



# Contextual safeguarding: children at risk of extra familial harm

## 1. Context

As children move from childhood into adolescence they spend increasing amounts of time socialising independently of their families. During this time the nature of young people's relationships that they form in these settings, inform the extent to which they encounter protection or abuse.

## 2. Peer Relationships

Peer relationships are increasingly influential during adolescence, setting social norms which inform young people's experiences, behaviours and choices and determine peer status. So if young people socialise in safe and protective settings they will be supported to form safe and protective peer relationships. However, if they form friendships in contexts characterised by violence and/or harmful attitudes these relationships too may be anti-social, unsafe or promote problematic social norms as a means of navigating, or surviving in, those spaces.

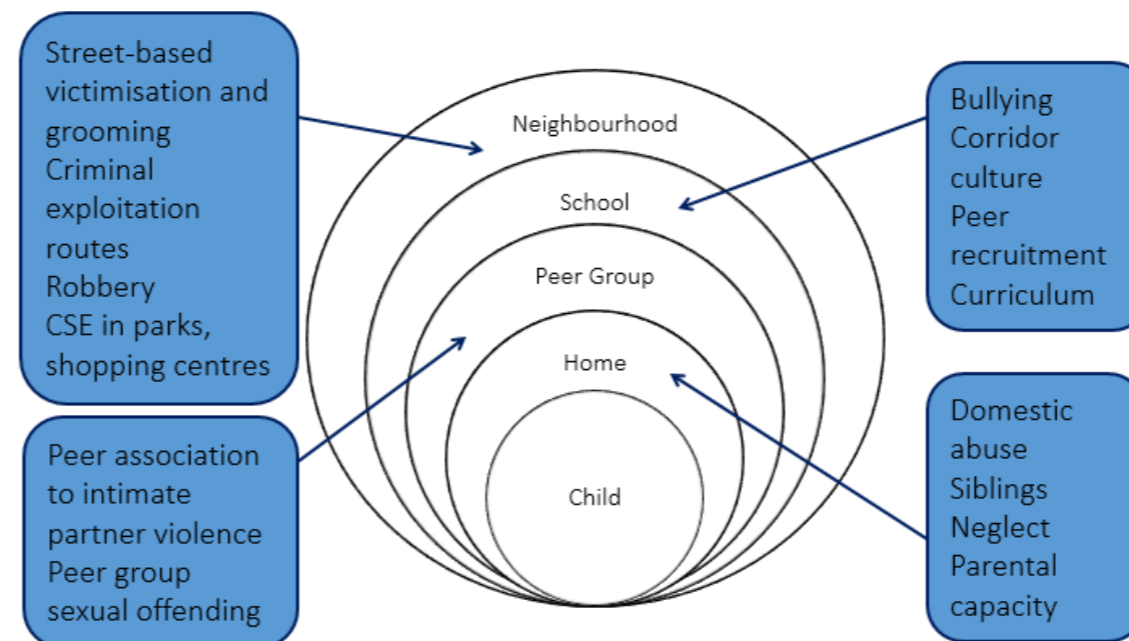
## 7. Role of multi-agency practitioners

Children's multi-agency practitioners need to engage with individuals and sectors who do have influence over/within extra-familial contexts, and recognise that assessment of, and intervention with, these spaces are a critical part of safeguarding practices.

Contextual Safeguarding, therefore, expands the objectives of child protection systems in recognition that young people are vulnerable to abuse in a range of social contexts.

## The people and places who matter

(Barter, 2009; Firmin, 2017; Firmin, Wroe and Lloyd, 2019; Hudeck, 2018)



## 3. Areas of Risk

Contextual Safeguarding is applicable to a wide range of risks which can potentially cause significant harm to children and young people outside of the family. This can include:

- peer on peer and relationship abuse
- criminal/ sexual exploitation/ online abuse
- missing episodes
- risks associated with gangs
- risks associated with radicalisation
- safeguarding risks in public spaces
- trafficking and modern slavery

**Contextual Safeguarding** is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. Contextual safeguarding recognises the impact of the public/social context on young people's lives, and consequently their safety. Contextual safeguarding seeks to identify and respond to harm and abuse posed to young people outside their home, either from adults or other young people. It's an approach that looks at how interventions can change the processes and environments, to make them safer for all young people, as opposed to focussing on an individual. Research undertaken in London illustrates that young people's experience is not only influenced by their family, but also by their peer network, wider community and society in general.

## 6. Changing the social conditions of environments

Contextual approach seeks to identify the ways in which professionals, adults and young people can change the social conditions of environments in which abuse has occurred and then hold them responsible for making these changes.

## 5. Families become critical partners in the safeguarding agenda

A Contextual Safeguarding system supports the development of approaches which disrupt/change harmful extra-familial contexts rather than move families/young people away from them. While parents/carers are not in a position to change the nature of extra-familial contexts those who manage or deliver services in these spaces are; and they therefore become critical partners in the safeguarding agenda.

