



**Hillingdon Safeguarding
Partnership**



Contextual Safeguarding Strategy

2023-2026

The vision of the Safeguarding Children Partnership is for every child and young person to be and feel safe, enjoy good physical, emotional and mental health, have pride in their unique identities, feel that they belong and have opportunities to thrive.

1. Introduction

Hillingdon Safeguarding Children Partnership has a responsibility to work across all the local agencies that provide services for children and young people. The main function of the Partnership is to coordinate the way services are provided to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in the borough and to ensure that services are provided to agreed standards.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023) sets out the expectation that the safeguarding partners should agree on ways to coordinate their services, act as a strategic leadership group in supporting and engaging others and implement local and national learning, including from serious child safeguarding incidents.

A whole system approach to contextual safeguarding demands creative, generous collaboration and collective leadership within Hillingdon. Collective leadership must come from the three statutory safeguarding partners: health, police, and the Local Authority working closely and cooperatively with all other statutory agencies including adult social care, education, housing, and youth justice.

This strategy does not and cannot sit in isolation and the Safeguarding Partnership will contribute towards the Serious Violence Duty which, from 2023, requires Local Authorities, the Police, Fire and Rescue, specified criminal justice agencies and health authorities to work together to formulate an evidence based analysis of the problems associated with serious violence in Hillingdon, and then produce and implement a strategy detailing how they will respond to those issues.

In Hillingdon this duty is discharged through the Safer Hillingdon Board. The Safeguarding Children Partnership and the Executive Leadership Group will contribute to the Borough wide Serious Violence Strategy and plans through the safeguarding children lens.

To further these ambitions, the three safeguarding partners must set out how they will motivate, support and work together with other relevant agencies. Relevant Agencies are those organisations and agencies whose involvement is considered by the safeguarding partners as necessary to safeguard children.

1.1 Contextual Safeguarding is an emerging approach to understanding, and responding to, children’s experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that children form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Parents and carers have limited influence over these contexts, and children’s experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships.

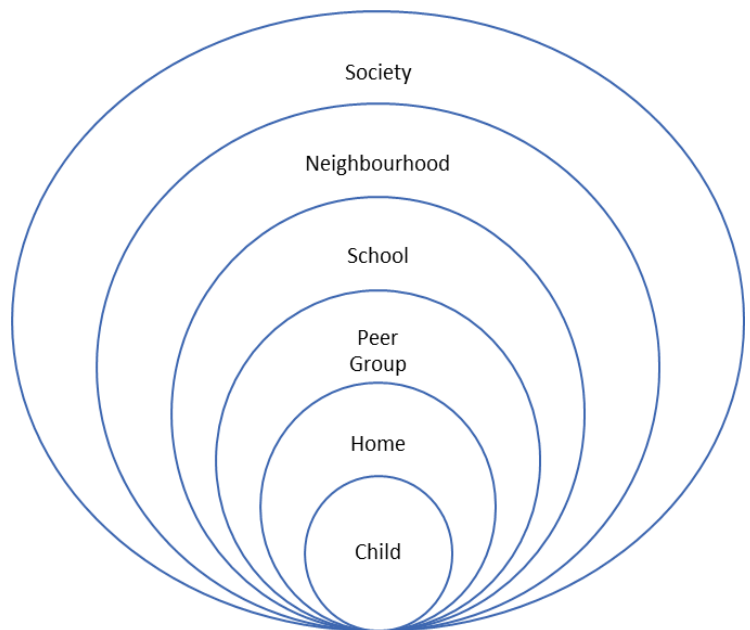


Figure 1. Adapted Contextual Safeguarding Model (Based on Firmin et al, 2018)

Whilst the harm that children experience outside of the home is not new, the concept of contextual safeguarding is innovative and encompasses an approach that is ecological, strengths based and has partnerships at the core. The Contextual Safeguarding Network published a [set of values](#) that underpin Contextual Safeguarding Practice:



Figure 2. Contextual Safeguarding Values

The contextual approach assists in reducing the risks to children from all forms of extrafamilial harm. This includes child sexual exploitation, missing children, gangs, county lines, radicalisation, modern slavery and all forms of criminal exploitation. It recognises that the child’s experience of exploitation

can undermine their relationship with their parents and that the child's abuse is often beyond the control of their parents/carers.

