

Setting The Tone In Risk Outside The Home (ROTH) Child Protection Pathways: a resource for chairs

Introduction

ROTH Pathways are most effective when underpinned by a foundation of care. You can demonstrate this foundation by the tone you set, and maintain, when chairing ROTH meetings.

A foundation of care involves:

- Centring relationships that matter to young people
- Humanising all those involved in the process
- Recognising the contexts where young people are seeking safety

You can set a tone for this in the language you use, the ideas you put forward, the way you approach others participating the pathway, and by the challenge you offer if needed.

This resource

In this resource we offer a composite case of a young person (built from three young people whose ROTH meetings we have observed and/ or plans we have reviewed). After summarising the situation this young person faced, we give you three scenarios where we have observed how the chair plays a key role in setting a caring and welfare-focused tone in ROTH meetings.

You can use this resource to:

- Consider each scenario and think about how you might respond to them
- Practise responding in these scenarios with members of your team
- Identify similar scenarios and use supervision or team meetings to reflect upon the steps you took to reset the tone of a meeting

If comfortable, do share your examples with us – we'd love to create a bank of these for chairs. You can send any anonymised examples to roth.gccs@durham.ac.uk.

The situation being addressed

Jack is 15 years old. He has a close group of friends who he has grown up with and who he plays sports with. Like him, several of Jack's friends are not currently in full-time education, and so when they aren't in school they are on the basketball court. Jack has been waiting for an assessment for suspected ADHD for some time and, until a plan is in place to support this, his school say they can't support his attendance at school for more than 90 minutes a day.

Jack and his friends recently witnessed a stabbing on a basketball court involving their friends. They use cannabis together and, since the stabbing, have also started to use ketamine.

They got the ketamine from older people who have started to approach Jack and his friends in the community during the afternoons when they are not in school.

Jack recently overdosed on ketamine and was seriously ill in hospital. He told a hospital-based youth worker about his afternoons on the basketball court and this has led to a referral to children's social care. Following an initial strategy discussion and associated enquires, Jack has been referred to the ROTH child protection pathway.

The ROTH meeting

You are chairing the initial meeting to discuss Jack's assessment and agree a plan. Below are a number of scenarios where you, as a chair, need to manage or set the tone of the meeting to maintain a foundation of care and to hold Jack's welfare as paramount.

Meeting scenario one

Jack isn't at the meeting but his mum, Lorna, and dad, Mark, are present. At the outset of the meeting, you invite Lorna and Mark to share their views on what's been happening with Jack. They start by talking about how Jack doesn't listen to them anymore, is only interested in being out of the house, and thinks everyone is overreacting about the drugs he is using.





Your challenge

How might you respond to his parents in a way that acknowledges their concerns and demonstrates care, while also prompting a wider discussion about who Jack is? In the meeting, attendees need to ask what Jack likes, or dislikes, what is going well for him (or had been) or what they think he needs from the people gathered in the meeting.

Potential responses

1. "That sounds really difficult and upsetting for you both. Have things always been like this – or can you remember a time when Jack had other interests or things that made him happy?"
2. "It sounds like you are really concerned about Jack and that things haven't always been like this. What do you think is important to Jack? Do you know what he needs most right now?"
3. "We all share your concerns and are committed to finding a way through this. Before we get the views of others in the room, can I also ask you to give us a bigger picture into your child, Jack – who is he, what matters to him, what makes him happy?"

Reflection: how might you set a tone that shows you care about the young person who is the focus of the plan?

Meeting scenario two

Later in the meeting the police officer in attendance says he has intelligence to share that the parents in the room cannot hear. Once the parents step out, the police officer states, "Jack hasn't made it onto our nominal cohort sheet at present, but some of his associates have."



Your challenge



The police officer is using language that is not aligned to a caring tone or a welfare-based approach, but is common in policing. You need to ensure that the wider meeting doesn't begin to adopt this tone or view Jack and his friends through a policing lens. How can you bring Jack's humanity, and that of his friends (who are also young people), back into the meeting?

Potential responses

1. "I understand that the terms 'nominal' and 'associates' are common in policing, but as this is a child-welfare meeting it would be helpful if we could all stick to calling Jack by his name and referring to his peers as Jack's friends, unless we believe these people are not his friends (and we currently do not have evidence of this)."
2. "Can I ask, when you say 'associates' do you mean Jack's friends or do you mean the adults who pose a potential risk of harm to Jack and his friends by providing them with drugs? If we are talking about Jack's friends, it is best that we refer to them as his friends, as these are also children and young people."
3. "With the exception of the two adults who have approached Jack and his friends, everyone else is a child, so for the purposes of this meeting it is most helpful to refrain from calling them associates. Particularly as we are not here to discuss details about Jack's friends."



Reflection: how might you set a tone that centres young people's humanity and values the relationships that matter to them?

Meeting scenario three

You complete a context-weighting exercise with the meeting attendants, and everyone agrees that the basketball court is currently the context where Jack and his friends are most likely to experience harm – both in terms of ongoing violence between young people and their exposure to drugs. The school and its inaccessibility, are second.

There is broad agreement that Jack's friends are largely protective and that as a group they are actually loyal and supportive of each other (this is a majority view rather than a unanimous point of view). There is also a consensus that the contexts in which they are either spending their time, or unable to access, contribute to the risks the group face.

Meeting attendees begin by discussing potential responses to the context weighting. Some, including a police officer, school representative, a housing representative and one of the youth workers present, recommend banning the group from the basketball court, given the concerns.



Your challenge

Jack and his friends have said the basketball court is an important place for them. It is also somewhere they should be safe. You know that banning them from the court will a) leave them with an unmet need and b) potentially trigger distrust towards professionals, as the details Jack has provided are now informing a plan to take away something that matters to him. You agree the group is unsafe on the court but need to come up with an alternative that maintains relationships of trust and ensures Jack's needs are not undermined in a bid to keep him safe.



Potential responses

1. “Do we have an alternative court that the boys can and will want to go to and feel safe? We know the basketball court is an important place for them and we need to be careful that any response we make isn’t one that leaves them with an unmet need. Are there ways we can make the court safer – and respond to that context?”
2. “We all agree the court is the context in need of a response – but if we ban the boys from the court we are responding to them, whereas the court remains the same (and is potentially a space that is unsafe for other young people). Do we know if there is sufficient community guardianship around the court? Is this something with could explore with the boys?”
3. “The boys have trusted us with information about the court. Perhaps we should go back to them and say part of what we discussed was the need for them to be safer when they are at the court – especially until we can get them back into school for longer. Being at a basketball court is actually a positive behaviour so shall we ask them what they think might make the court a safer place for them to be?”

Reflection: how might you set a tone that foregrounds contexts?

