



Durham
University

Global Centre for
Contextual Safeguarding

Prioritising Protection and Foregrounding Care: The Road to Contextual Safeguarding responses to harm beyond families

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What we'll be looking at

- Contextual Safeguarding – a brief history
 - From criminal justice to welfare
 - From risk to care
- The implications for children's rights and their lives

Contextual Safeguarding A Brief History

Children and families were telling us context matters

'if you're rude to them then they'll beat you up and I've seen how they beat up people, how everyone's scared of them....I said no for something very little I've been beaten up and bottled and I realised if I did say no what would happen...I was pressurised and scared, I knew deep down I didn't want it cos I was still young but I didn't have a choice.' (Sara's (age 13) Witness Testimony)

'There are things going on in Sara's world that I do not have access to...she is being controlled by others more powerful than me' (Sara's mother)

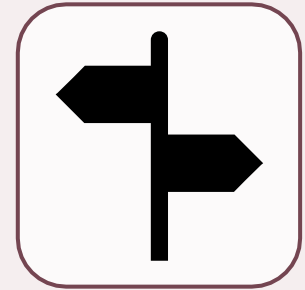
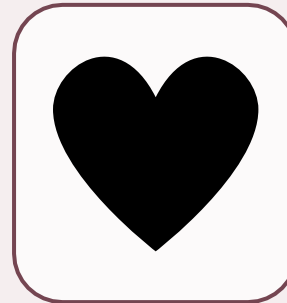
Our system couldn't accommodate it

'Sara is 'difficult to engage with', 'anti-police' someone who 'places her friends and gang associates as a higher importance than her family'

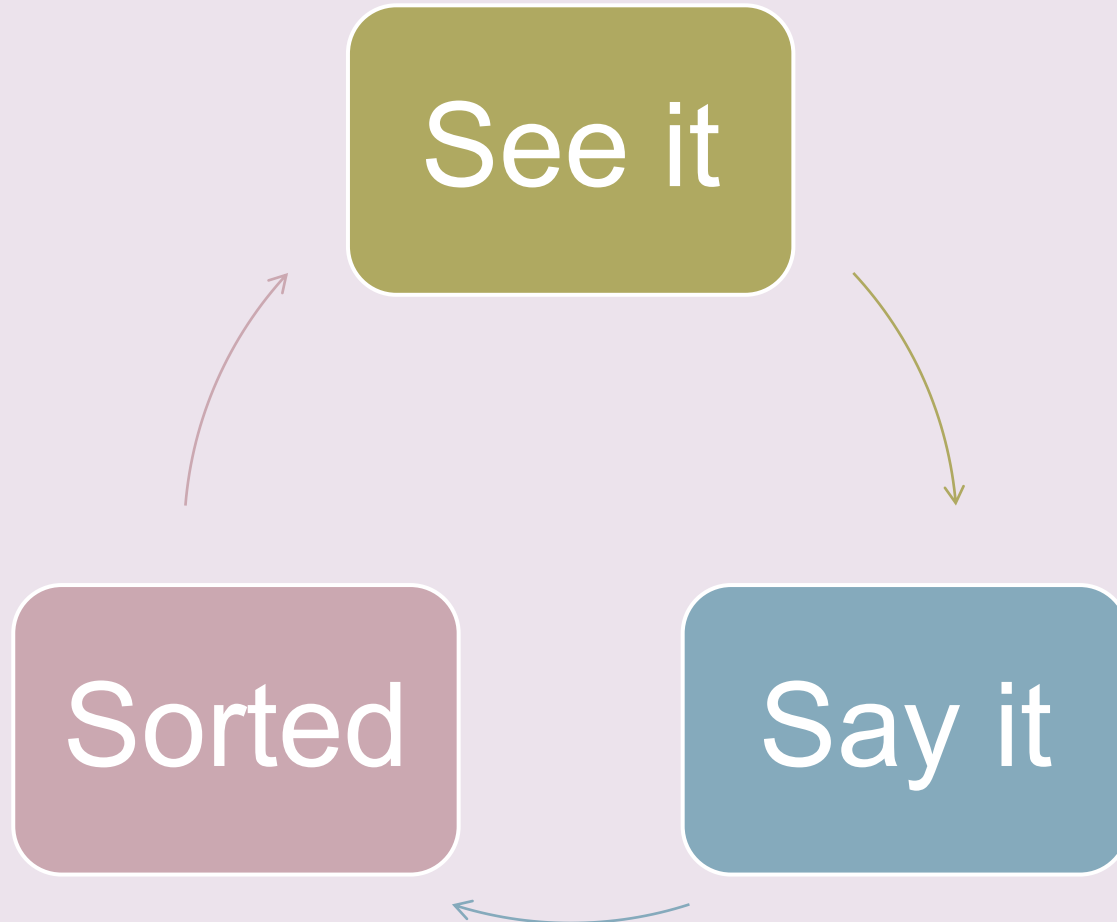
(Professional notes, Case File 4, Review 2011-204)

