

TOWARDS SAFETY:

Levers for safeguarding 'beyond referrals' in voluntary and community sector (VCS) youth organisations

BEYOND
REFERRALS

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BACKGROUND

When young people spend time in voluntary and community sector youth organisations (VCS) they do so voluntarily. These spaces offer young people opportunities to socialise with each other, and learn and develop, in local community settings.

Young people may also be exposed to a range of interpersonal harms within, and outside of, VCS settings. Some of these harms may occur within their family and home environments, or may take place in extra-familial contexts such as public places, schools, and VCS provisions themselves. When such harm occurs VCS organisations can play a role in safeguarding the welfare of those young people; and when such harm occurs in extra-familial contexts, this safeguarding role can extend beyond referring those young people into statutory agencies for support.

The Contextual Safeguarding programme has used research to support local authorities, schools, and VCS organisations to develop responses to contexts where extra-familial harm (EFH) has occurred. From 2017 – 2021 the Beyond Referrals project identified levers and barriers for creating safe school environments; initially in response to peer-to-peer sexual abuse and latterly to all forms of extra-familial harm. From 2021 onwards the project has focused on similar questions in VCS settings. This resource has been produced as a result of that work and is specifically intended to support youth-facing VCS organisations in building safety within and around their provisions, as a route to safeguarding young people from EFH.

It has been created from an exploratory study with three VCS organisations (one sports-facing, one generic open access youth club, and one faith-based youth provision) which explored how these organisations created safety, and responded to EFH, in and around their provision. Three sector-specific focus groups and a research advisory group helped sense-check the transferability of findings so that they could be converted into a self-assessment resource for the sector.



PURPOSE OF THE RESOURCE:

The *Beyond Referrals*, Towards Safety resource should be used by VCS organisations to support you to identify any levers you have for creating safe contexts for young people, as well as any barriers that you may need to address. The harms young people may face outside their homes are constantly evolving, and no organisation will get everything right all the time.

The resource is designed to be used to support 'contextual safety', that is, safety in your VCS context. According to the Contextual Safeguarding framework, upon which this resource is built, contextual safety is best achieved when: interventions target the social conditions of harm; they prioritise child welfare as opposed to sanctions and policing; creative partnerships are established; and changes in contexts are measured as outcomes, not just changes in the behaviour of individual young people.

VCS youth organisations can use this resource as part of your safeguarding practices, to assess the extent to which you are maximising levers for creating safe contexts (and thus mitigating the risks of extra-familial harm). There are four interlocking categories of self-assessment featured in the resource:



CULTURAL CONTEXT



SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES

Each category represents a 'lever' for creating safety in VCS youth organisations. Each lever has various components against which you can assess, and develop a plan of action as a result. Taken together, the four thematic areas also support VCS organisations to act preventively and provide young people with a safe space/s to spend their time.

We recognise that VCS organisations may work in various locations and spaces, so when we are talking about 'organisation' or 'space' throughout this resource, this is with an understanding that organisations don't necessarily function as a standalone setting. Rather, their work forms part of wider community responses and networks, and this might look different for different youth provisions.



IDENTIFICATION



RESPONSE AND INTERVENTION

HOW TO USE THE RESOURCE:

This is a strengths-based resource – it focuses on stating what your organisation does, rather than what you do not do.

To help determine how your organisation meets each component, you can use a range of methods. This might include:

- Speaking with young people who attend your organisation. This could be done through; a survey, to gain insight into young people's thoughts and provide an opportunity for young people to give anonymous feedback to your organisation; or an engagement session, where young people are provided with a safe space to freely discuss their thoughts about EFH and the current response from the VCS organisation.
- Speaking with young people who have engaged with the service and have now left, to hear their reflections.
- Staff engagement sessions to provide an opportunity for staff (including volunteers and young leaders) across a range of roles to discuss their thoughts on the VCS organisation's response to EFH, and to highlight good practice and raise any concerns.
- Review of safeguarding logs to understand how incidents of EFH are being recorded by staff.
- Interview with the Designated Safeguarding Lead(s) or team to discuss internal EFH referrals within the VCS organisation, referral processes to the multi-agency safeguarding partnership, and the VCS organisation's relationship with the wider safeguarding and child protection processes.
- Parent survey to gain an insight into parents/carers' thoughts about EFH and your organisation's response.



