

Transitional Safeguarding: what it means for young people leaving care



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The problem in a nutshell

The traditional binary approach to safeguarding has not served young people well. Safeguarding systems for those aged under 18 and over 18 operate to different thresholds, legislative frameworks and eligibility criteria.

This can mean that many young people face a 'cliff edge' as they approach age 18 and risk being left without support during this critical life-stage. Many emergent adults face significant risks and harms without having formal care and support needs under the *Care Act 2014*.

(Winterbottom et al, 2023)

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)

What Transitional Safeguarding is and why it is needed (Holmes, 2021)

- > ***‘safeguarding adolescents and young adults fluidly across developmental stages which builds on the best available evidence, learns from both children’s and adult safeguarding practice and which prepares young people for their adult lives’*** (Holmes & Smale, 2018)
- > Current binary approach bears significant **human and economic costs**
- > Harm, trauma and development **don’t stop** at 18
- > **Not just transition planning or service transfer**
- > **Extends beyond statutory duties** – holistic, flexible, person-centred
- > Interconnectedness of harms and adversities requires a highly **integrated system** of support: social care, health, justice, education... **whole place whole person**
- > **Safeguarding is a verb, not a noun**
- > **Systems leadership**: collective, participative, boundary-spanning

I thought it was a well known fact that your brain doesn't stop developing until 25. You're constantly learning things, neurons, the pathways are still connecting. So it happens gradually.

So you don't turn into an adult the moment you turn 18. It's a gradual transition as you learn those skills, as you learn to be independent and you learn how to navigate the world.

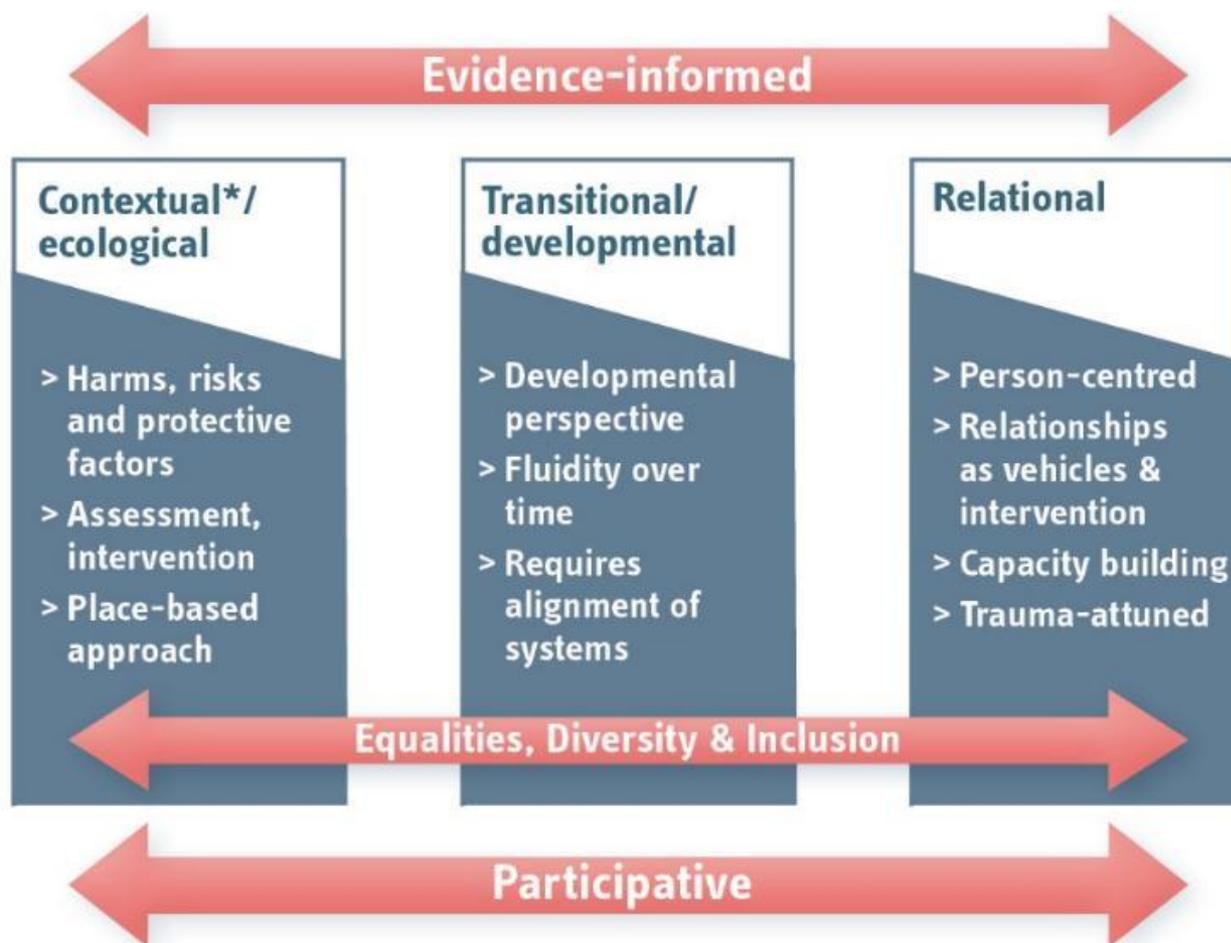
You don't understand the changes that happened so quickly and I don't think professionals really stop to think about that. From living in foster care to a semi-independence and you're isolated from your peers. I feel like that can be quite dangerous sometimes.

