Risk, Rights, Resilience & Relationships: redesigning our approach to safeguarding adolescents

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Every Lead Member Matters!

Though (appropriately) far from practice, even the most strategically oriented political leader exercises considerable influence on safeguarding practice.

They do so by:

- setting the tone of the system overall

- setting the standards for practice

- setting an example to colleagues and partners.

› Relationship with officers - High support, high challenge, high expectations

› Credibility and humility

It's about relationships

> *To develop normally, a child* requires progressively more complex joint activity with one or more adults who have an irrational emotional relationship with the child.*
>
> *Somebody's got to be crazy about the kid. That's number one.*
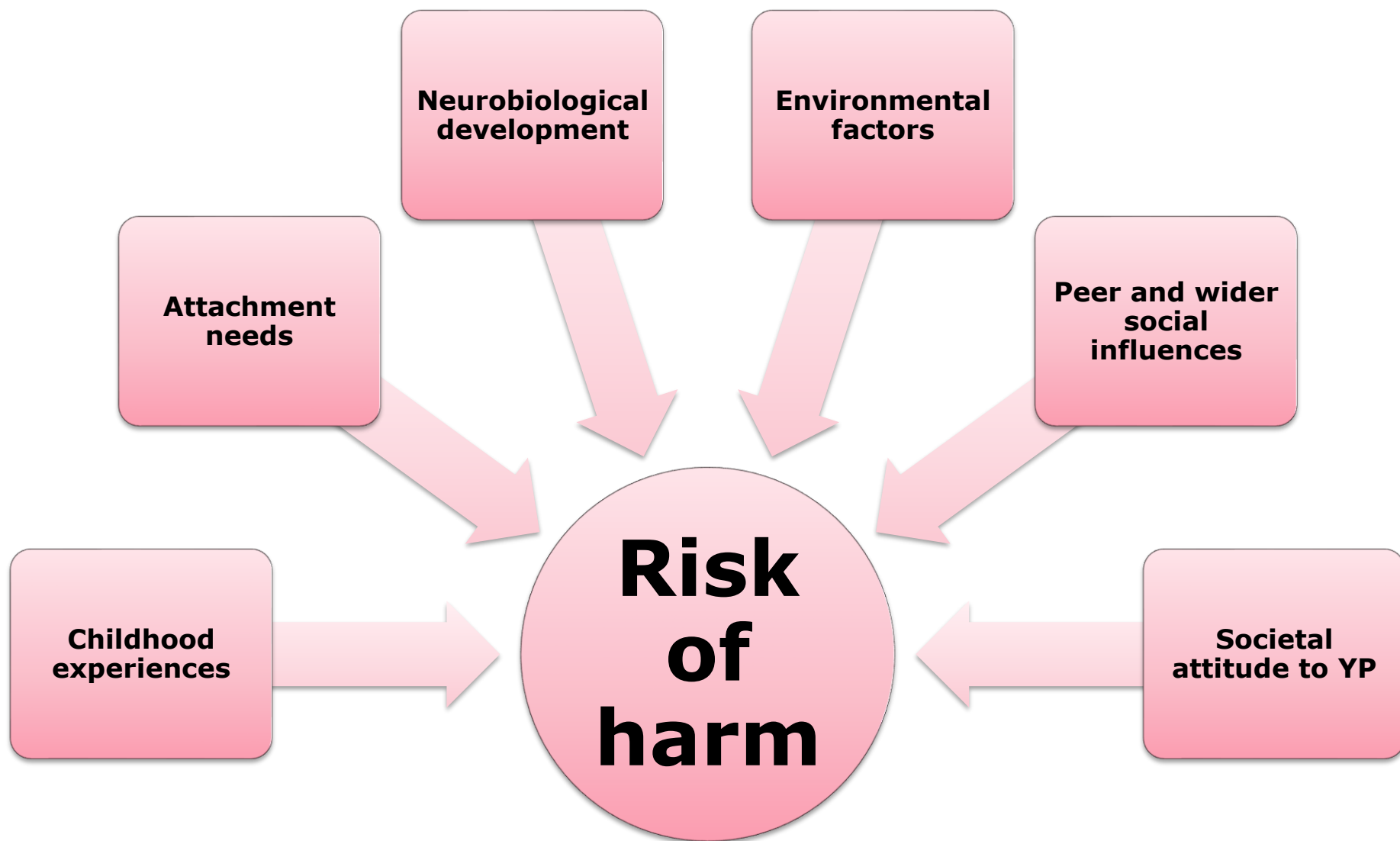>
> *First, last, and always.*

*person!