TOWARDS SAFETY WHEEL

The 'Towards Safety Wheel' is a resource to support VCS organisations to consider how they are creating safety for young people in their area and responding to extra-familial harm. The resource is divided into four thematic areas: Cultural Context, Structures and Systems, Identification, and Response and Intervention. Under each area are key factors that support contextual safety. Taken together, the four thematic areas also support VCS organisations to act preventively and provide young people with a safe space/s to spend their time.

It is a strengths-based tool that aims to identify what VCS organisations do, rather than what they do not do.

When using this wheel, start in the middle and work your way around the circles, moving up the layers, following the arrows.

When following this wheel, consider using the supporting document that provides further guidance on how to assess contextual safety in your organisation.

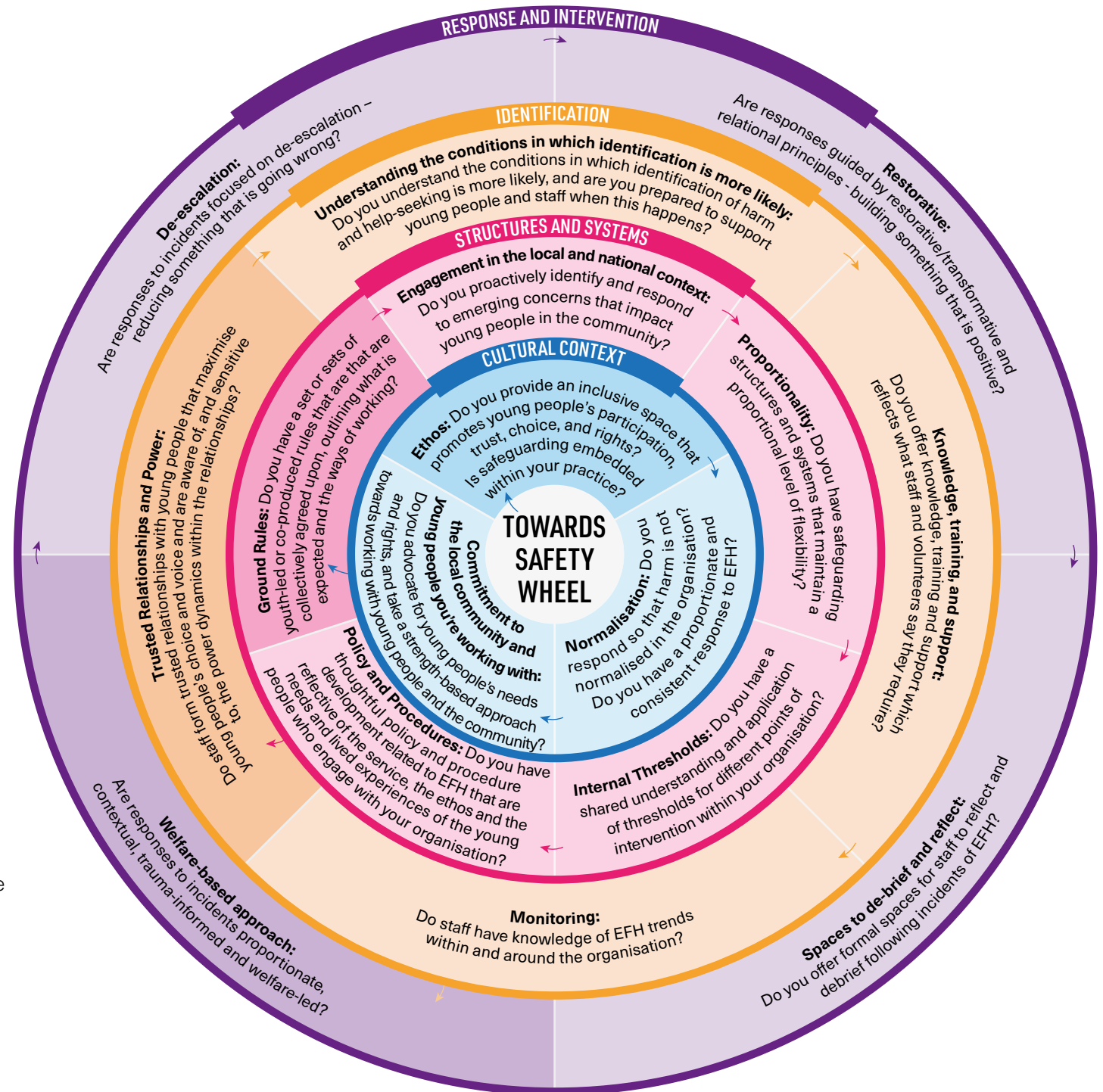
KEY

Extra-familial harm (EFH)

Extra-familial harm refers to a broad category of harm types, including peer-on-peer harm, sexual and criminal exploitation and bullying. Often, these different harm types share overlapping drivers, methods, and consequences for young people.

Staff

Staff refers to paid employees, but also volunteers and young leaders.





Cultural Context

This section refers to the social norms within your organisation amongst staff and young people that work to promote safety, as well as those that are harmful and act to undermine safety (this might include racist, sexist, ableist or homophobic attitudes and actions amongst staff, young people, parents/carers or the wider community).

DESCRIPTION	ENABLER	BARRIER
Ethos	<p>Do you provide an inclusive space that promotes young people's participation, trust, choice, and rights? Is safeguarding embedded within your practice?</p> <p>Your organisation has a strong commitment to safeguarding processes and young people's safety.</p> <p>Your organisation provides an open space for young people to engage in critical reflection/discussion about issues that might impact their safety, and their experience of the setting. There is an openness to discuss issues such as anti-racism, inequalities, politics, human rights, etc. Staff have the skills, knowledge, and confidence to understand, challenge and respond to the ways in which inequalities shape young people's experiences, including their experiences of harm and safety.</p> <p>Your culture is open and approachable so that young people feel able to raise any issues that might require a response. One example might be making the space more LGBTQ+ inclusive and representative. In doing so, youth workers collaborate with young people to identify how best to create and sustain that culture.</p> <p>Your organisation works to maximise young people's participation. For example, the space is designed for young people and guided by young people's views. Moreover, the development of policy and procedures that govern the space are led by young people in your organisation.</p>	<p>The ethos of your organisation might undermine young people's participation, trust, choice, and rights. For example, in a sports organisation where the purpose is competition and individualism, this may promote harmful masculinity, resulting in some young people feeling excluded.</p> <p>Young people's participation is minimal and opportunities for young people to make choices are not promoted.</p> <p>Not all staff members are committed to young people's safety and rights.</p>

