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Best practice examples and guidance for practitioners about how to apply their understanding in direct work with adolescents outside the family context

Relationship based practice (RBP)

When working with adolescents, especially those who have experienced adversity or are at risk, practitioners must establish meaningful professional relationships. Relationship-based practice (RBP) describes a way of working with children and adolescents that recognises the vital importance of building meaningful relationships.

Many adolescents experience anxiety as a natural response to distress and uncertainty (Munro 2011; Ruch, 2005). It is essential for practitioners to develop an understanding of the adolescent's situation and state of mind. Adolescents experiencing anxiety may have very self-critical thoughts and may be more likely to reject practitioner support.

For adolescents with SEND, the key factors in RBP can be established through non-verbal means, such as visual communication, or through adapted language.

RBP has been shown to improve the outcomes of adolescents affected by Child Sexual Exploitation: "Relationship-based practice created a context for developing self-efficacy and this, in turn, helped children and adolescents to disclose abuse, be supported to leave unsafe 'relationships' and begin to recover from CSE." (Alexi project evaluation, Nov 2017).

What is self-efficacy?

Adolescents who believe in their own ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task. A sense of self-efficacy can play a major role in how adolescents approach goals, tasks, and challenges.

Meaningful relationships form a positive basis for adolescents who experience anxiety to develop their sense of self-efficacy.

Practitioners working with adolescents should appear:	Practitioners should avoid appearing:
Available	*Unavailable*
Caring	*Uninterested*
Interested	*Unresponsive*
Responsive	*Neglectful*
Sensitive	*Hostile*
Accessible	*Rejecting*
Co-operative	*Inaccessible*
Trustworthy	*Ignoring*
	Untrustworthy

How can practitioners support self-efficacy in work with adolescents?

1. Make use of adolescents' interests
2. Allow adolescents to make their own choices
3. Set moderately difficult challenges
4. Encourage adolescents to try
5. Give frequent, focused, balanced feedback
6. Encourage accurate self-praise
7. Provide specific coping strategies for stress
8. Use positive peer models such as peer mentoring

Enforcement responses to adolescents who cause harm to others

When adolescents cause distress, alarm or threaten harm to others, some actions can be taken by the Police, the Council, Anti-Social Behaviour team, youth, or county court. Practitioners must understand these consequences and consider how they can continue to work according with children can seek advice from the Youth Justice Service on 01752 306999.

Sharing information about adolescents who cause harm

When the Police or Court respond to adolescent behaviour that may cause distress, alarm of harm to others, agencies are often called on share information.

Sharing information about known risks is a vital aspect of safeguarding adolescents at risk, both for those who are at risk or harm, and for those who do harm to others. This information includes the people adolescents are associating with and places where they go.

These meetings include any agencies who work with adolescents such as schools and colleges, community organisations and health services, and are not restricted to high-risk services such as the Police, Youth Justice Service and Children's Social Care.

Principled practice: maintaining focus on adolescent safeguarding

Enforcement decisions provide practitioners with an opportunity to understand adolescent behaviour and recognise the significance of boundaries in adolescent development.

Every organisation that works with adolescents needs to establish and maintain clear and consistency policy and practice for behaviour that includes limits and sanctions. This includes schools, voluntary sector organisations and statutory services like the police and social care.

Supporting adolescents who cause distress means understanding the contexts influencing their lives. The language of criminal prosecution can reinforce adult roles with phrases like "perpetrator" and "offender", which do not reflect the reality of adolescent circumstances.

The principles set out in this guide ask practitioners to consider adolescents as children first. It remains important that we understand trauma when we describe and respond to harmful and criminal adolescent behaviours. At the same time, boundaries and sanctions are a necessary part of development.

Research in practice in other areas has provided further examples of how agencies can respond to the wider contextual risks faced by adolescents, in Plymouth, we are building on our experience and use of the Adolescent Safety Framework, as a result, practitioners should consider:

Reclaiming vulnerable contexts

- Use to identify environments where adolescents are being groomed
- Specialist workers, social workers and police visit those environments on a regular basis
- Adolescents expect to see them there and begin to talk to them
- Slowly this becomes a space where exploitation can't occur

Protecting vulnerable homes

- Identify homes where peer-on-peer abuse occurring
- Identify family members with physical and learning disability, including adolescents with SEND
- Improve Lighting and CCTV
- Engagement with Safer Schools officer
- Engage peer group through combination of support and enforcement
- Home no longer used for abuse

Peer Group Mapping, assessment, and intervention

- Practitioners identify links between the social care and youth offending cases
- Meet to map and refine assessment
- Design complementary interventions

Children and families affected by peer-on-peer abuse

- Emotional, physical, and mental well-being affected
- Involvement in offending, going missing, use of alcohol, drugs, etc.
- Family relationships affected
- Ability to access education and other services affected

Interventions to create favourable social conditions for 1:1 delivery

- Build supportive and pro-social peer networks
- Ensure safe and nurturing educational environments
- Reduce exposure to street-based and online crime and victimisation
- Provide safe sites of adolescent socialisation

1:1 and familial interventions

- Recognise/recover from trauma
- Re-build family relationships
- Re-engage in education and other activities
- Reduce incidences of offending, going missing etc.

(Fermin, 2016)