(Bronfenbrenner, 1971)

› Adolescent agency in relation to risks makes adolescents 'imperfect victims' and makes addressing those risks (and their impact) a complex business. (Rees and Stein, 1999)

› working within a child protection system that is designed primarily to meet the needs of younger children maltreated within the family (Bilston, 2006)

› *Local political leaders are key – they need to understand the complexity*

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Risk – it's not neat

- Neurobiological development
- Environmental factors
- Attachment needs
- Peer and wider social influences
- Childhood experiences
- **Risk of harm**
- Societal attitude to YP

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Inconveniently, evidence evolves...

› CSE risk assessment toolkits & checklists - few of the 'indicators' are based on robust evidence, often used inconsistently, may be too general, or can create blindspots, and can undermine professional judgment (Brown 2016, 2017)

› Good RSE is vital. However there are ethical issues of using some 'educational' resources - they are largely untested, may be traumatising, may focus on the 'choices' and behaviours of children, however well-intentioned, can in advertently fuel a culture of victim blaming (Eaton & Homes, 2017)

› Sometimes, the evidence was always there... but perceptions change: eg algorithms!

› ***How can lead members ensure they understand the evidence?***

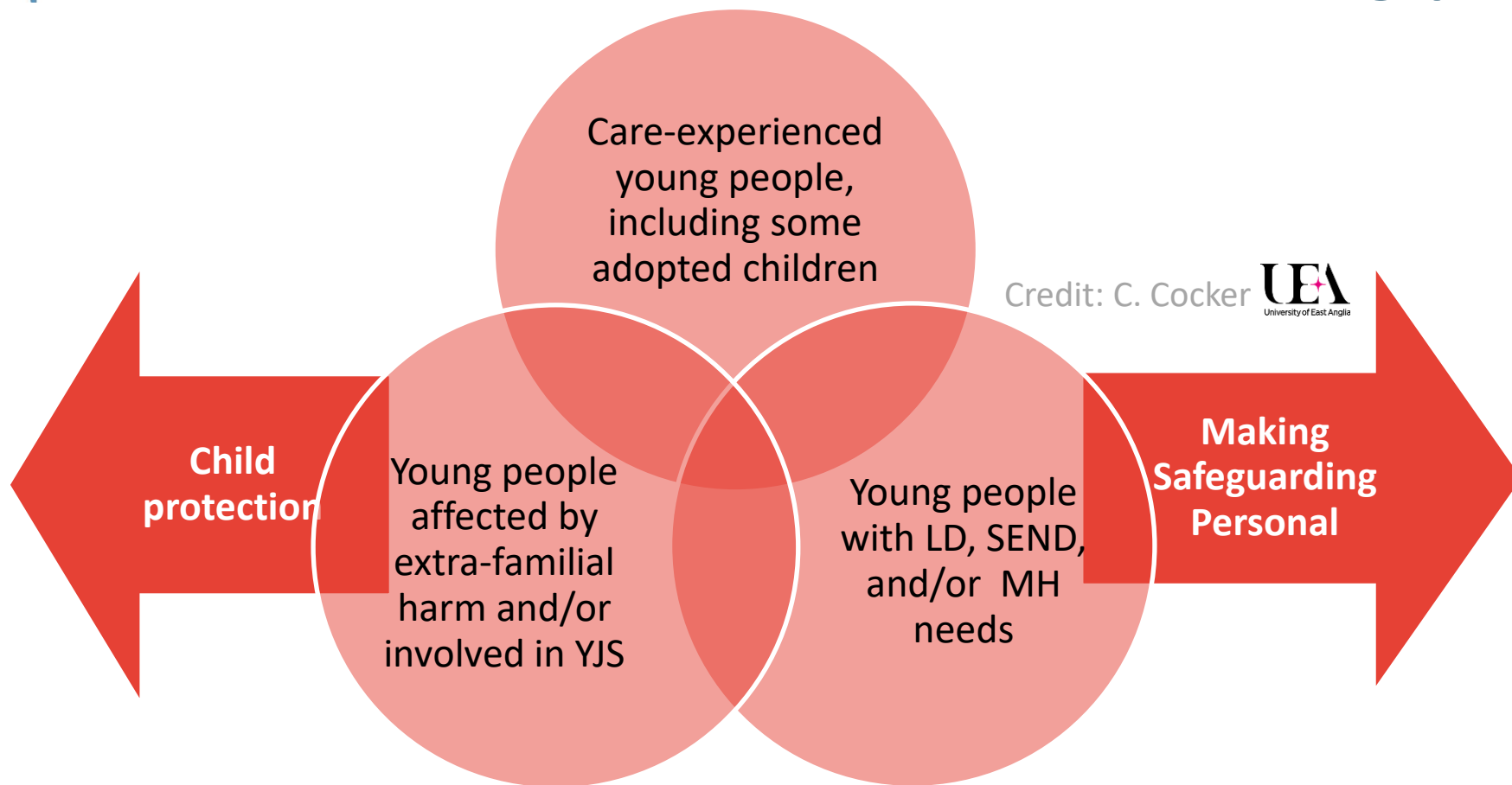# Professional perception
# of adolescents
(Rees *et al,* 2010)

