

# Interactive case study activity: exploring the significance of extra-familial contexts

March 2025

The Contextual Safeguarding Network

# About the case study

This interactive case study activity will allow you and your colleagues to build a contextual account of an incident of extra-familial harm, and the contexts and young people associated to it. Building an understanding of extra-familial harm in this way will support you to think about young people's needs, risks and vulnerabilities in the various contexts that impact their lives, and will allow you to practice 'context weighting'. Context weighting is a practice of identifying the ways contexts influence each other, and young people, and considering which ones you therefore prioritise with your response.

This is a composite case study designed by the Contextual Safeguarding research programme for the purposes of training.

You will be presented with information about three young people, their individual characteristics, and information about their families, peer groups, schools and neighbourhoods. You will need to:

- download and print out the 'Context Assessment Strips'
- get a notepad and pen
- gather some colleagues
- hold 30 - 45 minutes to complete the activity

## Context Strips – download and print out (or make your own!)

HOME

PEER GROUP

SCHOOL

NEIGHBOURHOOD

CSC SYSTEM

## Completing the exercise: step by step

### Overview

This case study activity will talk you through an incident involving three young people, Luke, Dana and Marcus. You will be given information about Luke, Dana and Marcus and then asked to choose one young person to focus on.

You will be given information about their family, peer-group, school and neighbourhood contexts. Please read the information about each context in the order presented – and try not to jump ahead!

After you have read the information about each context you will be asked to reflect on a number of questions and to use the 'Context Strips' to put the contexts in order of where you think the young person is the safest and where you think they are most vulnerable.

### Reflective question

As you make your way through the contexts, reflect on how your assessment changes and discuss with your colleagues!

### Questions to consider

Choose one young person to focus on and at each step consider the following:

1. Where are they safest and where are they most vulnerable? (Use the Context Strips to do this.)
2. Who has the capacity to safeguard the young person or the various contexts?

## The incident

- Luke, Dana and Marcus are all friends from the Manor House area.
- They are in conflict with another group of young people in the local area.
- One day a fight takes place between the two groups and a young person is stabbed.
- The incident takes place outside a school at 4:30 pm.
- The school make a referral for Luke, Dana and Marcus to social care.
- It is not clear who stabbed the young person.
- The police are investigating all of the young people involved.
- A rumour circulates on social media that Marcus stabbed the young person.

## Reflective question

Have a short discussion about the incident - what are your initial reactions and thoughts? Jot them down.

## Individual context

| Luke   | Dana   | Marcus  |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 16 years old</li> <li>• Ethnicity Black British</li> <li>• Recorded as having learning needs</li> <li>• Living with biological family</li> <li>• Subject of previous referrals to social care</li> <li>• Frequently missing from home</li> <li>• Attends college</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 17 years old</li> <li>• White British</li> <li>• No recorded disability</li> <li>• In foster care</li> <li>• Child protection plan for physical abuse historically</li> <li>• Attends college</li> <li>• No missing reports</li> <li>• One arrest and caution for a theft previously</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 16 years old</li> <li>• Ethnicity 'other'</li> <li>• No recorded disability</li> <li>• Living with biological family</li> <li>• Increasing disengagement from school</li> <li>• No missing reports</li> <li>• No contact with criminal justice agencies</li> <li>• Previously heard at an exploitation panel and closed</li> </ul> |

## Reflective question

Chose a young person to focus on, then read the family context on the next page.