Our system saw adolescence as the target for intervention

(Blakemore, 2011; Hanson and Holmes, 2014)



Our leaders couldn't see this



‘It hasn’t reached a threshold’

Referral after Tom was arrested in Brighton for possession with intent to supply of class A drugs (large quantity of heroin and crack cocaine)[. . .] Tom’s involvement with supply of illicit substances is currently considered to be the result of poor decision making, with no information to suggest he is currently affiliated to gangs. Whilst it is considered to have a huge implication for him given the risk of him being provided with a custodial sentence, such implications are not considered to present any safeguarding risks for Tom. (Case closure, 15, male)

The Contextual Safeguarding Framework



Domain one: Target

Seeks to prevent, identify, assess and intervene with the social conditions of abuse



Domain two: Legislative framework

Incorporates extra-familial contexts into child protection frameworks



Domain three: Partnerships

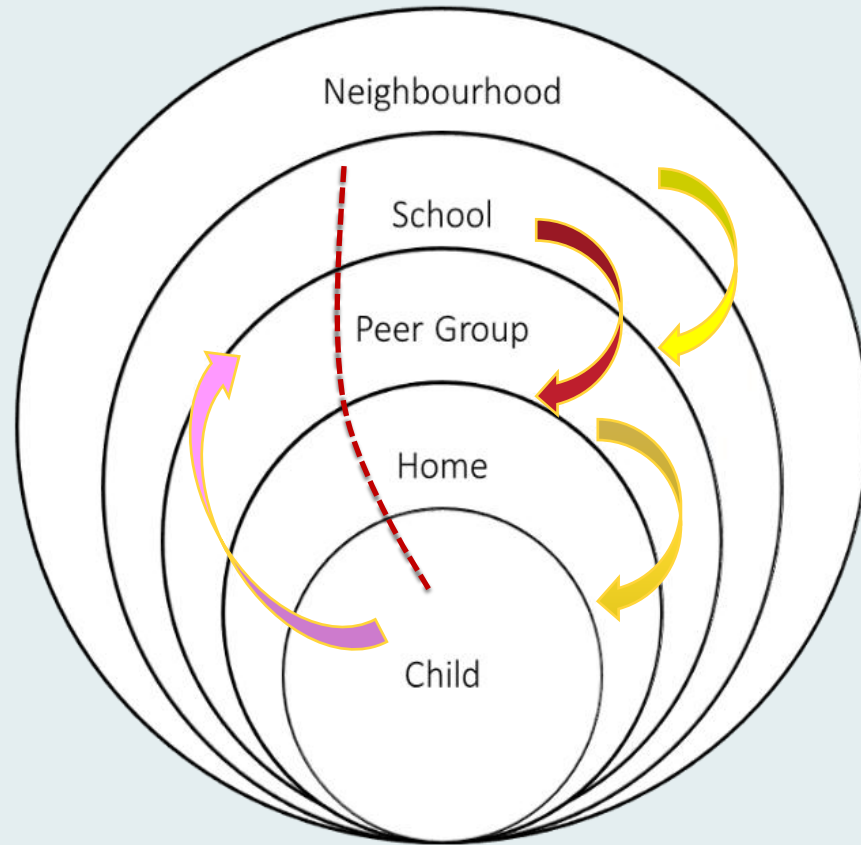
Develops partnerships with individuals/agencies responsible for extra-familial contexts