Young people aged 11-17 are often seen by professionals as:

› More competent to deal with maltreatment

› Less likely to be at risk of long-term negative outcomes

› More resilient

› More likely to be contributing to / exacerbating situations (and blamed)

› More likely to be putting

themselves at risk of harm

› ***How do you challenge this?***

› Adolescents may have **distinct** safeguarding needs - often 'contextual' / extra-familial and underpinned by complex social and biological drivers

› **Harm and its effects** do not abruptly end at 18; **the brain** may continue developing until mid-20s...(Sawyer *et al,* 2018); Prior *et al,* 2011) but support may stop at 18

› People don't fit into neat boxes! Different types of harm; vulnerability / resilience are situational and dynamic

› **Transition** to adulthood is process not an event, we may need care and support without having Care & Support needs™.

› Promoting **resilience** and dynamic **developmental** needs

› There are **moral** and **economic** drivers for a reimagined safeguarding system which is contextual, transitional and relational

› **Boundary-spanning**: practice, policy, mindset... and politicians!

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Care-experienced young people, including some adopted children

Credit: C. Cocker

UEA
University of East Anglia

Child protection

Young people affected by extra-familial harm and/or involved in YJS

Young people with LD, SEND, and/or MH needs

Making Safeguarding Personal

"An expanded and more inclusive definition of adolescence is essential … Rather than age 10–19 years, a definition of 10–24 years corresponds more closely to adolescent growth and popular understandings of this life phase" (Sawyer *et al*, 2018)

Protection *and* preparedness

I was in care all my life and you did keep me really safe. You wrapped me up tight in bubble wrap… but I'm 19 now and I kind of feel like I can't move my arms

(Max, care-experienced young adult)

Now I've left care I get really lonely. That's a big thing for my safety I think, but no one talks about it as safeguarding. Unless you're worried about my child, I won't hear from you [children's services] again.
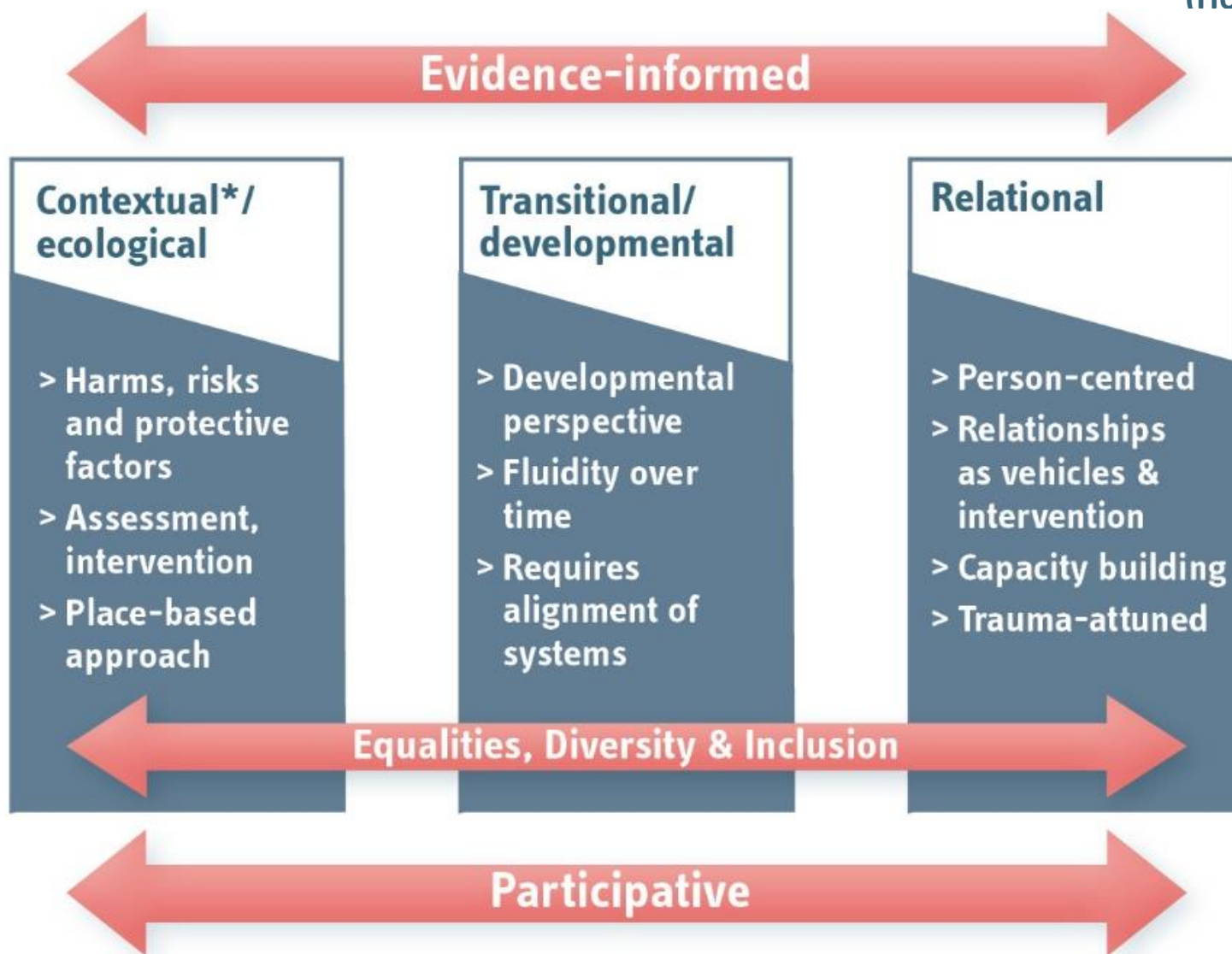
(Aisha, care-experienced young adult)