We are seen as young people who are doing well because we have ... We are deemed as not needing support, and so it falls away. ... does this seem right to do that? If you consider your own children or family, do they need less support or just different support as they move through life?

One young person may be facing the same issues but may require different levels or types of support, which is why you cannot plan or place every young person in a box with broad parameters.

Transitioning from being a child in care to a care experienced young person leaving care can be very difficult, especially when there is such a huge focus on the young person's 18th birthday. For some young people, the moment they reach 18, they are presenting as homeless when leaving supported accommodation

Key (non-negotiable) principles



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

For me and other people I know, the risks associated with being on your own in isolation, were probably more than say drug use

The moment you turn 17, you're starting to be built up to be able to leave. 'Right, your pathway plan'. They're going through what you can do, what you can't do. There's no sort of 'What can we help you with?' They're just ticking boxes for themselves.

Professionals do miss quite a lot of risks, like mental health and the people we surround ourselves

I wish they taught me like, how to like budget and how to get a job and how to keep relationships...

It's not just the sort of the skills like knowing how to pay a bill or sort out your rent, those practical things. But some of that more like relationship, emotional, psychological stuff.

Busting myths and misconceptions

- › *If an adult says they don't want safeguarding support, we can't act...* This doesn't mean we 'walk away' (Cooper, 2019). Making Safeguarding Personal and Transitional Safeguarding both emphasise curious, tenacious, relationship-based practice.
- › *The CA2014 stops us from working with a person unless they have Care & Support needs...* The prevention and wellbeing principles are key here (DHSC, 2020). Not all support to be safe = statutory Safeguarding
- › *But in the eyes of the law...* The law reflects common understandings at a given point in time. See CSE / marital rape.
- › *We can't afford to do different... We can't afford not to...*

How Transitional Safeguarding connects with the justice system (Holmes & Smith, 2022)

- > Justice professionals and researchers have repeatedly highlighted the high levels of trauma, neurodiversity, learning needs and impaired mental health amongst the young adult custody population (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2016).
- > Recent analysis regarding sentenced young people (YJB, 2020) found:
 - 88% had safety and wellbeing concerns
 - 75% had substance misuse concerns
 - 71% had speech, language and communication needs
 - 71% had mental health concerns
 - 56% per cent were a current or previous Child in Need.
- > Criminal exploitation, peer-violence, 'gang' association... all highlight how binary approach to safeguarding reinforces the way people are viewed as either vulnerable or culpable, depending on their age.
- > Criminal exploitation guidance (Home Office, 2018) acknowledges 'vulnerable adults' may be victims... But vulnerability is presented as an individualistic construct, rather than situational and/or contextual. Can mean many young adults without formal care and support needs may be punished rather than protected.

When you turn 18, you don't always have to listen to what social services have to say. Even though they're still gonna be your corporate parent, you [can] do what you want, without "When can I do this? Can I go?"

Wanting to be free, wanting to stop that restriction and feeling of control might almost push young people towards adulthood sooner than might actually be, you know, right for them.

you become too independent to the point where you're not able to accept help if it is available. So, there could be a service that helps you with that transition to adulthood, but you've learned to be too independent to trust or accept the help. It's like a fear of not being adult enough.

You might still need help after 18, but you can't ask for it because you were the one that was like "no, I'm an adult". And that young person will suffer essentially because they would rather do anything than be in that controlling environment.

Once you've decided that you want to be treated like adult, you don't want to ask for that support because then you, it looks like you're failing as an adult, so you don't want to.

You wanna keep that persona up that you're doing really well for yourself. You just don't want to seem like a failure.

Interdependence not 'independence' (John Radoux)

“Most children who come into care have already been let down, in some way, by adults who were meant to look after them... A single message is repeatedly reinforced: you are on your own. Many young people in care are already excessively self-reliant. It's an entirely understandable and necessary adaptation to circumstance, but an unhealthy and harmful one nonetheless....

They are told they must start preparing for independence. They must learn 'life skills'. They must learn these skills because 'there won't be anyone there to do it for you when you move to independence' It's that message again. You are on your own.