## 4. The child protection system, and the legislative and policy framework

This was designed to protect children and young people from risks posed by their families and/or situations where families had reduced capacity to safeguard those in their care. Extra-familial risks can reduce/undermine the capacity of families/carers to safeguard young people.



# Contextual safeguarding: resources and further reading

The Children's Commissioner has completed research with a group of young people about when, where and why children feel unsafe:

- Serious violence and knife crime
- Social media and news exacerbate children's fears of serious violence
- Harassment
- Anti-social behaviour and public disorder
- Fear caused by their environment

What could be done to address these fears?

- Better relationships between children and the police
- Other adults helping children feel safe
- Better design of public spaces

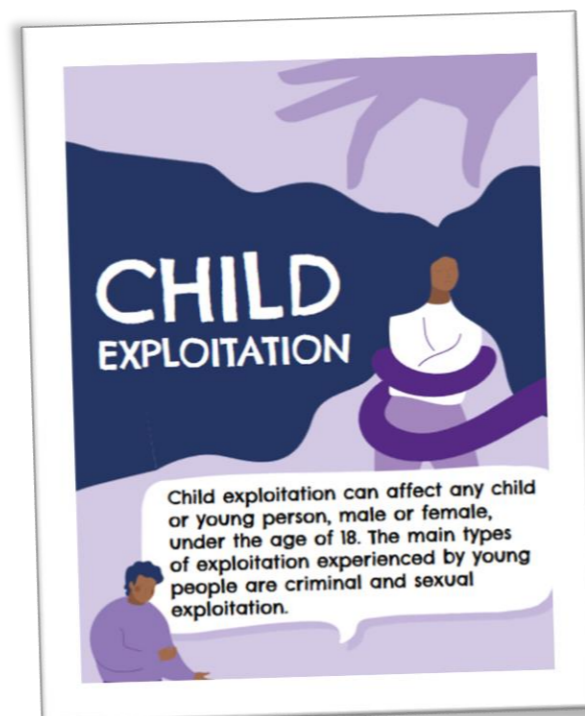
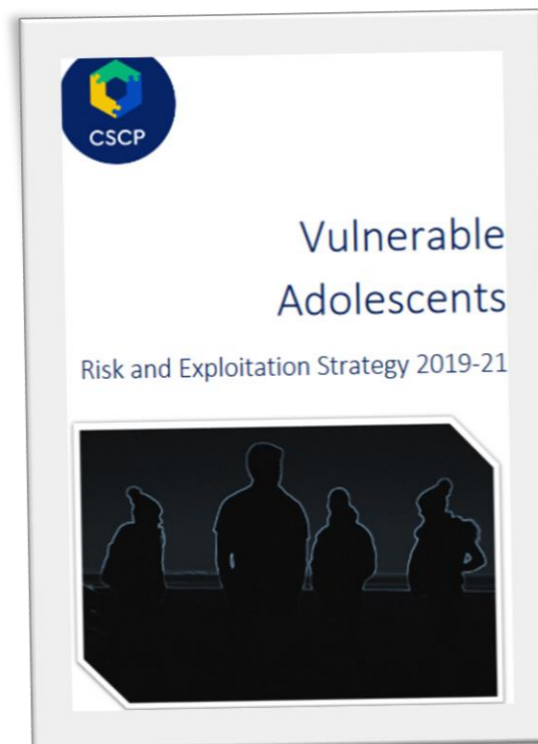


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## Mean streets

When, where and why children feel unsafe, and what can be done to address these fears

The CSCP has developed a multi-agency vulnerable adolescents strategy based on the 5 pillar approach; prevent, identify, support, disrupt and prosecute. You can read the strategy by clicking the image below. Camden has also designed a child exploitation leaflet, also available below:



## WHAT IS CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING

Watch the above video developed by the Contextual Safeguarding Network. It provides an overview of contextual safeguarding and what it means in practice for different social contexts. Other useful videos include:

[The Principles of contextual safeguarding](#)

[Safeguarding teenagers from sexual exploitation and violence outside of the home](#)

Other useful resources include:

- ❖ [It was hard to escape](#) – The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel *Safeguarding children at risk from criminal exploitation*
- ❖ [Child exploitation – safeguarding during the pandemic](#)
- ❖ Useful documents relating to child exploitation can be found on the CSCP website  
<https://cscp.org.uk/resources/child-sexual-exploitation-resources/>
- ❖ Useful documents relating to child trafficking and modern slavery can be found on the CSCP website:  
<https://cscp.org.uk/resources/child-trafficking-and-modern-slavery/>
- ❖ [County lines information for parents leaflet](#)
- ❖ [Contextual Safeguarding Network](#)
- ❖ [London Safeguarding Adolescents Steering Group](#)