I couldn't wait to get to 18, I thought that once I was an adult everything would change. It hasn't worked out that way. I really wish I was a kid again so that you could lock me up.

(Kelly, young adult)

Key Principles of Transitional Safeguarding
(Holmes, 2021)

Evidence-informed

Contextual*/ ecological
- Harms, risks and protective factors
- Assessment, intervention
- Place-based approach

Transitional/ developmental
- Developmental perspective
- Fluidity over time
- Requires alignment of systems

Relational
- Person-centred
- Relationships as vehicles & intervention
- Capacity building
- Trauma-attuned

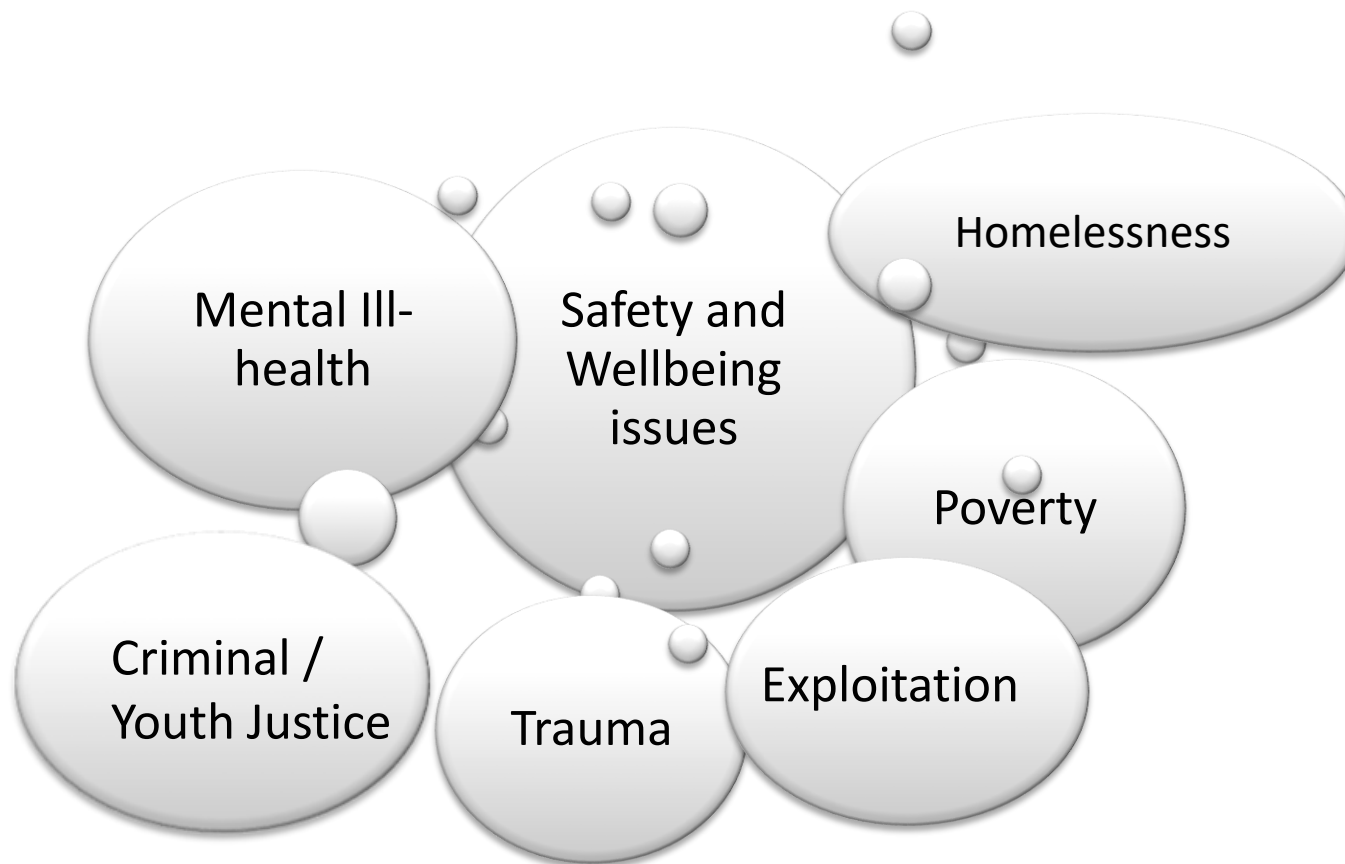**Equalities, Diversity & Inclusion**

Participative

See Firmin's work:
www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk

Systems leadership and boundary-spanning

› Boundary-spanning - the practices of *'reaching across borders, margins, or sections to build relationships, interconnections and interdependencies in order to manage complex problems'* (Williams, 2002)

› *systems leadership is characterised by two key attributes: it is a* **collective** *form of leadership, … 'leadership as participation' rather than 'leadership as performance' … the concerted effort of many people working together at different places in the system and at different levels, rather than of single leaders acting unilaterally. Secondly, systems leadership* **crosses boundaries***, both physical and virtual, existing simultaneously in multiple dimensions. It therefore extends individual leaders well beyond the usual limits of their formal responsibilities and authority.* (Ghate, Lewis & Welbourn, 2013)