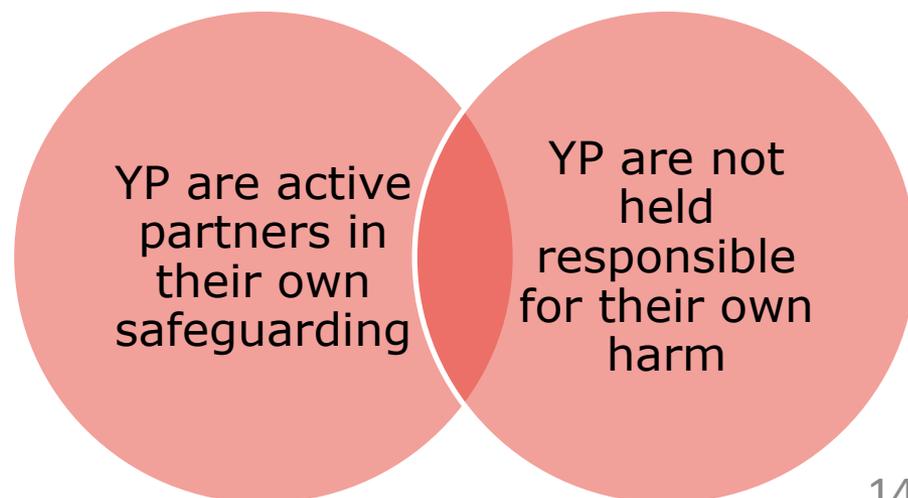
We need to change our entire thinking about how young people in care move into adulthood and the messages we are giving them. They need to have a sense that some key relationships are for keeps. We need to let them know that, no, they will not be on their own and, like every other human being on the planet, they do not have to be independent. Instead they can be interdependent.”

<https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2019/12/09/before-they-can-be-independent-children-in-care-need-to-learn-to-be-interdependent/#:~:text=They%20need%20to%20have%20a,a%20child%20and%20adolescent%20counsellor.>

With not to: Resilience and participation

- > **Relationships** are paramount to promoting resilience. (Coleman, 2014)
- > **Self-efficacy** - commonly associated with resilience, is an area that professionals can exercise some influence (positively or negatively!)
- > Children's **rights to protection and participation are mutually dependent and indivisible.** (UNCRC)
- > 'Both/and not either/or' (Lefevre *et al*, 2019)
- > Harm reduction principles?

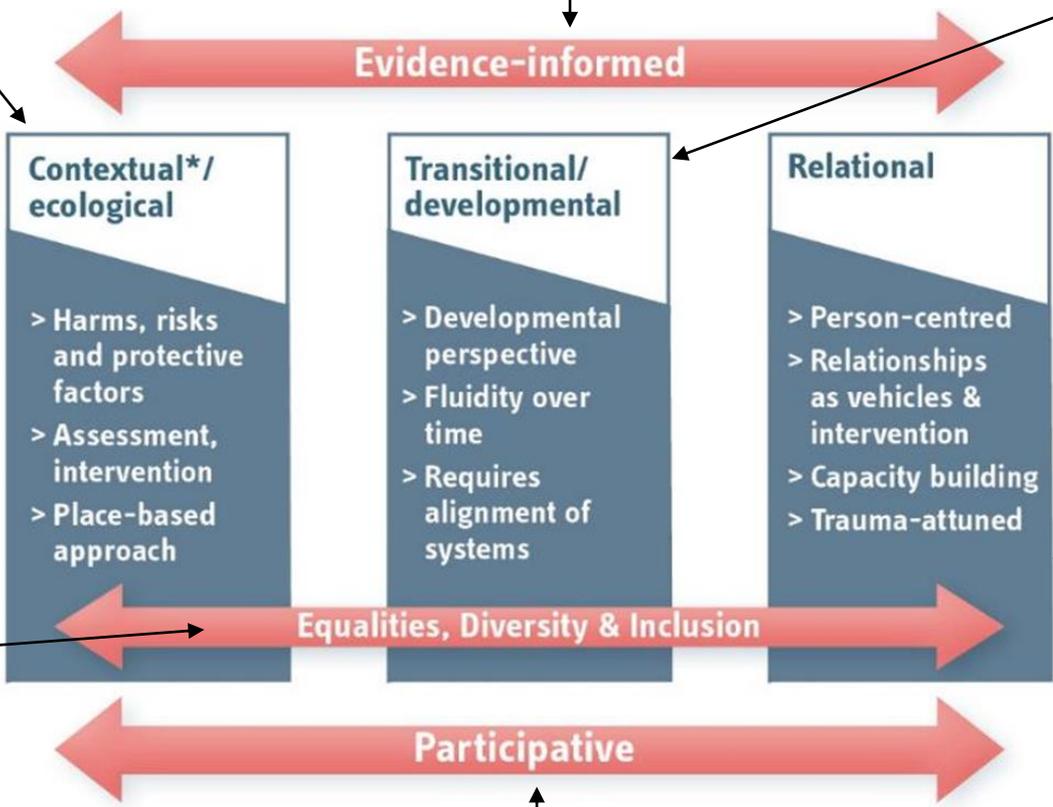
(Hickle and Hallett, 2016)



Utilising young people's view of the world.
Make sure we have the knowledge and skills
necessary to work effectively [and] in a reflective way.