DESCRIPTION	ENABLER	BARRIER
<p>Normalisation</p>	<p>Do you respond so that harm is not normalised in your organisation?</p> <p>Staff feel empowered and motivated to identify and intervene to prevent or respond to instances of EFH.</p> <p>You provide space for staff to discuss and recognise where they may be becoming desensitised to particular behaviours or incidents that might be indicators of EFH. To support this, staff rely on local knowledge, but also national evidence and frameworks in relation to extra-familial risk so that they are able to situate what they are seeing locally into the national picture.</p> <p>The social norms within and around your organisation that are harmful are recognised and proactive steps are taken to change them. This might include violent, abusive, racist, sexist, ableist or homophobic attitudes amongst staff, volunteers, young people, parents/carers or the wider community.</p> <p>Do you have a proportionate and consistent response to EFH?</p> <p>Responses recognise the spectrum of harms that can be classified as extra-familial abuse, the impact of this harm, and the context in which the harm occurred (i.e., responses do not victim blame and recognise the influence of power, trauma and structural factors such as gender, race, poverty and disability). For example, in your organisation's safeguarding policy, you state that staff should not allow sexist or discriminatory language to go unchallenged.</p>	<p>Some or all staff and young people feel that some forms of EFH are an inevitable aspect of young people's lives. Or staff have become desensitised to some forms of EFH. For example, bullying or harmful sexual behaviour might be seen as 'banter' rather than as harm.</p> <p>Responses are not always proportionate or consistent. For example, some staff might not respond to victim-blaming language or harmful attitudes related to sexuality.</p> <p>Staff are not encouraged or supported to take action to prevent or to intervene in some instances of EFH that are seen as 'banter' or 'inevitable'.</p>
<p>Commitment to the local community and young people you're working with</p>	<p>Do you advocate for young people's needs and rights, and take a strengths-based approach towards working with young people and the community?</p> <p>Staff have a good knowledge of the local area and community dynamics. Incident management may draw on the wider community and partners available in the area.</p> <p>Your organisation advocates for young people's needs and rights. Staff are hopeful, like young people, and take a strengths-based approach to young people and the community. Opportunities to empower young people and the community are sought. For example, your organisation works to build young people up to become leaders in the community.</p>	<p>There is uncertainty about how to respond to harm that young people experience outside of your organisation, in the wider community.</p> <p>Your organisation has a deficit approach to young people or the community.</p> <p>Staff hold negative views/attitudes towards young people.</p>