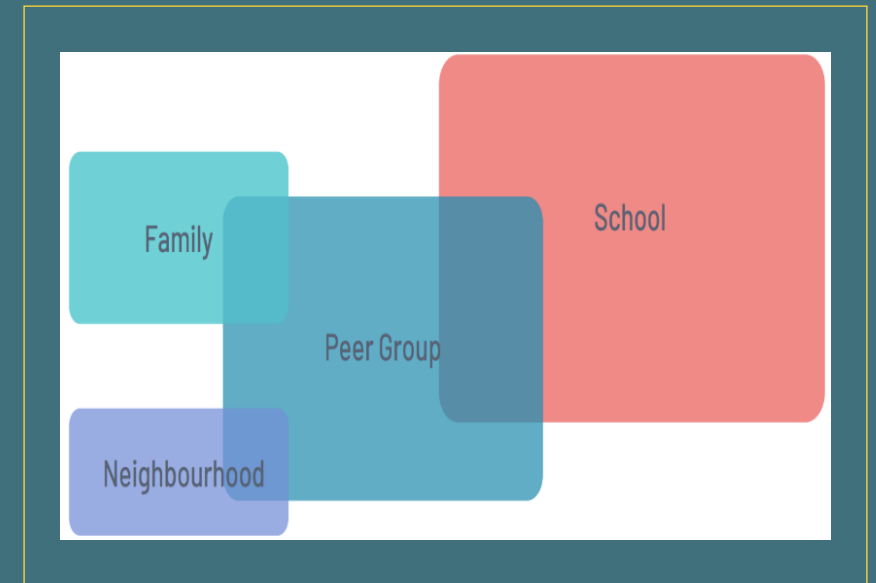
Domain four: Outcomes

Monitors outcomes of success in relation to contextual, as well as individual, success

Key Practice Feature: Context Weighting



where is this young person
safest, and where are they
least safe?



