

Contextual Safeguarding and Relationship-Based Practice

Research findings on addressing extra-familial harm (Lloyd, et. al 2023)

We were interested in how Contextual Safeguarding and Relationship-Based practice can complement each other

CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING

- CS Focuses on understanding the role of contexts to safety and harm of young people.
- To create safety in contexts practitioners need to learn about the places and peer groups young people spend time with & in.
- To date CS work has been on systems-change.

RELATIONSHIP-BASED PRACTICE

- Supportive relationships are part of core social work values
- But the current social work context is pre-occupied with risk.
- This can result in defensive risk-averse practice that undermines relationships.

THE BOTTOM LINE

- Contextual safeguarding and relationship-based practice can complement each other.
- **But!** Organisations need to create safe and containing work environments for practitioners, to support them to form relationships with young people.
- Without this Contextual Safeguarding could facilitate unethical practice that undermines relationships of trust.



UNDERSTANDING PLACES AND PEERS

RBP with CS can help practitioners to better understand the places and peer relationships that are meaningful for young people.



TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS

Young people need to feel safe enough to share concerns about peers and places.



PROCESSES

Relationships were valued but overshadowed by an interest in processes.



ECOLOGICAL APPROACHES NEED INVESTMENT

If practitioners are expected to keep young people safe, without investment in ecological responses, they may feel individually responsible for issues that they can never address through relationships alone.

FINDINGS

-The concept of social defences against anxiety (Menzies Lyth, 1960) helped us to think about organisational processes not individual failings.

SOCIAL DEFENCES

- Organisational procedures (e.g. risk management processes) were used to defend practitioners against painful feelings when safeguarding young people experiencing EFH.
- This resulted in systems that prioritised professional mapping meetings rather than forming relationships with young people.
- Control and stability are prioritised over relationships with young people.
- This makes sense, because it is really painful if practitioners open themselves up to feeling emotionally connected to young people who are at risk of death.
- It is not surprising why systems might try to defend against this and instead prioritise activities such as 'mapping' that feel safer and more predictable.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

1 Question simplistic responses like mandating practitioners to engage in relationships. This could make matters worse.

2 Look at how/if how organisations have created defensive practices as a means of protection.

3 Ask if practitioners are supported with safe and containing supervisory and peer support spaces to engage with the emotional implications of working with EFH.

4 Elevate the value of youth work skills

5 More work should be done to understand the cultural change needed to embed Contextual Safeguarding. Without this we will see Contextual Safeguarding, rather than increasing relationships, used as a defence against relationships – i.e. through increasing surveillance or through some applications of peer mapping.

Find out more

For the full paper:

JLloyd, J., Hickie, K., Owens, R., & Peace, D. (2023). Relationship-based practice and contextual safeguarding: Approaches to working with young people experiencing extra-familial risk and harm. Children & Society, 00, 1–17.