a child-welfare approach to assessing and intervening in extra-familial contexts where adolescents are harmed. We recognise that both young people harming and being harmed (whether by adults or peers) are both significant, and that the welfare of all children should be central. Since 'extra-familial' harm was included in Working Together 2018, multi-agency partnerships, voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations and social care teams across England and Wales have been developing policies and practices for safeguarding adolescents beyond their families.

## What is the need?

Researchers in the Contextual Safeguarding team have begun to observe that these innovations: on the one hand drew on 'trusted relationship' models, for example through mentoring or specialised adolescent teams or services with a focus on youth work or outreach. And yet on the other hand, could

include a range of interventions that rely on surveilling and monitoring young people and their communities, sometimes with little offer of support or with the potential to criminalise young people and their families. This might include monitoring of social media, profiling of 'peer groups' and neighbourhood spaces, acquiring and sharing 'intelligence' with the police, or the use of enforcement or disruption orders and 'deprivations of liberty' in secure and distance care placements.

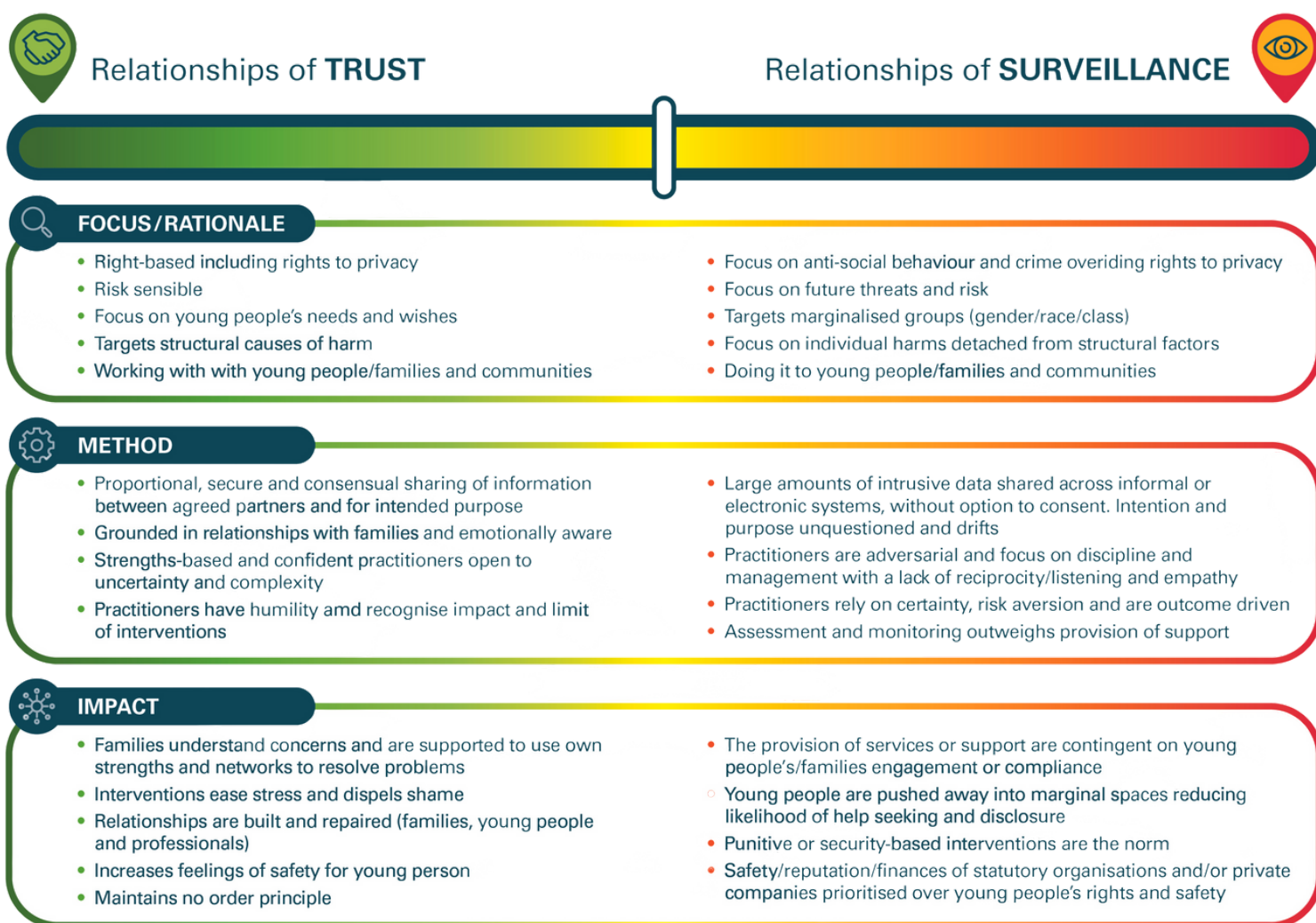
## What did we do?