› ***What helps you to be a boundary-spanning systems leader?***

Interconnected issues require an integrated response

Mental Ill-health

Safety and Wellbeing issues

Homelessness

Poverty

Criminal / Youth Justice

Trauma

Exploitation

Interconnectedness of harms and adversities requires a highly integrated system of support, whereby attention is paid to childhood/adolescent experiences. Commissioning may be a key lever for change

Money matters

> › The economic context makes innovation as difficult as it is essential

> › The current approach isn't great value…

> › Investing in preventative and recovery-oriented work to promote people's safety and wellbeing can play an important role in avoiding the costs of later intervention

> › Evidence from the UK and international contexts suggests that failing to help young people recover from harm and trauma can mean that problems persist and/or worsen in adulthood, creating higher costs for the public purse. (Chowdry and Fitzsimons, 2016; Kezelman *et al*, 2015)

> › The system (and the spend) is connected… Maternal wellbeing (SM, MH) and CP/care; care and criminal justice; mental health needs, costs Vs funding; family relationships and homelessness; domestic abuse and community violence etc

CCE / CL – not only a justice issue

…the research and evidence we collected made clear that serious violence between young people is an issue that cannot be adequately understood through a narrow criminal justice lens of suppression and enforcement. Not only would such a lens provide a distorted view of the problem, but crucially, it would also prevent the identification and development of effective solutions…
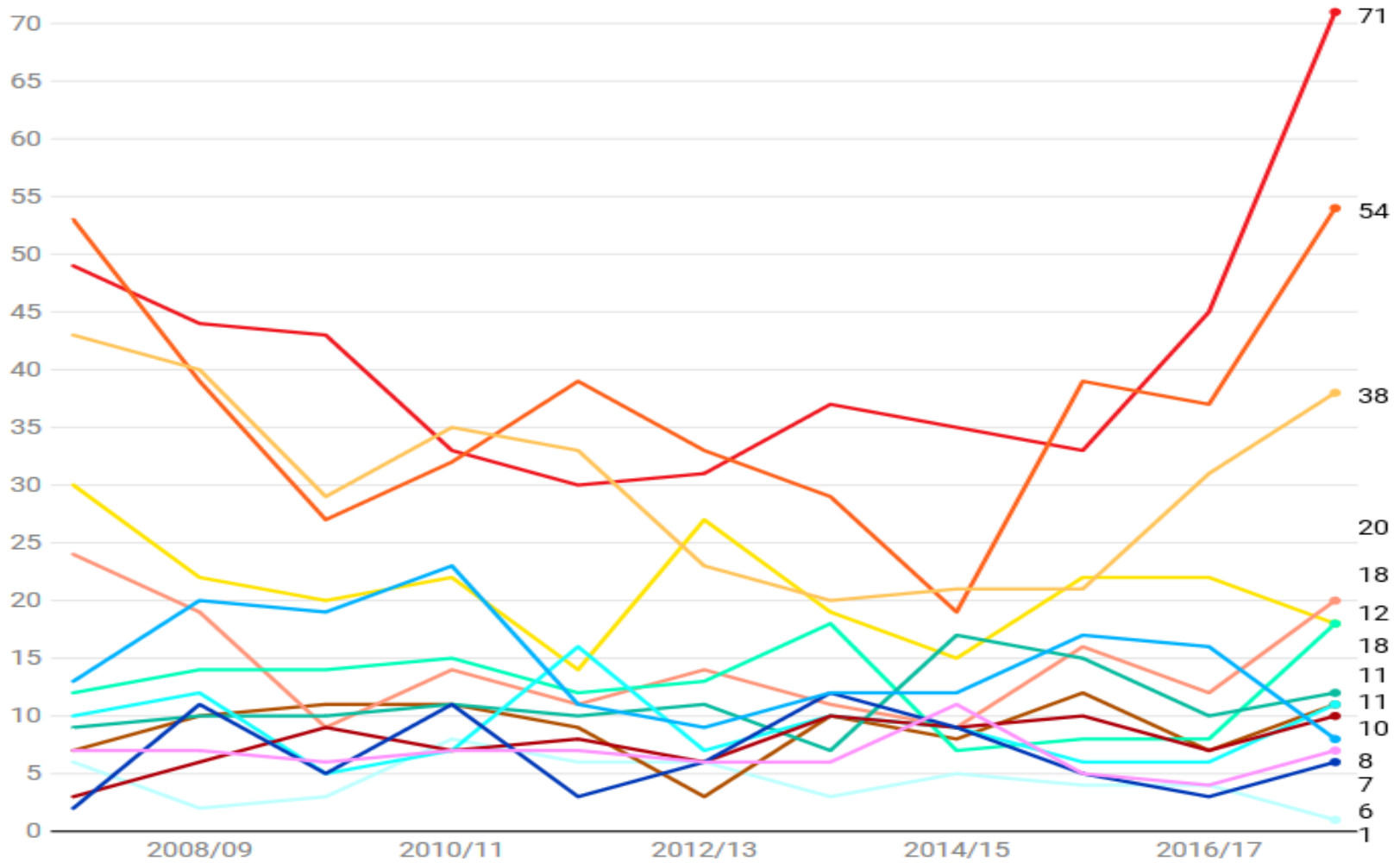
YVC, 2020

