

CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING SUMMER WEBINAR SERIES

ASSESSING PEER RELATIONSHIPS

15 JUNE 2020

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Q. Regarding transparency and consent, would you share peer assessments with families and at which point would you try to gain consent?

A.

Transparency, wherever possible, is key with peer assessment as it would be with any other kind of assessment. During tests we have seen practitioners seek parental consent for a peer assessment at the start of the process – and for the most part this has been granted – and then engaged the young people directly in the assessment process. Furthermore, engaging young people in conversation about peer relationships as part of the assessment process is the ideal, so that they participate in, and inform, the discussion. The peer assessment framework shared during the webinar is used to collate thematic ideas around the peer relationships in question rather than personal information about any individual in the peer group. As this should directly inform plans and the focus of interventions, and shouldn't contain personal information, sharing them with families help to ensure everyone understand which interventions were being used and why.

Q. How easy is it to stay focused on the health requirements and not get drawn by partners into criminal intelligence gathering?

A.

It is something that local areas have to continue to keep at the forefront of their minds during a peer assessment process. When peers assessments are conducted in a social care settings this is a process of pooling information – not 'intelligence' – to build a safeguarding plan for, and ideally with, young people. It is critical that this remains the objective throughout and that the lines between police investigation and welfare planning don't become blurred to the point that the objective of the process is undermined. Once again keeping an assessment thematic and focused on building safety, rather than individualised should assist with this.

Q. What was/is the outcome of the peer assessment case study?

A.

As a result of the peer assessment case study that was shared in the webinar, two young people were placed in to a placement together. The assessment recognised the value and protection in their relationships and the risks existing particularly in the environments they were spending their time in and the lack of agreement amongst the adults and professionals in their lives. A joint placement aided agreement and therefore strengthened guardianship and protected the relational safety these young people experienced when together. Organising the information available against the peer assessment themes helped to identify and articulate the needs and areas of strength, and focused the plan in this direction. The intervention is ongoing.

Q. How do you assess peer-groups that are quite fluid? An assessment could quickly become out of date as young people come and go.

A.

We have been working with the providers of case management systems to work out ways to connect, and disconnect, individual young people's record (via their practitioner) to a peer assessment. When that peer assessment becomes outdated or is no longer relevant to an individual young person the hope is that they can be detached from it. Once again, but keeping assessments thematic rather than individualised, it should be possible to retain a level of core information that is relevant and adjust that as the situation changes. Finally, if the relationships are fluid and changing you would note that in the assessment in relation to the group dynamic – a finding that may prompt you to focus on the environmental factors associated to these relationships or the guardianship capacity around them as route to creating safety

Q. I work in a school, would a peer assessment be something we should complete to add to a referral to children's social care or would it be something that the social worker would complete?

A.

It is still early days with much of this so we can't fully answer this question. However for now I would suggest that maybe thinking along the three lines of the peer assessment triangle and organise information around those headings when making a referral may help – so there are concerns with the group functioning at the moment, or safety in the group is compromised the environments they spend their time in etc. may help you identify why you are concerned, and where opportunities might exist – as well as align it to frameworks an LA may be using

Q. Do you have any advice on undertaking peer assessments when looking at gang contexts which can contain a hierarchical structure? The roles young people can take within a group can vary massively depending on age and perceived status

A.

The side of the triangle focused on group functioning would help with this – particularly group dynamic. There you can describe if there is a range of influence, strong/weak relationships, positive/concerning connections etc. and consider whether or not these might be a focus of intervention – or whether it is the environmental factors or guardianship capacity that require more attention. Having young people's views on these dynamics would be extremely helpful.

Q. Also have you had issues in your test boroughs where parents have not wanted their children included in peer assessments/ mapping?

A.

This isn't something that has come up as of yet – and for the most part parents appear to welcome consideration of their children's peers as part of an assessment of their needs. Engaging young people and parents in the process of peer assessment should also assist with this. That's not to say that issues won't arise – it just hasn't been a dominant theme as of yet.