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Background

Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families.

These extra-familial threats might arise at school and other educational establishments, on high streets, public transport, and other community spaces, from within peer groups and from the wider community and/or online.

[It Was Hard to Escape \(2020\)](#) states that 'being drawn into exploitative situations where children can be both victims and perpetrators can have severe consequences for them, their friends, families, and communities'.

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Why it matters

Increasingly, children and young people are facing challenge and risk to their safety and wellbeing from outside the home. These threats can take a variety of different forms and children can be vulnerable to multiple threats, including exploitation by organised crime groups such as county lines; trafficking; online abuse; teenage relationship abuse; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation ([Working Together, 2018](#)).

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Information

During adolescence the nature of the risks faced by young people, and the way that they experience these risks, often differs from earlier childhood. Specifically, young people may be faced with a new set of complex risks – ones not posed by families, but by peers, partners, and other adults. Peer relationships are increasingly influential during adolescence and relationships formed at this time in a context of violence can be harmful.

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Practitioners who work with children and families should consider whether wider environmental factors are present in a child's life which are a threat to their safety and should look at parental capacity to support the child, including helping the parents and carers to understand contextual risk. Contextual safeguarding can involve young people perpetrating, as well as experiencing harm

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and can present as the result of perceived 'choices' a young person has made. Working Together (2018) states that young people who may be perpetrators should also be supported to understand the impact of contextual issues on their own safety and wellbeing. Interventions should focus on addressing these wider environmental factors, which are likely to be a threat to the safety and welfare of a number of different children who may or may not be known to local authority children's social care.

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Questions to consider

Is the child at risk of significant harm?

What steps do we need to take to safeguard this child?

Does information need to be shared to protect this child or to protect a wider cohort of children?

Do parents know who their children are with and where they are when they are not at home?

[Nest Lancashire](#) can offer support for young victims of crime.

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What to do

If you are worried about a child or young person who may be at risk, speak to your safeguarding lead to discuss what action to take. Anyone with concerns about child sexual/criminal exploitation can contact police on 101 or 999 in an emergency.

Lancashire's multi-agency Exploitation teams can be contacted directly on Operation Awaken (North) 01253 477261, Operation Engage (East) 01254 353 525 or Operation Deter (Central): 01772 209122