Knife related homicides 2008-2017

Chart: The Conversation UK • Source: Office for National Statistics • Get the data

Legend: Males under 17, Females under 17, Males 18 to 24, Females 18 to 24, Males 25 to 34, Females 25 to 34, Males 35 to 44, Females 35 to 44, Males 45 to 54, Females 45 to 54, Males 55 to 64, Females 55 to 64, Males 65+, Females 65+

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	YP in general population	YP in custody
Learning disability	2–4%	23–32%
Comms impairment	5–7%	60–90%
ADHD	1.7–9%	12%
Autism	0.6–1.2%	15%
Any head injury	24–42%	49–72%
Head injury (LoC)	5–24%	32–50%

Young adults involved in the CJS have often themselves been victims of crime. Many have a history of being exposed to violence, including in the home, abuse, neglect, bereavement relating to the deaths of parents, siblings and other close relatives, and criminal behaviour by parents and siblings. These traumatic events have frequently occurred from a very young age and, the traumatic effects may be raw.
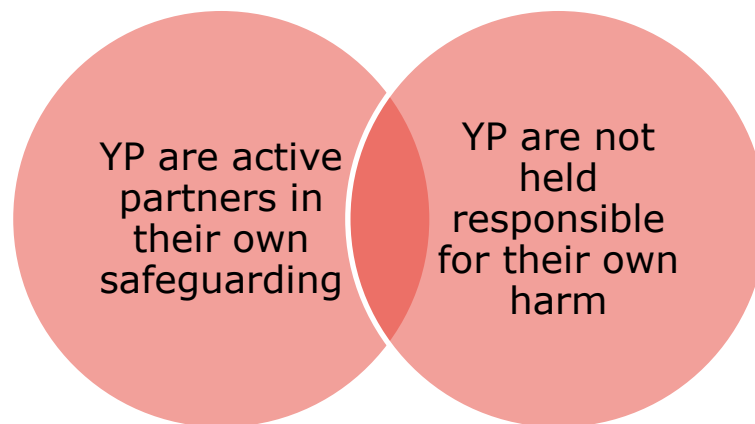
(Justice Select Committee, 2016)

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› Does not attend to wider social / structural factors eg poverty, homelessness, racism or hunger

› Other factors overlooked eg bereavement; people's individual experiences of trauma are significant (Edwards et al, 2017)

› The evidence base is not as clear as popularity suggests (EIF, 2020)

› "Working with" important in engaging families rather than "doing to"

› Risk of young person/parent becoming fatalistic rather than empowered

› 'Serious concerns about the ethics of some ACE screening practices (inc routine enquiry)' (EIF, 2020)