Key Practice Feature: Community Guardianship

Towards building a 'collective capacity' to safeguard

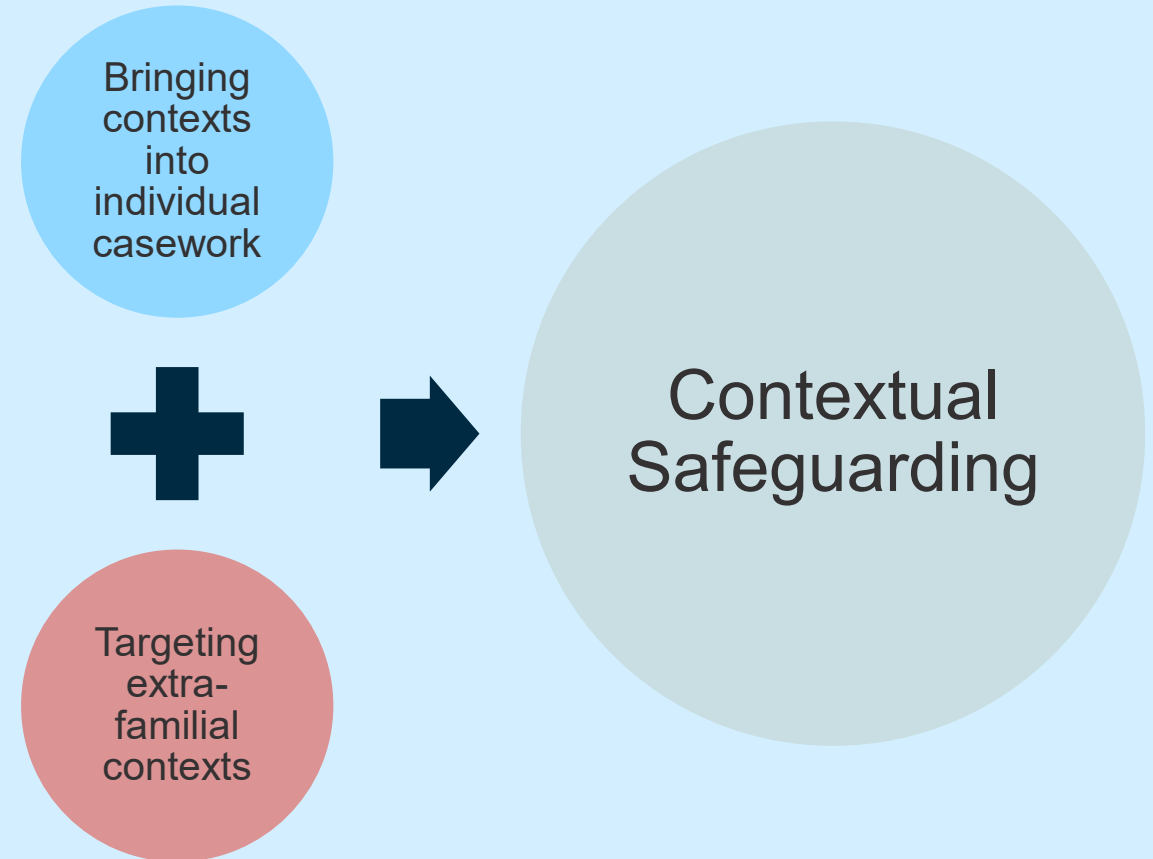
- Trusting relationships
- Welfare-led and restorative
- Understand their role in promoting safety
- Committed to anti-racism and anti-discrimination and aware of their own biases

During an assessment of a city centre, practitioners identified that young people who were being sexually exploited did not trust the police when they were unsafe. Local business owners and sex workers were all concerned about these young people. The police offered their horses as a source of equine therapy for the young people, and in the process began to build relationships of repair and trust. Ultimately a code word was agreed that they could use with the police when unsafe.

Embedded at two levels

Context weighting and collective capacity to safeguard are considered for:

- Individual young people
- Targets where young people are unsafe



Level 1: Risk Outside of the Home Child Protection Pathway

A Risk-Outside-of-the-Home (ROTH) pathway provides a structure through which social workers can organise a child protection response/support plan when a young person is:

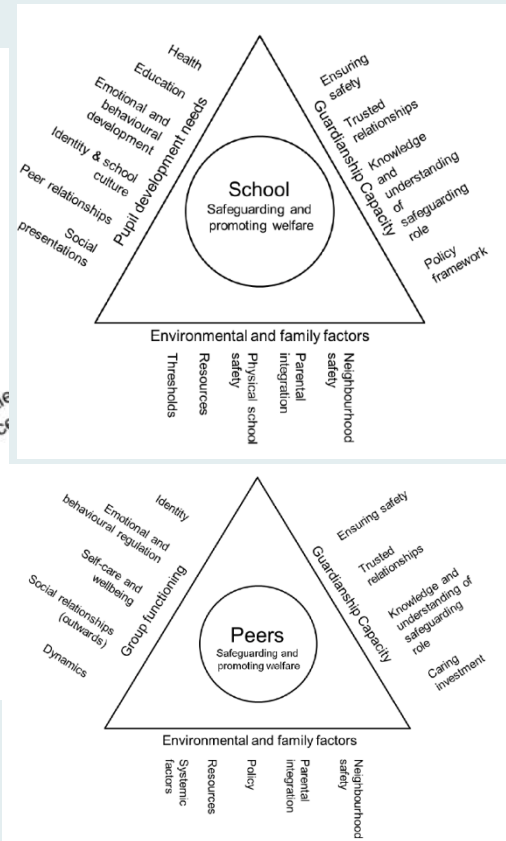
at risk of significant harm

AND

that harm is principally extra-familial

... I was really worried, I thought oh no, like we've got a social worker, that's what I'm... you know, this is not what I wanted; what have I done wrong? ... but then as I was introduced to all of this, it sort of came to my attention that actually people really trust me as a parent and they're just looking at what's going on for my boys outside and how they can help (Parent)