Develop young
people's skills
and attitudes
rather than
remedy
'problem
behaviours'.

We seek to
enhance young
people's personal
and social
development. We
promote the
welfare and safety
of young people



Respecting
and valuing
differences

Helping young
people develop
stronger
relationships
and collective
identities

Treating young people with respect.
Promoting the voice of young people

- > Deliberative learning from parts of the wider system where transitional approaches are more embedded
- > ‘Drawing down’ best practice from safeguarding adults: rights-based approaches, MSP, wellbeing focus...**Making Safeguarding Personal for young people?** (Cocker et al, 2021)
- > Considering how Contextual Safeguarding and other innovations might inform safeguarding of young adults
- > Leverage the opportunities: ICS, probation, CSC review, LPS
- > Lean in...



What's helping local areas make the change

- > Clear, credible, explicitly owned local leadership of the agenda
- > Expansive definition of 'partnership' – inc communities
- > 'A system not a service' - A salad not a soup
- > Active knowledge and skills exchange (Cocker et al, 2021)
- > Culture of innovation ('the soft stuff is the hard stuff')
- > Collective, place-based problem solving (rather than problem displacement)
- > Building the local case – the current approach is remarkably poor value for money...

A cliff-edge at 25 is still a cliff-edge

So the other day I was speaking to [a senior manager] and they said something that doesn't really make sense: *“you're a young person till you're 25, and we are your corporate parent until you die”*. So what about between 26 and when you die? Nothing - you're on your own.

There should be a safe thing. A safety net. Catch you when you fall, yeah.

I don't know why the system shuts off at 25.... You should be the one to leave, not they get rid of you once you turn 25. There needs to be support for some other people that haven't got help. Everyone needs a support bubble.

The young co-authors:

- › Described *both* craving the freedom of adulthood *and* harbouring several fears and anxieties about what is to come.
- › Feeling *both* deterred from accepting support for fear of being seen as ‘not adult’ *and* firmly believing young people should be offered support.
- › *Both* want support to be and feel safe *and* sometimes find safeguarding processes to be an unsafe experience.
- › *Both* argued passionately for the right to be protected, *and* passionately reject paternalism.

*“What is needed is safeguarding support that **balances rights and risks, integrates protection and participation, and is person-centred and holistic.** Young people need to know that there is support available to make the journey to adulthood a positive one, and accessing such help does not undermine a person’s status as an adult. By drawing on the expertise of local young people, local areas can develop their approach to Transitional Safeguarding and redesign their systems and structures of support.”*

Thank you



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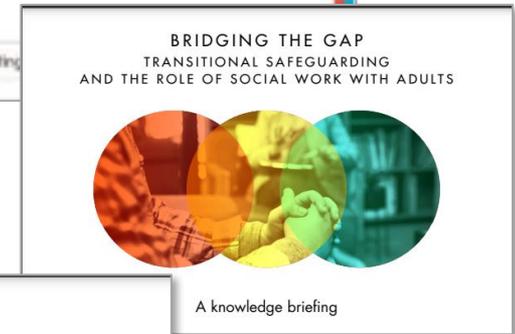


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- Transitional Safeguarding (2018) original briefing: [Mind the Gap/](#)
- The role of adult social work & adult safeguarding to the Transitional Safeguarding agenda (2021): [Bridging the Gap](#)
- HMIP paper on Transitional Safeguarding and justice (2022): [Transitional Safeguarding and Justice](#)
- How Transitional Safeguarding relates to the health sector:
<https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/all/publications/2023/october/transitional-safeguarding-knowledge-briefing-for-health-professionals/>
- Transitional Safeguarding and youth work: <https://www.nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/National-youth-work-curriculum-Transitional-Safeguarding-July-2023-DIGITAL.pdf>
- The relationship between Contextual Safeguarding, Complex Safeguarding and Transitional Safeguarding (2019): [CS CS TS/](#)
- A short animation explaining what Transitional Safeguarding is and why we need it:
<https://vimeo.com/794130649>

What would care-experienced young people in your local area say about the need for change?

What do you want to do differently?
Could anything be done better as a region / sub-region?