We reviewed research papers about trust and surveillance in child protection work and asked: what was the focus of the interventions and what was different about the approaches; what sorts of methods were used, i.e., what sorts of things were done to promote trust and/or what sorts of surveillance practices featured; and finally, what was the impact on young people, families, and communities.

## The Framework

The findings of our exploration into relationships of trust and surveillance in literature can be summarised in the below framework 'Watching Over Working With' (WoWW). The framework is

useful for those looking to review their system, including responses to extra-familial harm, and examine what kinds of values are at the heart of the relationships workers hold with young people.



## What does this mean in practice?

We took the WoWW framework and applied it to some of the work that was being done to 'test' or implement Contextual Safeguarding in various settings. We asked: in what ways do they feature

### Focus/rationale

Whilst traditional child protection interventions tend to focus on individual children and their parents/carers, responses to 'extra-familial' harm sometimes seek to understand and respond to harm that features in 'groups' and 'locations'. Individuals have a right to private life, and to their personal data being protected, including where there are concerns about safety. It is important that people's rights to privacy, including protection of data, are considered when they feature as part of a 'groups' or 'locations' where harm has happened.

It is important that consent is sought from young people, families, and community members for their inclusion in an assessment, a plan, or an intervention. It is important that this is informed consent, and that people understand what will happen if they say yes, if they say no, or what will happen with their data or any information they share with professionals.

When we seek to understand how and why harm happens in extra-familial contexts, we are likely to identify 'contextual' and 'structural' drivers of harm. This could include poor lighting, lack of guardianship or lack of youth provision

relationships of trust or relationships of surveillance, and what might the impact be for young people, their families, and communities? Here are some of the key reflections:

(contextual) or high levels of school exclusions, poverty, or racism impacting young people and their safety (structural). If these needs are identified by young people or by professionals, it is important that they are named, and that any subsequent plans seek to address these issues.

### Method

If an intervention is designed to create safety in an extra-familial context where young people are experiencing or are at risk of harm, it is important that the purpose, methods, and impact of this intervention are clearly defined and transparently communicated to young people, families and communities impacted.

It is helpful if professionals continuously reflect on the focus and purpose of their involvement with young people, or the places where harm happens. Including creating spaces for critical and challenging discussions about inequalities, resources, and relationships. Have we remained focused on the welfare of children and their best interests, or is the focus the prevention of crime and anti-social behaviour (the latter is not Contextual Safeguarding)?

## Impact

---

Professionals can find it difficult to turn assessments of contexts into contextual interventions. When carrying out an assessment with a group or location, what is the intended outcome? What are the anticipated impacts on young people's safety and how will we measure them? This should include, and prioritise, seeking the views of young people, their families and the communities impacted by the harm and by the response. Assessments and interventions may impact the wider community, i.e., by increasing the presence of professionals, or making changes to the built environment, how is this impact being measured and have the views of community members been included?