› *Moral issues?*

› *Inconsistency?*

https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmsctech/506/50605.htm#_idTextAnchor004
https://www.eif.org.uk/report/adverse-childhood-experiences-what-we-know-what-we-dont-know-and-what-should-happen-next

Adolescent 'choices' and 'risk-taking' behaviours

› Young people's 'risk-taking' - underpinned by *interacting* biological, social, environmental and neurobiological changes (Calkins, 2010)

› Risk can be positive (Coleman, 2014)

› Ego-syntonic risks

› Adapted to harms experienced in earlier childhood

› Unmet needs - seek to meet via risky routes

› Misinterpreted as rational informed adult 'lifestyle choices' → Victims being denied appropriate support / permission to give up

› Conversely, professionals can minimise adolescent choice and agency

› *How do you show your officers you know this?*

› Multiple dynamics and experiences of safety: physical, relational and psychological safety (Shuker, 2013).

› Different relocation contexts can **create or undermine** a sense of safety, can create **stability or instability**

› Relocations can **achieve or compromise** physical, psychological and relational safety for young people.

› Can restrict adolescent agency, leaving young people without a sense of choice or control in their lives.

› *"If the success of a relocation (or any other intervention) is measured only by its impact on physical safety this provides only a partial picture of the holistic impact of the intervention on a child's and family's experience of safety"*

Resilience and participation

› **Relationships** are paramount to promoting resilience. (Coleman, 2014)

› **Self-efficacy**, **positive identity development**, **aspirations** - commonly associated with resilience, are areas that professionals can exercise some influence.

› Children's **rights to protection and participation are mutually dependent and indivisible.** (UNCRC)

› 'Both/and not either/or' (Lefevre *et al*, 2019)

YP are active partners in their own safeguarding

YP are not held responsible for their own harm

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Participation as protective

(Warrington, 2016)

Consequences of CSE	Benefits of participation
YP don't recognise exploitative situation	Critical thinking/better understanding (AYPH, 2014)
Lack of power/control	Agency and decision-making power
Isolation/sense of 'difference' (Reid & Jones, 2011)	Sense of belonging (Hagel, 2013)
Stigma	Approval/acknowledgement (Batsleer, 2011)
Low self worth/lack of purpose	Helping others (Batsleer, 2011, Levy, 2012, AYPH, 2014)

![research in practice logo]

When we deny young people self-efficacy…

> *I was basically a puppet. When they* [the police] *wanted me, I had to do it. When they didn't want me, I heard nothing.*

(Beckett and Warrington, 2015)

> *Workers expect you to tell them everything about your lives but then they tell you nothing about theirs . … That's how the men work too – they find out everything about you then don't even tell you their real name.*
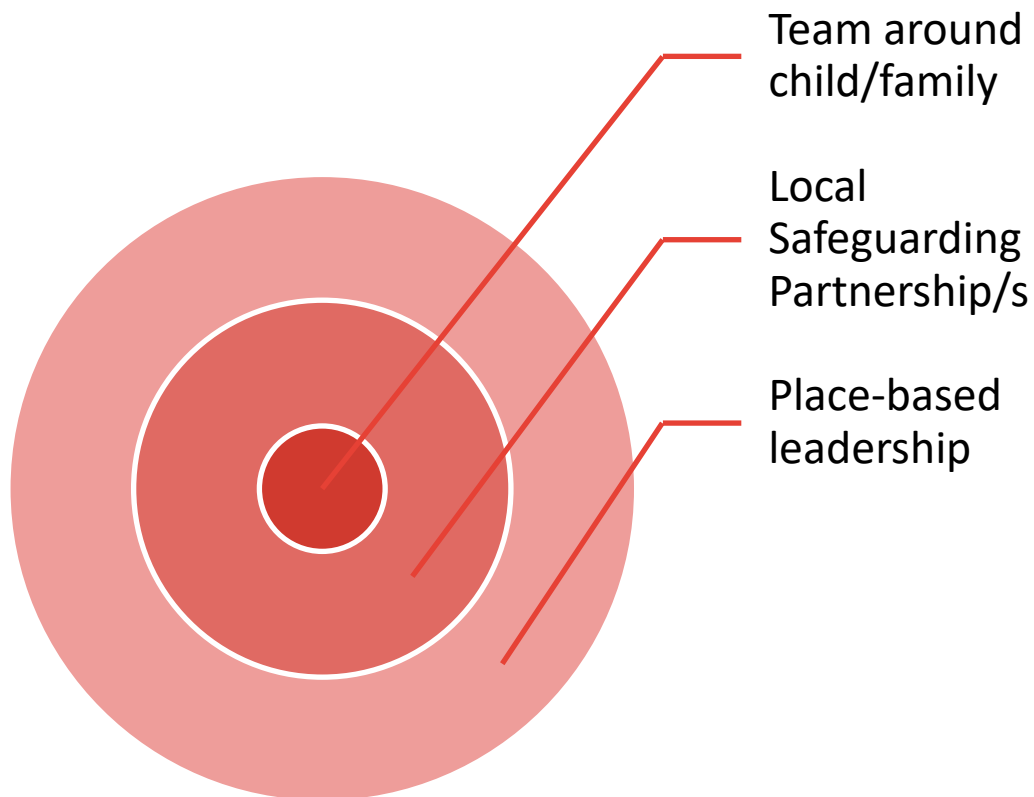
(Warrington 2013, in Melrose and Pearce, 2013)

