

## **Adolescent Safeguarding Practice Framework**

This framework has been designed by safeguarding partners to promote a consistent response to safeguarding older children and young people in London. It reflects the established evidence base, best practice and an emerging set of shared principles across agencies. Local partnerships should consider how well each element of this framework is reflected within their area, by individual agencies and as a collective response to the safeguarding needs of adolescents.

### **Strategy**

#### **To what extent does your local partnership fulfil the following aspirations?**

A shared vision, strategy and plan for partners, articulated at a local authority level, detailing the approach to and ambition for safeguarding adolescents.

Demonstrable political and senior leadership commitment to prioritising safety and well-being for older children and young people across the local authority and partner functions.

Evidence that your vision is based upon the lived experience of young people in your area and informed by their voice and participation.

The strategy recognises that all young people are potentially vulnerable to harm and exploitation while also identifying specific approaches for some young people who are more likely to experience safeguarding concerns in adolescence. Deprivation, discrimination and structural disadvantage increase the likelihood of experiencing harm and local partners both pay attention to tackling the underpinning context for these children and families and ensure that safeguarding (and public protection) responses do not exacerbate underlying inequalities through overly intrusive or punitive interventions.

The approach to safeguarding adolescents reflects the wider practice model adopted by the local authority and is supported by the LA and partners' corporate structures, recognising that impactful work with adolescents will only thrive if the wider conditions for effective work with children and families are met.

### **Shared Principles**

#### **To what extent does your local partnership fulfil the following aspirations?**

The local partnership is able to articulate a shared set of principles for its work with adolescents. These closely align with the principles agreed for work with adolescents by the London Safeguarding Children's Partnership

*The London Safeguarding Children's Partnership has agreed nine principles for safeguarding adolescents for statutory safeguarding partners in London. These are appended and inform each of the components of this practice framework.*

## **Structure**

### **To what extent does your local partnership fulfil the following aspirations?**

Structures to enhance adolescent safeguarding reflect the principle of organising around the child / young person thereby avoiding multiple handovers, cliff-edges at the point of transition, and are bespoke for the particular needs of adolescents, having been developed by and with young people.

Services are well-integrated in order to enhance a shared professional approach to adolescent safeguarding and to aid a common understanding of the circumstances of any given child or young person. Co-location of multi-agency / multi-disciplinary staff is well-developed.

Services are accessible for young people and well-advertised, promoting improved experience and support to stay safe.

## **Systems**

### **To what extent does your local partnership fulfil the following aspirations?**

Partners share information readily to support safeguarding and have developed common data resources that support informed decision-making, both for individual children and young people and at a strategic level. This includes shared analytic capacity between partners, which supports better understanding of problem profiles and local need.

The children's safeguarding partnership has articulated and codified its understanding of levels of adolescent need in order to identify the pathways to support and promote a shared understanding of appropriate adolescent safeguarding responses. This specifies the role of universal, targeted and specialist services, from statutory and non-statutory partners, in promoting adolescent safeguarding.

Practice in relation to missing children has been developed to be an asset to safeguarding responses, the approach is relational and information from children, parents and partners is used effectively to enhance safety.

Safeguarding adolescents in education has been given sufficient attention by educational settings and is appropriately supported by partners. Children missing / missing from education and those in alternative education are recognised as requiring increased safeguarding attention in view of heightened risk of harm / exploitation.

Partners have analysed their adolescent cohort and clearly identify what is being done to address disparities in outcomes and experience. This includes attention to BAME disproportionality (particularly in YJ, CP/care and under-representation in CAMHS), gendered responses, and the particular needs of adolescents with SEND.

Approaches balance the young person's individual agency with that of the responsibilities of adults to promote safety for them. This includes a focus on disruption and enforcement activity against those who exploit / abuse young people.

Adolescent safeguarding is grounded in a whole system response which works in a co-ordinated fashion to promote a safe and healthy environment for children and young people's development.

Approaches to enabling young people to be supported within their family and avoid the need for care are clearly articulated and agreed by the local authority and partners.

Local systems are informed by evidence of the most effective responses to adolescent safeguarding, approaches are routinely evaluated and young people's voice and experience supports reviews and commissioning of services.

### **Style (practice approaches)**

#### **To what extent does your local partnership fulfil the following aspirations?**

Local partners ensure that services to adolescents are grounded in relationship-based practice, are strengths-based and recognise young people as assets in their safeguarding.