Level 2: Context assessments and plans



And the assessment helped us understand what that friendship group meant to each other. They all have shared lived experiences ...These are friends. These are people who see each other as family. Their core need is to be loved, to be needed, to be wanted, to belong (...) Peer mapping before that had been very much, let's share intelligence. And this was all about risk. But we started changing the conversation to what strength does this group bring to young people? (Social worker)

From Crime to Welfare

*YP1 has been stop checked with YP2. YP1 does not talk about his peers/associates. YP1 has links to YP4, as they were arrested for Burglary offence together. YP1 is also linked to YP8 and they are close friends at present. [...]
Professionals have not been able to engage with YP6 and YP3 and their peers and associates.
(Peer assessment 1)*

They are all talented with many positive core values and a capacity for kindness and, to use one of their favourite words, love. It is my opinion that they all have the potential for successful life outcomes if they can receive and make use of the best possible support. (Peer assessment 2)

Articulating this shift

Crime	Welfare
Offending – what is the risk this child will commit an offence?	Need – what does this child need from us to feel safe?
System knowledge – this child is known to services, and our systems tell us this is happening	Relational knowledge – this child is known by this professional and they have told us what is happening
Risk aversion – we ask whether this proposal is in our organisations best interest	Best Interest – we ask whether our proposal is in this child’s best interest

“But actually they're all our children that you are targeting, following and disrupting that you make up your crime statistics with because you're not prepared to go after the big (fish)my kids are just little fish that are easy to arrest and get the charge and will inundate youth justice and say ‘well why you're not adhering to your conditions’....well because actually I'm being exploited and I can't.” (Social worker)

From Risk to Care

Articulating this shift

Humility – recognising things have gone wrong and you might not have all the answers

Heartfelt – coming from a place of concern and care

Humanising – seeing a whole child, recognising their life beyond risk and harm and committing to meeting need