Structures and Systems

This section relates to the processes and mechanisms in place to support safety for all young people.

DESCRIPTION	ENABLER	BARRIER
<p>Ground Rules</p>	<p>Do you have a set, or sets of, youth-led or co-produced rules that are collectively agreed upon, outlining what is expected and the ways of working?</p> <p>These rules align with the ethos described in the cultural context section.</p> <p>For example, a youth club or a fixed faith organisation may have a set of rules displayed on their walls that apply to everyone participating in that organisation. Or a sports club that is doing different sports sessions in varying locations with young people may have a set of ground rules specific to that session or activity.</p>	<p>Your organisation does not have clear, collaboratively agreed upon ground rules and young people and staff are unsure what is expected of them and what to expect from others in the space.</p> <p>Or,</p> <p>Young people are not given an opportunity to contribute to the ground rules.</p> <p>Or,</p> <p>Ground rules are not in line with the ethos described in the cultural context section.</p>
<p>Engagement in local and national context</p>	<p>Do you proactively identify and respond to emerging concerns that impact young people in the community?</p> <p>You may be aware of the local context due to being embedded within the community and having good relationships with local people; or you may take active steps to hear from local young people and community members about sources of safety and harm for young people.</p> <p>Your organisation identifies and responds to national concerns and trends that may impact on your organisation or young people in the area. For example, sessions may focus on social movements such as Black Lives Matter; or in relation to national policy changes such as legislation related to conversion therapy and the impact of this. Similarly, policies and procedures may be amended in light of national developments.</p> <p><i>Organisations with a fixed/temporary space:</i></p> <p>If you are an organisation that is in a fixed space (i.e., a youth club), you may take measures to integrate into the local context and understand how this context impacts young people who use your organisation. This knowledge informs the work that is carried out with young people, for example creating space to talk about issues or informing session development.</p> <p>If you are an organisation that runs sessions in temporary/non-permanent spaces in the community (i.e., a field/patch of grass), your response may involve assessing the space to try to understand the safety and risk factors, and to mitigate harm and promote safety for the session to take place. Or your response may take the form of youth outreach or engagement work in spaces identified to be of concern and where young people are spending their time.</p>	<p>Your organisation is not aware of concerns related to EFH in the local context.</p> <p>Or,</p> <p>Your organisation is not aware of national concerns or trends that may impact young people in the area.</p> <p>Or,</p> <p>Your organisation does not seek to understand or mitigate harm in the environment they are providing for young people, resulting in young people feeling intimidated or unsafe during sessions.</p>

