

SINGING FROM THE SAME HYMN SHEET?

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN MULTI-AGENCY PARTNERS APPLY CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING?

Rachael Owens & Jenny Lloyd (2023)

This infographic helps you think through what to consider when different partners come together to create safety for young people using Contextual Safeguarding. It reports some findings taken from Owens & Lloyd's (2023) research article.

UK social workers are being asked to create safety for young people in the community spaces and places where they experience harm by addressing their welfare needs. Working outside the home is new for most social workers, but it is familiar to the police, community safety, youth workers and education. It makes sense then for safeguarding partners to work together for young people in community contexts.

Contextual Safeguarding is a framework that safeguarding partners have started using to help them do this (Firmin, 2020). In this approach, the focus is on changing contexts by addressing the social conditions of harm. This ecological approach is different from interventions and responses that focus on changing the behaviour of individuals. Our findings from five social care departments is that behaviour-based responses dominate.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO USE ECOLOGICAL OR BEHAVIOUR-BASED APPROACHES?

Do we see social problems as mostly a result of the environment or mostly a result of 'wrong' choices that individuals make?

ECOLOGICAL

Responses that try to change the environment, context or structure around a person

e.g., Addressing racist attitudes that created barriers to young people accessing their education

Youth workers going onto the street to spend time there

BEHAVIOUR-BASED

Responses that try to change the behaviour of an individual person through rewards, punishments or changing beliefs

e.g., Young people who were weapon carrying being given education programmes designed to encourage them to make better choices

Youth workers giving victims of sexual assault relationships education

EXAMPLES FROM OUR RESEARCH



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

There is power in connecting with different partners to work in new places. But there are also challenges of bringing together different professionals and agencies who think and work in different ways. Here are some questions that you can discuss in your multi-agency partnership that will help you to have a better awareness of whether your responses target the behaviour or the environment. On the CS website you will find a workshop activity.

1. Who are the partners in your meetings? How do they understand problems and solutions?
2. Who has the most influence on the decisions that you make? Who speaks most/least?
3. Look at the responses and interventions that you use – go through each one and consider whether they are behaviour-based or ecological.
4. Is there space for critical reflection in your meetings? Can you create an atmosphere where it is ok not to know the answer and then think together about what what needs to happen and why?
5. What do you need as a partnership to work more ecologically together? Think about commissioners, funders, meeting chairing, plans etc.

You can find a briefing and workshop activity on the CS Network by searching for 'hymn sheet'