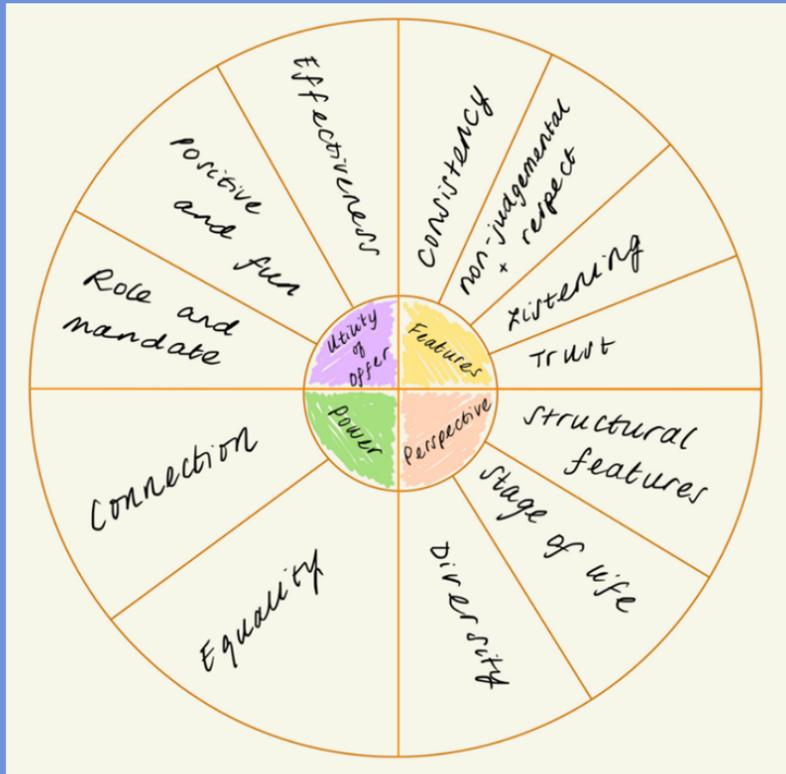# YOUNG PEOPLE'S RELATIONSHIP FRAMEWORK

A framework outlining what young people said they wanted from relationships with professionals that were tasked with creating safety in contexts.

"[Young people] have a right to know what things are being talked about them" (Young Person).

"Involving them in conversations and decisions that concern them. So you know, you don't need to be in every single meeting, but maybe a debrief, this is what was said, this is what's happened, what do you think? Do you agree, disagree, if not why, why do you disagree? If you agree, why do you agree, which do you think this helps you?... You don't want decisions to be made for you, because then you won't make none for yourself... You're still going to be vulnerable if you have somebody making all decisions" (Young Person)

Features of a relationship

Consistency: Having the same person, over time, being consistent in the approach

Listening: Listening to us and also hearing and responding to show you hear us

Non-judgement and respect: Treating us as adults, not talking down to us

Trust: The existence of trust even in light of the harm that has happened and what we have gone through

Perspective of the young person forming the relationship

Diversity: Recognises we have different personality types and ways of engaging

Stage of life: Allowing us to make mistakes etc. Know we're kids

Structural features: Understanding things in context and any discrimination we may have experienced

Power within the relationship

Connection: There needs to be some sort of relationship – familiarity, shared interested or being like one of us, not outsiders

Equality: Being transparent about what is going on, what is being shared with who and when and enabling young people's participation in decision making and working in collaboration

Utility of Offer

Effectiveness: Doing things that are useful – what can you offer, how you can make change and effectively keep us safe?

Positive and fun: Recreation, being friendly, being independent and having fun

Role and mandate: Recognising the positionality of the professional and the impact of that on the relationship. Sometimes people are too close because of their role i.e. Youth work or maybe we have bad history with professionals i.e. social work roles / police

"Me personally, if I feel like someone's constantly shouting at me, even though I know it is for the best, if I feel like someone's constantly shouting at me or just constantly going at, I'm just like, yeah, get out my face, I don't want to talk to you anymore, ...'Yeah, just go away, I don't want to be here'. I think they have to be more understanding, I know they're not aware of what's going on in the outside world, but they have to be more aware ...to find out what is going on in order to help the situation, and then they will be able to like pick up the signs easy and faster, and identify the problem earlier rather than later. Because I think that would be a solution" (young person)

The five core values of Contextual Safeguarding provide an opportunity to build a child protection system that has young people's participation as a central element. A Contextual Safeguarding approach should be:

Of particular importance to young people's engagement is the principle ensuring that Contextual Safeguarding systems are evidence-informed and grounded in the reality of young people's lives. A key way to do this is to work in collaboration with young people in order to make decisions about safety. Finding opportunities to build partnerships with young people and finding ways to engage with them is therefore crucial for taking the work forward.

Speaking with young people

Between 2019 and 2021 the Contextual Safeguarding programme was funded to consult with children on the 'concept' of Contextual Safeguarding in nine local authorities in England and Wales that were developing a Contextual Safeguarding response to extra-familial risk. The consultations with young people aimed to understand the implications of a Contextual Safeguarding approach for different groups of children and young people, in different settings, and to inform the system development in each site . A mixed methods approach to consultation was taken through the use of individual surveys, interviews and focus groups.
The Young People's Relationship Framework draws on the data from the interviews (n=7) and focus groups (n=9) with young people across the 9 sites. In total we spoke to 66 young people in these interviews and focus groups.