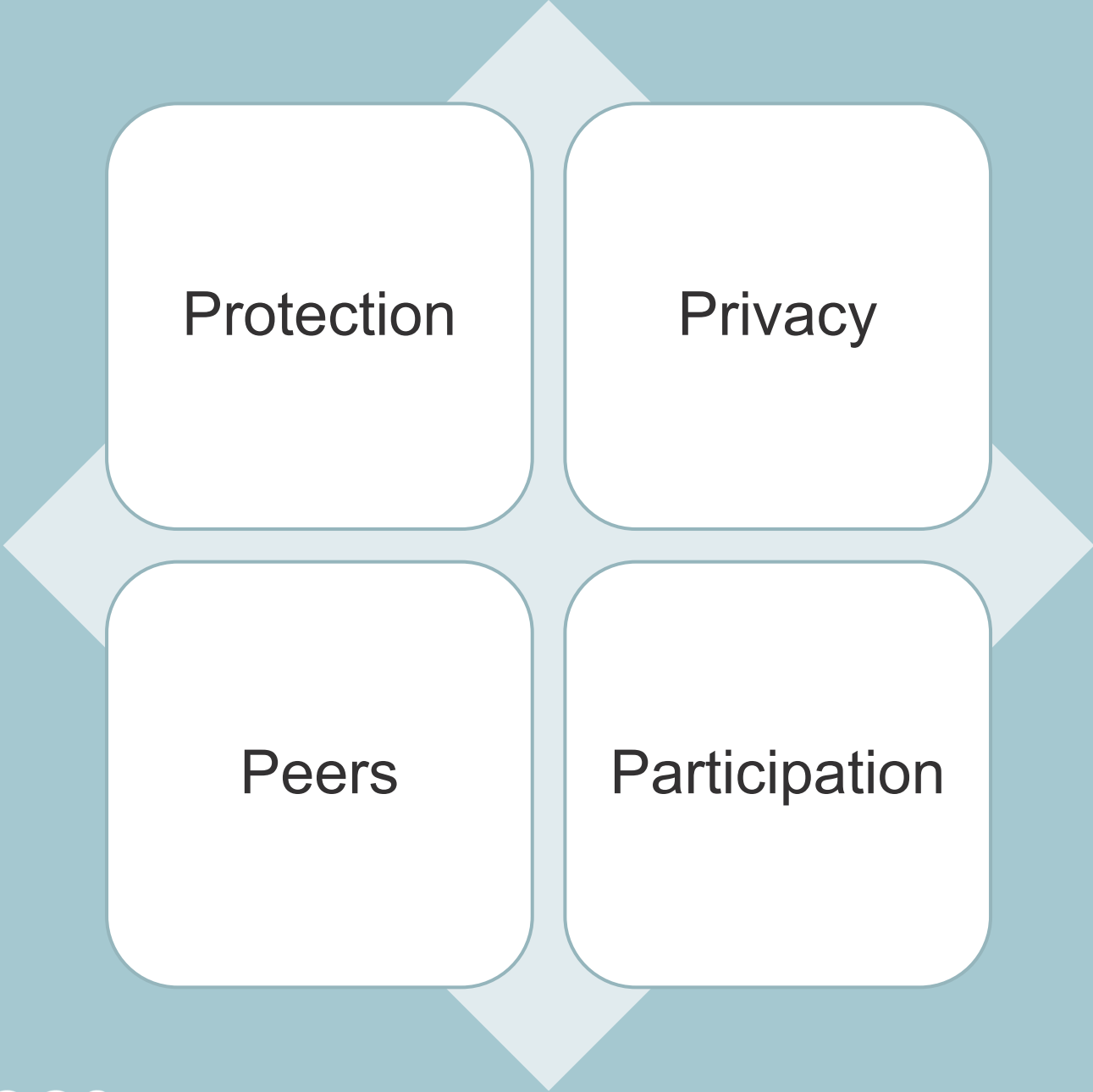
They were saying] We want to make this work so you can have the best life. We're not here to take you away... not ... telling us how stupid she is or what horrible mistakes she's making. And it's all her fault, and she should know better. We haven't had any of that this time. It's been very understanding, very calm. (Parent)

Articulating this shift

Risk	Care
Certainty – we score, we share what is known, we gather what we don't	Humble – we have made mistakes, we might not know
Distant – we are monitor young people, we manage their risk	Heartfelt – care about and like young people, we nurture them
Dehumanising – we denote labels, scores and markers to coordinate our response	Humanising – we talk about who this child is and who they want to be to coordinate our response

Sammy, you have witnessed a significant assault on your best friend, whereby he was stabbed last year. There's been ongoing concerns for your safety since this time both in school and outside of school in the community. It is clear that everybody around you is finding it increasingly difficult to keep you safe from the risk of serious youth violence...You were really open with me about how this is impacted on your mental health and how you were struggling to remain on track and not retaliate (Social work assessment)

The implications for children's rights and lives



Protection

Privacy

Peers

Participation

We have two main things to work on still - finding more ways to offer 'Laura' and her friends, fun, exciting opportunities to spend time together so they feel less need to go missing and getting the necessary school support in place so that Laura can feel safe and comfortable to be in school every day. (Excerpt from ROTH Social Work Assessment)

This means sometimes pushing against...

Dispersal orders

Increased
surveillance

Mapping peer
groups

Design changes
to disrupt young
people

Extensive
information
sharing without
knowledge

These are not examples of
Contextual Safeguarding



Trying to create a contexts that are inclusive of
young people and hostile to abuse

Trying to avoid contexts that are hostile to young
people and conducive with abuse



Questions to consider

Does your response to violence and exploitation lead with crime or welfare?

Are your systems designed with 'adolescence' in mind?

Can professionals identify and respond to contexts where harm occurs in ways that protects rather than disrupts young people?



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