What's helping local areas make the change

› Clear, credible, explicitly owned local leadership of the agenda

› Expansive definition of 'partnership'

› 'A system not a service'

› Meaningful engagement with communities

› Active knowledge and skills exchange (Cocker et al, 2021)

› Culture of innovation ('the soft stuff is the hard stuff')

› Practice informed strategy

› Collective, place-based problem solving (rather than problem displacement)

› Building the local case – data, inc people's lived experience

Thinking critically about parallel processes

› Collaborative problem solving or problem displacement?

› What behaviours get rewarded?

› Everybody's business? Or everybody's *busyness*?

› Coherence: whole child, whole system

Team around child/family

Local Safeguarding Partnership/s

Place-based leadership

Are you modelling the kind of behaviours you want to see in practice?

Safeguarding – a verb not a noun

› Binary notions of child/adulthood, victims/perpetrators, vulnerability / capacity can mean some people can 'slip through the net' or face a 'cliff-edge'.

› Many environmental / structural factors persist into adulthood, resulting in unmet need.

› Investing in preventative work to promote safety and wellbeing can help in avoiding costs (financial and human) of later intervention.

› Resilience, self-efficacy, social connectedness requires relational practice (and concordant policy).

› Does *not* propose all young adults facing risk should be protected via statutory means, nor does it propose a paternalistic approach to safeguarding young adults.

› **This is a systems leadership issue – Complexity, Coherence & Courage**

› **If not now, then when? If not you, then who?**

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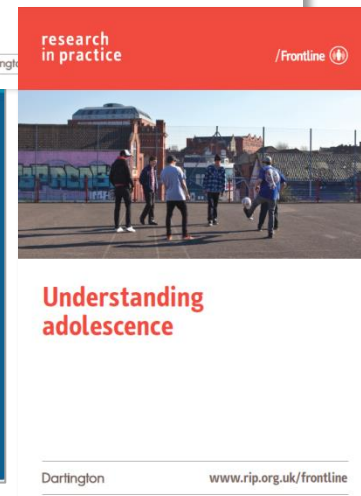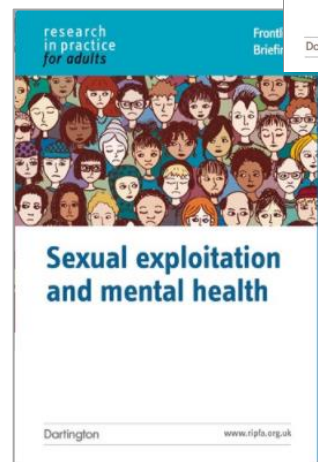

www www.researchinpractice.org.uk

 ask@researchinpractice.org.uk

 @researchIP

Thank you

Young person-centred approaches in child sexual exploitation (CSE)
– promoting participation and building self-efficacy
Dartington   www.rip.org.uk

Transitional safeguarding – adolescence to adulthood

That Difficult Age: Developing a more effective response to risks in adolescence
Dr Elly Hanson and Dez Holmes
Dartington

Sexual exploitation and mental health
Dartington   www.ripfa.org.uk

Understanding adolescence
Dartington   www.rip.org.uk/frontline

› Transitional Safeguarding (2018) original briefing: https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/all/publications/2018/august/transitional-safeguarding-adolescence-to-adulthood-strategic-briefing-2018/

› The role of adult social work & adult safeguarding to the Transitional Safeguarding agenda (2021): https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/media/5420/67346_dhsc_trans-safe-report_bridging-the-gap_web.pdf

› The relationship between Contextual Safeguarding, Complex Safeguarding and Transitional Safeguarding (2019): https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/publications/2019/january/safeguarding-during-adolescence-the-relationship-between-contextual-safeguarding-complex-safeguarding-and-transitional-safeguarding-2019/

› Systems leadership: https://thestaffcollege.uk/staff-college-research/systems-leadership-research/

Some questions we might ponder…

› How do our established approaches to scrutiny and accountability reflect (or not) the complexity and nuance of the work with young people?

› How can political leaders model a YP-centred approach to practice and strategy?

› How can Lead Members for children exercise boundary-spanning influence? What structures help you, and what hinders you?

› How do political leaders experience (and/or contribute to) the emotion that plays out in the system?