DESCRIPTION	ENABLER	BARRIER
<p>Proportionality</p>	<p>Do you have safeguarding structures and systems that maintain a proportional level of flexibility?</p> <p>Safeguarding structures and systems reflect your organisation’s requirements and enable a flexible environment for young people to access.</p> <p>Flexibility will be dependent on staff confidence and knowledge, the needs of young people who engage with your organisation, and how they use the space.</p> <p>For example, safeguarding structures and systems may need to be designed and utilised differently depending on whether an organisation holds sessions in different environments, or if different young people are using the service at different times. When thinking about engagement in the local context for instance, if your organisation is embedded within the community, engagement in the local context may be more flexible and occur through day-to-day conversations and activities. In this instance, the need for formal structures and systems for community engagement may be reduced. Whereas, for an organisation that is new to the area or one that does not have local connections, there may be a requirement for more formal structures such as establishing communication pathways with the community members, the local authority, and schools in the area.</p>	<p>Your organisation has rigid safeguarding structures and systems that are based on generic templates and/or reflect the need of your organisation, but not the needs of young people accessing the services.</p> <p>Conversely, a service that is too flexible without staff expertise and confidence may result in staff being unsupported and unprepared, and young people failing to be protected.</p> <p>For example, this may occur where your organisation does not have established pathways and processes in relation to the identification of, and responses to, harm and risk; and where staff lack confidence and knowledge in these areas.</p> <p>Or, your organisation has flexible structures and systems due to experienced staff and low staff turnover, but in the event of staff changeover these processes would be lost because they would be held by those particular individuals.</p>
<p>Internal Thresholds</p>	<p>Do you have a shared understanding and application of thresholds for different points of intervention within the service?</p> <p>Thresholds are proportionate and consistent. This means that staff have a shared understanding of what response would be required for different incidents of EFH and have a shared understanding of how these decisions are made. For example, when hearing sexist language within a session, all staff would respond to and challenge this language in the same way.</p>	<p>There is varied understanding and application of thresholds within your organisation.</p> <p>For example, when hearing sexist language within a session, some staff would respond and challenge this behaviour, whereas other staff members would ignore this and fail to challenge the language.</p>
<p>Policy and Procedures</p>	<p>Do you have thoughtful policy and procedure development related to EFH that are reflective of the service, the ethos and the needs and lived experiences of the young people who engage with your organisation?</p> <p>For example, following the identification of knife carrying as a concern for young people in the community, you develop a policy outlining the service’s response should a young person bring a knife into your organisation or session. This policy would reflect the needs and welfare of the young person carrying a weapon and those who might be impacted by this.</p>	<p>Your organisation has externally enforced policies that don’t reflect the service requirements or the needs and lived experiences of young people who engage with your organisation. For example, externally enforced zero-tolerance policies and procedures are used, which do not account for the needs and welfare of young people involved.</p>



Identification

This section relates to the ability of staff (including volunteers and young leaders) to identify EFH and the conditions that enable harm to occur.

DESCRIPTION	ENABLER	BARRIER
<p>Trusted Relationships and Power</p>	<p>Do staff form trusted relationships with young people that maximise young people’s choice and voice; and are aware of, and sensitive to, the power dynamics within the relationships?</p> <p>Processes are aimed at levelling power within staff-young people’s relationships, and creating relatability is promoted.</p> <p>Your organisation is sensitive to, and aware of, how power manifests in young people-staff relationships. In organisations that have a more formal hierarchy, staff power is acknowledged and barriers to forming relationships are recognised and addressed, ensuring that processes are put in place to promote young people’s choice and voice. Similarly, in organisations that strive for shared power between staff and young people, the power held by staff is acknowledged - for example, as gatekeepers for the organisation and through their safeguarding duties.</p> <p>Transparency forms a key element of trusted relationships where young people are regularly informed about the limits of confidentiality and staff safeguarding duties so that they can make fully informed decisions about sharing information and disclosures.</p>	<p>Staff-young people hierarchies act as a barrier to relationship building and result in young people feeling unheard and unable to seek support or help from staff. These barriers are not acknowledged and go unaddressed.</p> <p>Strong trusted relationships are formed between young people and staff, however a lack of transparency undermines trusted relationships where young people are not regularly informed about the limits of confidentiality and safeguarding duties. Young people are therefore not able to make fully informed decisions about sharing information and disclosures.</p>
<p>Understanding the conditions in which identification is more likely</p>	<p>Do you understand the conditions in which identification of harm and help-seeking is more likely, and are you prepared to support young people and staff when this happens?</p> <p>Your organisation takes steps to understand the conditions where identification of harm is more likely. For example, before a period of sustained contact with young people, such as a residential trip or pilgrimage, there may be a need for additional training or a refresh so that staff are better prepared to manage potential identification of harm/disclosures.</p> <p>Your organisation thinks about the conditions they create for young people so that help-seeking and identification is more likely. This will involve being sensitive to young people’s different requirements for sharing, which may be based on their circumstances and relationships with staff/others. Young people may need different options (formal and/or informal) for sharing.</p>	<p>Your organisation doesn’t consider the conditions that maximise young people’s help-seeking and the identification of harm, and are therefore unable to plan service provision in light of this. For example, staff hadn’t received training on disclosure management when going on a residential trip and therefore don’t feel confident or equipped to deal with young people’s help-seeking.</p>