Young people's involvement
The project wanted to draw on the perspectives of young people to inform the future development of safeguarding services related to extra-familial harm. In order to do this, the project looked to involve a range of young people aged between 12 and 21 years who were existing or potential users of safeguarding services in relation to extra-familial harm.
All potential participants were engaged through a gatekeeper who had an existing relationship with the young person; this was either via voluntary or community (VCS) organisation, a practitioner from Social Care, or a practitioner from a Youth Offending Team Gatekeepers across all sites identified young people to participate in the research, and advised the research team on potential participants' needs and suitability for safe involvement in the research. Gatekeepers also provided one-to-one preparatory and follow up support for each participant.

The research also worked with the Young People's Advisory Panel (YRAP) at the Safer Young Lives Research Centre, who aim to challenge the marginalisation of young people's voices in safeguarding sectors and the maintenance of damaging power imbalances within both organisational and public responses to this form of abuse (Hamilton et al. 2019). Seven YRAP members were involved in supporting and consulting on the in two ways. YRAP members reviewed and piloted consultation resources, providing feedback and advice on scenarios and questions.

Consulting on systems change
Designing methods to consult with young people about the current child protection system and proposed changes was not straightforward. In order to consult with young people about a Contextual Safeguarding approach and the implications of this, a certain level of information needed to be provided about how the current system works in order to situate proposed changes.

A series of 'scenario' activities based on adapted real-life cases of young people experiencing harm outside the home and the responses from Children's Social Care were used as a discussion point during interviews and focus groups. These included incidents of extra-familial harm in peer groups, schools, and community spaces. Young people were then asked questions about the scenario. Questions asked were based on the following four themes:
- A young person's safety and harm in each scenario;
- Trusted professionals and adults who could support the young person and create safety;
- The current child protection response received by the young person; and
- Alternative ways of responding as per a Contextual Safeguarding response.

Whilst theme two focused specifically on trusted relationships with adults (with questions being asked such as is there anyone the young person would feel safe to talk to? What is it about that person or their approach or position that would enable the young person to trust them?) discussions on relationships emerged across all the themes. For example, when discussing alternative ways of responding, young people would discuss adults, such as youth workers, who they would like to form part of the response.
The use of these scenarios enabled young people to reflect on the professional response and the system without having to share their own experiences.

Developing the framework

In order to develop the Young People's Relationship Framework the Contextual Safeguarding team analysed the data from the young people's consultations thematically using Nvivo12, coding for features where young people implicitly and explicitly spoke about relationships. We then reviewed these findings to identify emergent patterns that were then grouped and clearly defined.

The data fell across four overarching thematic areas:
- Features: the features of a trusted relationship;
- Perspective: the positionality/perspective/approach of the person forming the relationship;
- Power: the nature of the relationship and the power within the relationship; and
- Utility of offer: what the adult can offer as part of the relationship.

A number of subthemes fell under the four overarching themes. The overarching themes and subthemes formed the basis of the Young People's Relationship Framework. The table below outlines the overarching themes and subthemes:

Theme	Sub theme heading	Description and examples from the data
Features of a relationship	Consistency	Having the same person, over time, being consistent in the approach
	Listening	Listening to us and also hearing and responding to show you hear
	Non-judgemental and respect	Treating us as adults, not talking down to us
	Trust	The existence of trust even in light of the harm that has happened and what we have gone through
Perspective of the person forming the relationship	Diversity	Recognises we have different personality types and ways of engaging
	Stage of life	Allowing us to make mistakes etc. Know we're kids
	Structural features	Understanding things in context and any discrimination we may have experienced
Power within the relationship	Connection	There needs to be some sort of relationship – familiarity, shared interested or being like one of us, not outsiders
	Equality	Being transparent about what is going on, what is being shared with who and when and enabling young people's participation in decision making and working in collaboration
Utility of Offer	Effectiveness	Doing things that are useful – what can you offer, how you can make change and can you effectively keep us safe?
	Positive and fun	Recreation, being friendly, being independent and having fun
	Role and mandate	Recognising the positionality of the professional and the impact of that on the relationship. Sometimes people are too close because of their role i.e. Youth work or maybe we have bad history with professionals i.e. social work roles / police

"You're a kid and you're just nosey, so I mean how are you going to – how is that going to be implemented, how are we going to get parents to understand that this is not their child being an idiot or stupid, this is their child being young and not fully competent of what's happening or what's going on around them" (Young Person).

"["]I've been at risk and I kid you not, it's just me having fun, but in reality, it's not, it's very, very dangerous. My social worker she was my backbone, she was there at times where she should have just like ticked her box and left. So it's just about consistency, whether you believe and brother I believe I was at risk, she knew and she was there every day, whether it was removing me from the area and speaking to me at a bowling alley, or taking me to a coffee shop, or just chatting to me at home, or maybe I go and see her for a walk in the park... It would be like sometimes there were more of like ruses and prompts to get me to talk, "You don't want to go to a workshop next week? Well then, what are we going to do?" Then I create something and then, "Do you see what's happening?" Then she's just a dominant cycle of positive things..., like I said, consistency, trustworthy relationships, open space, reliability, stuff like that is majorly important (Young Person).

"Getting to that point of the relationship between social worker and young person where you can actually implement change, not only as a young person taking an initiative, but to help the social worker help them, it's actually working, it's coming into effect" (Young Person).

"Engaging with young people will give them a deeper insight into what's actually going on because if they just decide to just look at something with a bird's eye view and see this and this is happening, they won't know what's happening at ground level, what's actually going on with the young person" (Young Person).