

Transitional Safeguarding briefing note

The problem in a nutshell

The current 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.

This is not only damaging for young people and those who care about them but is also an inefficient use of public money.

How did we end up here?

Statutory safeguarding duties for over 18s rely on the person having formally defined 'care and support needs' as set out in the Care Act 2014. There are good reasons to limit the bounds of state intervention. However, the current binary approach means that many young adults face significant risks and harms without having formal 'care and support needs'.

We now know that harm does not stop at 18, nor does the impact of harm. We understand that harms facing many teenagers like exploitation, peer-abuse and poor mental health can in fact escalate as the young person turns 18 – not least because professional involvement reduces or stops altogether. We also know that cognitive, social and neurobiological development continues well into our mid-twenties (Sawyer et al, 2018).

What Transitional Safeguarding is...

'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)

- > A lens through which to address a multitude of issues affecting older teenagers and young adults (eg mental ill-health, exploitation, care-experience, prevention)
- > "early help for grownups" – i.e., it is about developing a multi-agency offer, in which local partners alongside communities all play a part, in order to support older teenagers and young adults who ordinarily would not be eligible for statutory services as an adult
- > A concept for **whole-system** change, underpinned by six key principles. (Holmes, 2018; 2022).
- > About thinking beyond statutory duties – instead creating an offer for young people that is holistic, flexible, person-centred ... to help them make the transition to adulthood.

What it is not...

"Transitional Safeguarding refers to activity that has often fallen outside of the traditional notions of both 'transitions' and 'safeguarding', where these have sometimes been interpreted through a lens of eligibility, rather than in the wider sense of human experiences and needs."

(Department of Health and Social Care, 2021, p.10)

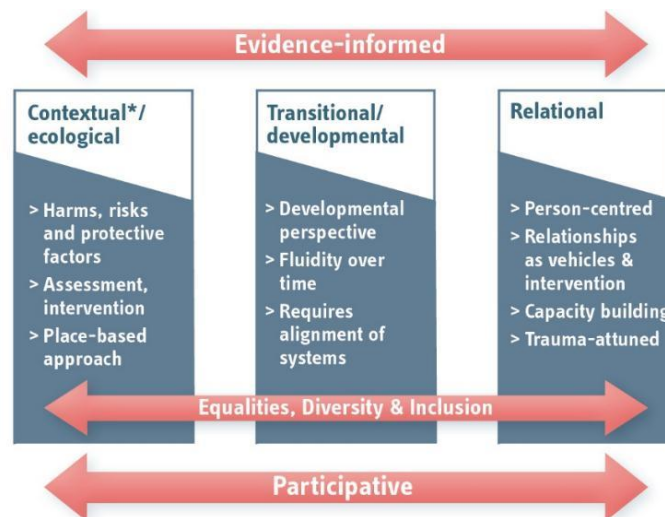
- > Transitional Safeguarding is not a set of defined activities. It does not seek to dictate practice through the use of prescribed tools
- > Transitional Safeguarding is not simply 'transitions' or 'service transfer' (important those these issues are, they relate to the relative minority of young people who *are* eligible for statutory services as an adult).
- > Transitional Safeguarding is not just about statutory safeguarding services working harder – most teenagers we are worried about (eg those facing exploitation, those with SEND, those with poor mental health, etc) will not automatically qualify for adult services, and in fact may be better supported by other parts of the local system.

- > Transitional Safeguarding is not an intervention, nor a service (creating a standalone service will likely create another silo – and Transitional Safeguarding is all about trying to make the system more connected and less siloed).
- > Transitional Safeguarding is not just about exploitation (or care-leavers, or SEND, or mental health). It is about creating system change in order to defragment the siloes so that all young people who need it can get support as they make the journey into adulthood.

Why Transitional Safeguarding is needed...

- > The current binary approach bears significant human and economic costs
- > Harm, trauma and human development don't stop at 18 – we now know that abruptly stopping support at 18 does not align with the evidence
- > Interconnectedness of harms and adversities requires a highly integrated system of support. Getting 'upstream' requires support that is as early, holistic and person-centred as possible.
- > **Safeguarding is a verb, not a noun** – in its truest sense, Transitional Safeguarding is everybody's business; spanning prevention, protection and repair. It should be an act we collectively undertake, not a service we send people to.

Key Principles



Three core intersecting pillars underscore the need for a reimagined safeguarding system to be:

- **Contextual, or ecological, in its perspective.** This means recognising and responding to the harms young people face in a variety of spaces beyond their family and seeking to make these contexts safer rather than only focusing on the individual. It encourages a systemic approach to assessment, intervention and outcome measurement.
- **Transitional, or developmental, in its design.** This means understanding the distinct developmental needs and strengths of this life stage and creating services and pathways that reflect the individualised nature of transition to adulthood. It encourages greater fluidity between children and adult safeguarding processes and requires an active effort to align systems to create a smoother more holistic offer for people being supported.
- **Relational in its ethos.** This means being person-centred and trauma-informed in practice, recognising that meaningful relationships are an important aspect of any therapeutic support. It requires us to adopt a capacity building and empowering approach, so that young people are supported to build resilience and exercise positive control in their lives. It also means using language that is inclusive and respectful, avoiding terminology or expressions that could be victim-blaming.

Three cross-cutting themes act as a guide to inform how practice and policy should be experienced and designed. These require us to:

- Be **evidence-informed** in our approach. This means drawing on knowledge from a variety of sources – research and data, practice wisdom and the expertise of people with lived experience. It

means adapting approaches in light of new knowledge and being curious and committed to continuous learning.

- Actively attend to issues of **equity, equality, diversity and inclusion** throughout. This means identifying where people's safety and wellbeing is affected by structural and/or interpersonal discrimination and robustly addressing these within local systems. People's safety and their experiences of support can be affected by racism, ableism, ageism, sexism, classism or other forms of prejudice, and these can occur in tandem with each other. This requires us to adopt an anti-oppressive stance at all times and recognise the intersectionality of people's lives.
- Ensure a **participative** approach. This means adopting a strengths-based approach; respecting young people's expertise and enabling them to coproduce solutions and support rather than being treated as a passive recipient. This is as important at a strategic level as it is in practice and is a key means of promoting a person's sense of self-efficacy, by affording them autonomy and agency.

Further resources

- Transitional Safeguarding (2018) original briefing: <https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/all/publications/2018/august/transitional-safeguarding-adolescence-to-adulthood-strategic-briefing-2018/>
- A pretty accessible talk for some young adults about Transitional Safeguarding: [YP talk](#)
- A short animation explaining what Transitional Safeguarding is and why we need it: <https://vimeo.com/794130649>
- 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
- Transitional Safeguarding and justice: <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2022/03/Academic-Insights-Holmes-and-Smith-RM.pdf>
- Transitional Safeguarding and health: [transitional-safeguarding_health_knowledge_briefing_final.pdf](#) ([researchinpractice.org.uk](https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk))
- One-stop shop <https://www2.local.gov.uk/our-support/partners-care-and-health/safeguarding-resources/transitional-safeguarding-resources>