## Family context

| Luke   | Dana   | Marcus  |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Luke lives with his mum and three younger siblings.</li> <li>• Exposed to domestic abuse since infancy.</li> <li>• Subject to CSC referrals but little recent support.</li> <li>• Sometimes he is missing for up to two weeks and returns home with money.</li> <li>• Luke's mum has asked the local authority for <u>support</u> but CSC felt it 'didn't reach threshold'.</li> <li>• They live in a <u>two bedroom</u> flat and are on a waiting list for a larger property.</li> <li>• Spends most of his time 'sofa surfing' with friends.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dana has lived in a stable foster placements for over two years.</li> <li>• Dana is bereaved of her mother. The cause of death is <u>unknown</u> but her mother experienced significant mental health difficulties while alive.</li> <li>• Dana has a strained and inconsistent relationship with her father. Dana was taken into care following experiences of ongoing physical abuse and since this time she has had a stable relationship with him.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marcus lives with his mother, father and three younger siblings.</li> <li>• There are no child protection concerns raised about the family over Marcus.</li> <li>• Both of his parents are in full time employment and so Marcus has some caring responsibilities at home, helping with his younger siblings in the evening and walking with them to school in the morning.</li> <li>• Marcus' parents are not fluent in English.</li> </ul> |

## Reflective question

What are your initial reflections, thoughts and feelings about the incident, the young people and their safety and risk? Order the Context Strips - go back to the prompt questions; at this stage, where do you think they are the most and the least safe?

## Peer-group context

### Luke, Dana & Marcus

- Luke, Dana and Marcus are in the same group of friends – mainly young men and a small number of young women.
- This group is also part of a larger peer network who hang out together in the evenings and at weekends.
- Half of the peer group are not in full-time education.
- Some members of the group are known to children's social care because of concerns of exploitation.
- Luke, Dana and Marcus attend a local youth club where they enjoy making music videos.
- These videos are posted online and lots of young people know them from watching these.
- The group that they are in conflict with live locally and attend a different school.
- Dana is in a relationship with Marcus.
- Dana's social worker has tried to stop her spending time with Luke and Marcus.
- Luke and Marcus have known each other their whole lives. Their families know each other.

## Reflective question

Now that you have more information about Luke, Dana and Marcus's peer groups, has your assessment changed in anyway? Go back to the prompt questions, do you need to re-order your strips?

## Education context

### Luke, Dana & Marcus

- Luke, Dana and Marcus all attend the same college.
- Luke and Marcus don't enjoy going to college and find it hard to concentrate in class.
- Marcus' parents have asked for help but felt dismissed by the college.
- Dana joined the college in the last year and she has struggled to make friends.
- Some girls have accused her of 'bullying' them – bullying has not been routinely addressed within the college.
- Teachers have complained about Luke and Marcus and their behaviour.
- All three have received multiple sanctions for 'disruptive behaviour' including dress code infringements and lateness.
- The college received a bad inspection rating and were particularly scrutinised around attainment.
- As a result, Marcus and Luke are on reduced timetables and sometimes encouraged to go home. This is not formally recorded.
- One of Marcus' teachers wants to help and has raised issues to senior leadership but doesn't feel his concerns have been heard.

## Reflective question

How has the information about Luke, Dana and Marcus's education contexts changed your assessment of vulnerability, safety and risk? Return again to the prompt questions; has the order of your strips changed? Why?



## Neighbourhood context

### Neighbourhood

- Luke, Dana and Marcus come into contact with the other peer group on their way home from college.
- They also interact with them online.
- Dana was mugged by a young person while waiting at the bus stop by the college. She reported this to the police but nothing happened.
- Other students were there but no-one asked if she was ok.
- Some staff in the local authority are aware of young people experiencing sexual harassment from adults in the area.
- Residents have reported to the local authority that young people are a nuisance in the park.
- This was discussed at a community safety meeting. The police have agreed to park a tactical unit in the park with CCTV.
- Luke had mentioned to a youth worker that he didn't feel safe locally.
- Luke had been spending a lot of time in the youth club open access sessions but these were cut and funding is now used for targeted 'gangs' mentoring.
- Marcus has experienced being stopped and searched by the police.

## Reflective question

Now that you've learnt about Luke, Dana and Marcus' neighbourhood context, what are your thoughts about where they are most and least safe? Are there any disagreements between you and your colleagues? Why? In what ways do the previous incidents in the area impact your assessment? Return to the prompt questions; do you need to re-order your Context Strips?

