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| NCC-l-head-cmyk**Education, Learning & Skills****Contextual safeguarding: Reflective practice** **& structured conversations.*****Background***“*As well as threats to the welfare of children within their families, children may be vulnerable to abuse or exploitation outside of their families. These extra-familial threats might arise at school and other educational establishments, from within peer groups, or more widely from within the wider community and/or online. These threats can take a variety of different forms and children can be vulnerable to multiple threats, including: exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups such as county lines; trafficking, online abuse; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation*.” Working Together 2018, para. 33***What is ‘Contextual Safeguarding’?****Contextual safeguarding* is an approach to safeguarding which does not replace the existing systems we have around child protection, but rather seeks to enhance and strengthen them; it acknowledges that the world has moved on significantly since our child protection systems and legal frameworks were first developed. It is an approach which acknowledges that no single agency has the ability to address the sorts of threats which young people are currently sometimes exposed to. It is an approach which builds on existing best practice and lessons learned from Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), recognising that the nature of the presenting threats, requires both a collective and individual response to safeguarding, rooted in a culture of professional curiosity and effective partnership working. It recognises that the combined efforts of professionals across a range of agencies need to work in ways which seek not just to protect the individual, but also tackle the root cause of the presenting threat. ***What does this mean for schools, colleges and other educational settings?***In practice, for schools, colleges and other educational settings *contextual safeguarding* goes beyond sharing concerns and making appropriate and timely referrals. It requires a proactive approach which notes trends and responds to wider available information about the child or young person’s context. It involves being professionally curious about a child or young person’s presenting behaviours, including their non-attendance, notable changes in their behaviour, or specific incidents. For example, when a school’s response to a young person’s behaviour is to consider exclusion, there is a responsibility for the school to also consider the potential safeguarding implications for the young person. A contextual approach to safeguarding requires that schools, colleges and other educational settings develop an organisational culture, curriculum and set of processes:* which actively reduces the risk of harm to children and young people,
* which increases the likelihood of safeguarding concerns being identified at an early stage, and
* which is more supportive of children and young people who have been the subject of safeguarding concerns.

A relationship-based approach to the development of an organisation’s culture is one where respect, openness, and having regard for the well-being of each other, is evident and celebrated in the relationships between staff, between staff and pupils, and between students. This will serve as a protective factor for everyone in the organisation.The revised Ofsted Inspection Framework makes explicit the need for schools to have an understanding of what is happening within the communities they serve, to respond to identified concerns, and to proactively teach children about potential threats to their health, safety and wellbeing, as well as how to obtain help and support. ***Information gathering and the assessment of risk****“Safeguarding incidents and/or behaviours can be associated with factors outside the school or college and/or can occur between children outside the school or college.* ***All*** *staff, but especially the designated safeguarding lead (and deputies) should be considering the context within which such incidents and/or behaviours occur. This is known as contextual safeguarding, which simply means assessments of children should consider whether wider environmental factors are present in a child’s life that are a threat to their safety and/or welfare. Children’s social care assessments should consider such factors so it is important that schools and colleges provide as much information as possible as part of the referral process. This will allow any assessment to consider all the available evidence and the full context of any abuse.” (para 32, KCSIE 2019)*A contextual approach to safeguarding is underpinned by proportionate professional curiosity around all aspects of a child or young person’s behaviour. Respectful, professional curiosity needs to have regard for rights of privacy, and the gathering and storing of detailed contextual information needs to take place within GPDR guidelines. However, GPDR should not be used as an excuse for not sharing information in a timely way to ensure young people are kept safe. It is an open-minded professional approach which reflects on a child or young person’s behaviour in terms of the possible function or purpose of that behaviour, for the young person. ***“The Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR do not prevent the sharing of information for the purposes of keeping children safe. Fears about sharing information must not be allowed to stand in the way of the need to promote the welfare and protect the safety of children.” (para 78, KCSIE 2019)***The *A framework for contextual safeguarding reflection within a structured conversation* is a tool which schools, colleges and other educational settings can use to support their thinking and actions to safeguard young people. It has been designed to be used by two people to structure a conversation around concerns which may be held about a young person’s behaviours which are not fully understood. In this sense it can be an early intervention tool which over time can turn a ‘thin’ story into a rich picture. This richer the picture, the more informed will be the decisions about what to do next, including how to keep young people safe. When using the tool, it is helpful if one person takes on the role of questioner and recorder, whilst the other is the person who knows most about the concerns. It is preferable to answer the questions in the order in which they are listed in the tool, which means that the questioner may need to ensure the focus is maintained on each question in turn. It is important that where individuals are named in the record, that there is an evidence base for what is asserted. The outcome of the structured conversation will be a shared, evidence-based understanding of the young person’s situation, and one which may support a referral to the MASH. Settings will need to consider how the record that the structured conversation creates will be stored. Where more than one young person is named in the record, it may help to maintain a redacted, cross-referenced copy in that other young person’s school file. This recognises that schools as communities are well-placed to identify connections between individuals about whom there are safeguarding concerns. ***References***Keeping Children Safe in Education (2019)Working Together (2018) |