DESCRIPTION	ENABLER	BARRIER
<p>Knowledge, training, and support</p>	<p>Do you offer knowledge, training and support which reflects what staff and volunteers say they require?</p> <p>Your organisation recognises that staff and volunteers may need differing levels of support and training on identifying EFH. This may be dependent on staff experience and confidence. For example, if a youth worker has a relationship with lots of young people in the area and is aware of peer group dynamics, they may feel more confident and able to identify peer group conflict within a session, and therefore may need less training around this area.</p>	<p>Your organisation does not offer any knowledge, training or support around EFH.</p> <p>Or, training and support are generic and do not reflect what staff and volunteers say they require. For example, in the event that there are changes in funding that require your organisation to engage for the first time with young people who are experiencing criminal exploitation; and staff have not had, or have not been offered, knowledge or training in this area, staff may feel unable to identify concerns or talk to young people about this.</p> <p>Or conversely, staff are trained to identify and discuss narrowly defined safeguarding issues – such as ‘criminal exploitation’ or ‘knife crime’ – but staff do not understand the underlying dynamics of these issues and how these forms of harm intersect with other issues impacting young people. For example, staff’s narrow understanding of ‘knife crime’ results in a response to a young person carrying a knife that is solely punitive and exclusionary, and fails to understand that the young person may be carrying the knife for their own protection. Therefore, this response would fail to safeguard that young person or make their situation safer.</p>
<p>Monitoring</p>	<p>Do staff have knowledge of EFH trends within and around your organisation?</p> <p>This is acquired through formal and informal structures. Formal structures, such as secure recording systems can mitigate against the loss of informal knowledge due to, for example, staff turnover or absence.</p> <p>For example, a small staff team with low turnover is aware of EFH trends in your organisation through experiences of identifying and responding to incidents over time. These informal structures are supported by weekly staff meetings where recent EFH trends are discussed and recorded.</p>	<p>Systems are not in place to monitor EFH trends within your organisation. Staff do not feel confident in identifying EFH in your organisation.</p>



Response and Intervention

This section relates to the availability, use and effectiveness of responses and interventions following incidents of EFH.

DESCRIPTION	ENABLER	BARRIER
<p>Welfare-based approach</p>	<p>Are responses to incidents proportionate, contextual, trauma-informed, and welfare-led?</p> <p>Responses to young people recognise young people's needs and rights and respond proportionally. Your organisation recognises young people's rights to engage in a safe place and have a sense of belonging, and work to provide that.</p> <p>Responses to EFH incidents consider and take steps to safeguard all young people who were involved, both those who harmed and those who were harmed, as well as witnesses and other young people affected.</p>	<p>Your organisation fails to respond and support all young people involved in an incident.</p> <p>Or, your organisation only provides welfare-led approaches to young people who were harmed, providing solely punitive and exclusionary responses to young people who harmed.</p>
<p>De-escalation</p>	<p>Are responses to incidents focused on de-escalation – reducing something that is going wrong?</p> <p>De-escalation approaches include conflict resolution and risk-holding.</p> <p>Your organisation recognises the importance of responding to incidents in a way that doesn't create more harm and violence. This includes recognising that historically safeguarding involvement and responses are often met differently according to young people's identities, backgrounds and lived experiences – i.e., gender, race, sexuality. Responses consider the young person or young people's needs and wishes, for example their prior experiences with agencies, and what safety means to them. Responses are built on this.</p> <p>For example, if a young person tells a youth worker that they are going to carry a knife for their protection, the youth workers provide a space for the young person to discuss what reasons they feel they need to carry a knife, and what steps can be taken to make their situation safer.</p> <p>Your organisation has clear processes or guidance in place that outlines at what point the incident is significant enough to warrant a referral to Children's Social Care, and at what point risk holding needs to be passed on.</p>	<p>There is no clear guidance on how best to de-escalate situations of EFH, and this is based on individual youth worker skill and experience.</p> <p>There is no clear process or guidance in place that outlines at what point the incident is significant enough to warrant a referral to Children's Social Care, and at what point risk holding needs to be passed on.</p>