If you have time, start to think about what a response could look like that focuses on these contexts, and not only on the individual young person? Who would need to be involved? How would you ensure the response was about building safety around young people in these contexts and not about dispersing them to other areas or criminalising them?

Reaching your conclusions, ask yourselves:

- What does each young person need?
- Which adults have the capacity to protect them in the contexts in which they spend their time? Does this need improving/building?
- What features of your priority context would you seek to target with a response?

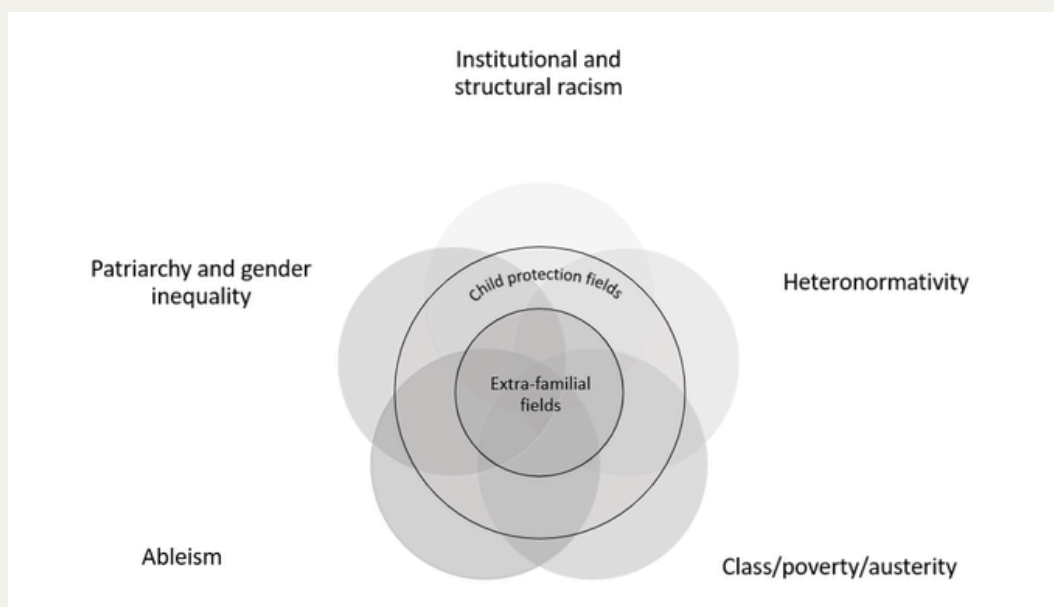
## Safeguarding system context

What about safeguarding systems and partners as a context? We have added this context to the case study because the piloting of Contextual Safeguarding in local authorities, schools and voluntary and community sector organisations has taught us that the safeguarding system and partnerships context can contribute both safety and harm to young people's lives.

How? Professionals, young people and families have told us that professional interventions do not always feel helpful and sometimes they are experienced as harmful. For example, curfews imposed on children who are looked after can result in increased police involvement in their lives heightening their chances of entering the criminal justice system. They have also told us that young people sometimes receive differing levels of care and protection depending on their age, gender, ethnicity, class, disabilities and immigration status. For example, Black can young people receive a slower protection response than their white peers.

The diagram below helps us to think about how socio-economic inequalities impact on young people's experiences of safety and harm in extra-familial contexts and also how they impact on how the safeguarding system and partnerships respond to young people.

Think about the young person you have been considering for this case study exercise. How might the CSC context contribute to their safety? How might it contribute to harm? How does this influence your assessment? What could be done to reduce harm contributed by the safeguarding system and its partners?



## What next?

Hopefully this case-study exercise has supported you and your colleagues to reflect on the significance of extra-familial contexts when assessing young people's safety and risks in their peer groups, schools and neighbourhoods. There is a wealth of resources to support you to take this work forward with the young people you work with, go to the 'extra-familial harm' section of the Contextual Safeguarding website to find out more about how we can understand, prevent and respond to extra-familial harm in adolescence.