The specific services designed to be delivered to / with young people are balanced with those that promote opportunities to strengthen families and parenting. Interventions are holistic in that they respond to the whole needs of the child (not a single behaviour or concern) and they work with the whole family, responding to the dynamics of the family system.

Services provided to adolescents are culturally competent and promote equality and diversity. They have been tested by groups of children and young people to ensure that they are fit to respond to a range of diversity needs and identities, including young people's experiences of racism and discrimination.

Adolescent services articulate how they respond to young people who have experienced trauma and the particular approaches adopted support trauma-recovery through a coherent theory of change.

Wider partnership services have considered and implemented measures to adapt to meet the needs of children and young people who have experienced trauma or other adverse childhood experiences.

Responses to adolescents recognise the impact of extra-familial harm and deploy contextual approaches / tools to promote young people's safety in a range of environments outside their family home.

Services have been adapted to 'go with the grain' of adolescent development, promote young people's agency, engagement and participation.

Safeguarding and child protection processes have been adapted to the developmental needs and environmental harms specific to adolescence. Approaches such as young

people's safety planning have been employed to enhance participation and ownership by young people within statutory processes.

Practice is attuned to the particular risks of criminal exploitation faced by adolescents. When a young person (under the age of 18) is believed to be involved in criminal or anti-social behaviour they are viewed first and foremost as a child rather than an offender.

Services recognise the importance of transitional safeguarding and that young people over the age of 18 remain vulnerable. Responses reflect their particular developmental needs, which may additionally be affected by trauma or learning difficulties.

Approaches to adolescent safeguarding seek to balance the safeguarding needs of children and young people with the needs of others (including other children) to be protected from them. Shared responsibilities to protect a range of children and young people and the wider public, and the tensions this can cause, are articulated within multi-agency decision-making bodies. Partners understand the potential for competing imperatives and are able to work collaboratively to discharge their responsibilities.

## **Staff / Skills**

### **To what extent does your local partnership fulfil the following aspirations?**

Older children and young people can expect those who work with them to be practitioners who want to work with adolescents and have specific skills, training and aptitude to effectively engage with young people.

In addition to specific training around adolescent development and trauma-informed approaches, those who work with young people are supported to develop practice which avoids blame, stigma, labelling or any suggestion that adolescents are responsible for the abuse / exploitation they may have experienced.

**Practitioners have received training and development in relation to unconscious bias and understand their role in promoting equality of opportunities and challenging racism and discrimination in the experience and outcomes of the young people with whom they work.**

Practitioners working to safeguard adolescents are supported through reflective supervision and are provided with opportunities to share their experience of working amidst trauma through group supervision and / or peer fora. They are provided with appropriate clinical input and support in their work.

Systems for staff support recognise the impact of working with young people who experience trauma (both through serious incidents and the cumulative impact of adversity, fear and conflict) and ensure that, as well as responding to specific incidents, ongoing support for the welfare of practitioners is built into the design of services.

## Appendix

### London Safeguarding Children's Partnership Adolescent Safeguarding:

- As children get older, their increasing autonomy should be recognised, inform our response and shape how they are involved in decision making.
- The risks facing some adolescents, and the protective factors that help keep them safe, are located not only in families but also in their peer groups and wider communities. Services must therefore work in close partnership with families, peer groups and communities.
- We must never give up on children and young people because they seem reluctant to engage with services or face complex issues. We must always 'go the extra mile'.
- Responses must address the context of children and young people's lives, including the impact of different forms of social prejudice and inequality (such as race and racism).
- Policy and practice should address the need for older young people (i.e. those over 18 years) to be able to access appropriate support and protection.
- A joined up multi agency response must be provided by professionals who have expertise and capability in working with older children and young people **[through service provision and structures which promote continuity of relationships and are organized around the child young person rather than the needs of services]**
- When a child is believed to be involved in criminal or anti-social behavior, assessments should seek to understand safeguarding concerns. **[and adopt the approach that they are viewed as children first and offenders second]**
- Children need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to keep themselves safe and live healthy, happy and productive lives. For older children this means high quality sex and relationship education **[and services which are accessible and shaped by and for young people]**.
- Strategic and operational practice must be based on sound evidence, good and shared intelligence and effective data analysis.