DESCRIPTION	ENABLER	BARRIER
<p>Restorative</p>	<p>Are responses guided by restorative/transformational and relational principles - building something that is positive?</p> <p>Responses taken by your organisation are restorative, with time being taken to speak with young people about what has happened, what process the young person who has been harmed would like to happen (i.e., who to involve), and steps your organisation will take to build safety/healing and prevent future harm from occurring.</p> <p>Your organisation engages young people who harm others or who behave inappropriately.</p> <p>Your organisation provides responses that acknowledge and seek to understand the root cause of behaviour, and not just respond to presenting behaviours.</p> <p>Responses are tailored to young people's intersecting experiences of SEN, (dis)ability, gender, sexuality, religion, age, class and socio-economic factors and how these might influence their experiences of extra-familial risk. For example, a young person's communication needs might be considered alongside their experiences of bullying; or, a young person's socioeconomic status is considered alongside their experiences of exploitation.</p> <p>Your organisation is motivated to build space for young people as a collective to support each other.</p>	<p>Responses to young people who harm others or behave inappropriately are exclusionary and focus on removing the young person from your organisation.</p> <p>Responses do not recognise or locate the wider social conditions that can lead to, or increase harm, and responsibility young people/parents.</p>
<p>Spaces to de-brief and reflect as staff and volunteers</p>	<p>Do you offer formal spaces for staff to reflect and debrief following incidents of EFH?</p> <p>Staff are invited (where appropriate) to reflect on young people's experiences of harm, the response, and ideas for future prevention in team meetings/spaces. Staff feel supported following incidents of EFH.</p>	<p>Your organisation has informal processes to de-brief about incidents, i.e., youth workers know about young people's experiences of harm, and discuss ad-hoc/as and when they have time.</p> <p>Individual staff members are left to manage and hold risk without feeling properly or appropriately supported by your organisation.</p>

WITH THANKS TO:



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APPENDIX – DEFINITIONS OF EXTRA-FAMILIAL HARM

Extra-familial harm means harm that happens to young people beyond/ outside their family(s)/family home.

In statutory guidance, extra-familial harm, or harm that young people encounter in contexts outside of their homes, is defined as follows:

As well as threats to the welfare of children from within their families, children may be vulnerable to abuse or exploitation from outside their families. These extra-familial threats might arise at school and other educational establishments, from within peer groups, or more widely from within the wider community and/ or online. These threats can take a variety of different forms and children can be vulnerable to multiple threats, including: exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups such as county lines; trafficking; online abuse; teenage relationship abuse; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation. Working Together 2018 (s.40, page 25)

Risk of harm to young people outside the family home, includes (but is not limited to):

- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)
- Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB)
- Peer on peer abuse
- Criminal Exploitation (CE) including 'County Lines'1
- Violence between young people (also sometimes known as 'serious youth violence')
- Online abuse (e.g. cyber bullying, peer grooming)
- Relationship abuse/ intimate partner violence
- Radicalisation
- Bullying and social isolation

Please refer to your local child protection procedures for definitions and further information about these forms of abuse.

FIGURE 1: FORMS OF 'EXTRA-FAMILIAL HARM'