## Case study analysis

What does applying this framework look like in practice? How can we know whether we are forming relationships of trust or relationships of surveillance? The following section helps us to explore what it looks like to apply this framework in practice. How do we know if the work we are doing is helping us form trusting relationships with young people and their families and communities, or if we are 'watching over' young people without offering tangible support, and with the potential of infringing their

rights? Often child protection interventions feature both trust and surveillance and there, this tool is just a starting point to help you think about what this looks like in your work, and how it might impact young people's protection and rights. The composite case study below is made up from various observations of interventions that have been piloted as part of the Scale Up project. The annotations show how we could apply the WoWW framework.

Dean is 12 years old and attends Meadow High School. He is subject to a Youth Offending Team (YOT) referral order for possession of cannabis. Dean is on a fixed-term exclusion from Meadow High School for truancy, disruptive behaviour and carrying cannabis in school. Meadow High School have previously referred Dean to the local authority Children and Families Team with concerns about his welfare. This was 'no further actioned' as he was already working with his YOT worker.

Sarah, one of Dean's teachers at Meadow High School, attended a training session about Child Criminal Exploitation and became increasingly concerned that Dean may be being criminally exploited. Sarah re-referred Dean to the Children and Families Team highlighting that she had seen Dean with older young people in the community and that he had come to school wearing an expensive Nike jacket despite Sarah knowing Dean's parents were struggling financially.

How can we have conversations with young people about safety and risk before escalation? (participation, strengths-based)

What assumptions do we make about young people and their families? How are these assumptions informed by relationships, by professional training, and by issues such as race, class and gender? (ecological, strength-based)



A children's social worker, Joanne, was allocated to Dean and as part of her Initial Assessment she spoke with his YOT worker and spent a couple of visits getting to know Dean before sitting down with him to complete a 'peer map'.

Dean filled an A3 page with names of young people, adults and family members connected to him. When Joanne asked Dean who on the map was a safe person that he could trust and if he felt threatened by anyone, he identified his family, some friends and his teacher Sarah as people he could trust and said he had been in a fight with a few of his friends about money. Joanne recognised the names of an adult on Dean's map as subject to an on-going police investigation, Operation Claridge, about child criminal exploitation in the area.

Joanne asked her manager if Dean's name could be added to the list for the next Exploitation Risk Panel where she shared Dean's map with the other professionals' present. The names of young people on the map were recorded by the meeting Chair and a plan was made for Joanne to continue to work with Dean and his parents. After the meeting, Joanne was worried about how the information would be used by other professionals, noting that the police officers present from Operation Claridge had run searches on Dean's older brother, who is 17, and a couple of Dean's friends.

What time can we invest in building and maintain trust? (participation, rights-based)

How do we draw on and resource the strengths in young people's family, peer and community networks to create safety? (strengths based, ecological)

What practices can we use to centre young people's voices? How do we balance young people's views with professional interpretation and assessment? (participation)

Have the privacy rights of young people, their peers and their families been considered? What are the legal and ethical and relational consequences of sharing information across multi-agency partnerships? (rights-based)

When do we seek, and re-seek consent? How do we ensure transparency about the purpose of assessments and how information is stored and shared? (participation / rights based)

Are we building safety in contexts and groups? Have the safety needs of all young people been considered? (ecological, rights-based, strengths-based)

Can professional anxiety be transformed into professional advocacy? What role can social workers have in ensuring safeguarding interventions maintain children's rights and the welfare principle? (rights-based)

## Reflective questions

Discussing and reflecting on case studies can be a helpful learning tool for thinking about the sorts of practices and relationships we are engaging in through our work with young people. The questions below are intended to help you reflect on your own practice, or that of your

organisation. You can start by thinking about a case study, go through the framework and think about where the practice features relationships of trust and surveillance, and what the impact might be for the young person, their family and community.

Where is the work featured in the case study grounded in trusted relationships and where are there features of surveillance?



What impact do you think this has? How does it impact Dean, his family, his friends, and the wider community?

Can you identify any challenges or opportunities for building trust and safety into Dean's support from Joanne?