As with many forms of abuse, exploitation brings with it an imbalance of power within the relationship. This power imbalance significantly impairs children's ability to ask for help or to form safe relationships with professionals or family/friends. Research tells us that children are routinely coerced or tricked, with blackmail then used as a strategy by perpetrators to continue the abuse. This leads to further alienation and the isolation of victims from those who could provide help and support. A child's misplaced sense of culpability adds to the barriers in forming trusting and protective relationships with those adults who have a caring investment in them.

Adopting a contextual approach supports a shift in mindset from individualising the responsibility for safety to the sole child/ren and family, to recognising the importance of wider aspects of life, relationships and community dynamics that affect us all. It provides a framework for children, families, communities, and professionals to understand that there are factors, or 'contexts', outside of the family unit that contribute to increased risk of extrafamilial harm. Intuitively this carries an opportunity for relationships to be developed that facilitate meaningful intervention in these contexts. Furthermore, it develops the professional and community focus from seeing the child as responsible for "making risky choices" towards questioning the capacity of contexts (and the adults in those "contexts") to increase safety.

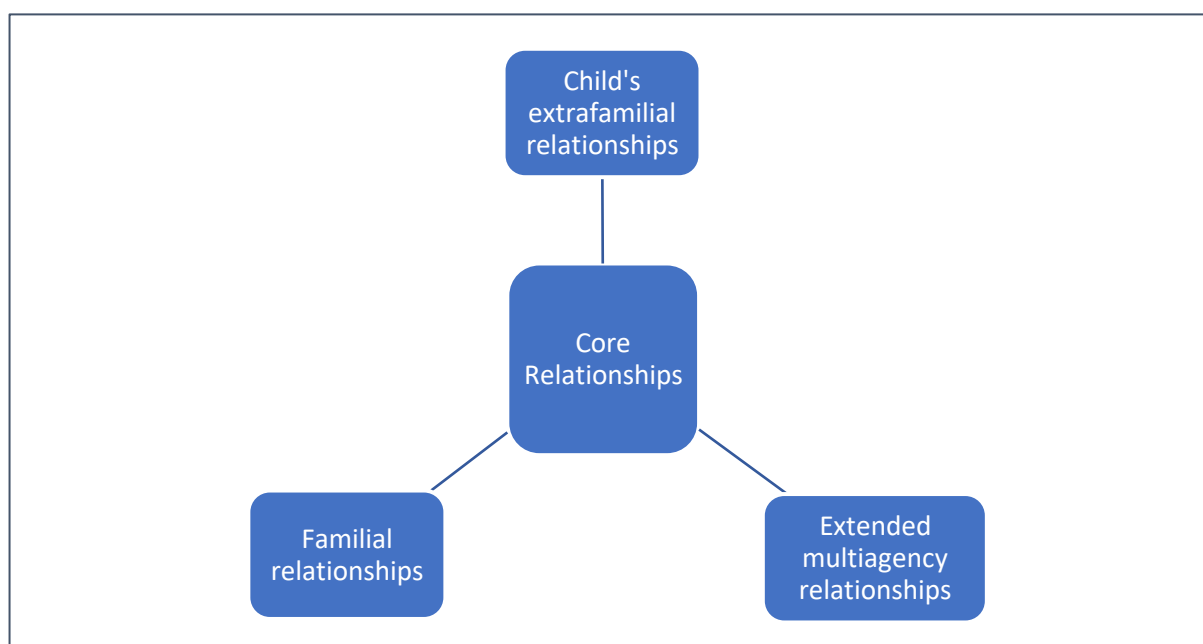


Figure 3: Relationships core to a Contextual Safeguarding (CS) approach

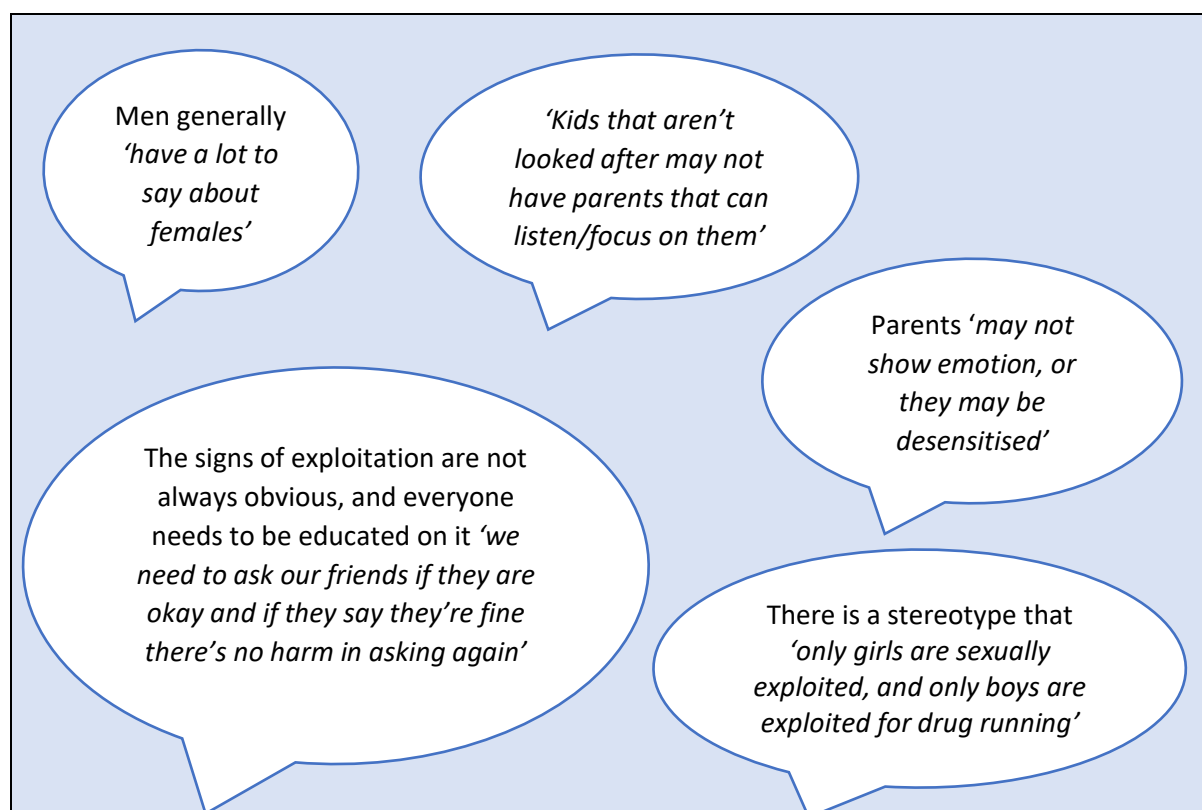
1.2. Listening to Children and Young People

Hillingdon Children’s Rights and Participation Service coordinates a range of consultation groups with children, each group meets regularly to share their thoughts and feelings about the support they receive, and to have fun together. The groups are:

- ‘Talkers’ – for children aged 6-11 who are cared for by foster carers
- ‘Step-Up’ for children aged 12-16 who are cared for by foster carers
- ‘Stepping Out’ for children and young people aged 16+ who are care experienced
- ‘Youth Voice’ for children who have a social worker, or a youth justice worker

Listening to children is fundamental to good practice. It reminds us of the importance of a child first approach, ensuring our language is child friendly, that we avoid jargon and that we make sure we have the child ‘in mind’ both in practice, and as a strategic group.

Our Youth Voice children have reported that they notice a gap between *‘the rich families and the poor’* and raised concerns about some areas of Hillingdon, Hayes in particular. Children have noticed *‘a lot of drug dealing’* which they felt was not addressed and made them feel unsafe. Some children described being *‘g checked’* (for gang affiliation) on buses and trains. This group felt that toxic relationships are *‘where you end up owing something to someone...it’s not mutual, you can be exploited for stuff or money and feel pressured’*. Adding that it is typically an *‘older person taking advantage’*. Some other views expressed included:



1.3. The Practitioner's Perspective

As part of the review of Serious Youth Violence in the borough, professionals reflected on what helped promote engagement with children at risk of extrafamilial harm. Key points are summarised below, with the full report available via the Safeguarding Partnership.

- *'Engaging with parents and children, separately and together to understand their needs and the skills required to build a partnership for meaningful engagement'*
- *'Professionals validated and understood why families had mistrust for some services. They developed trust by being reliable, listening and providing regular updates'*
- *'Child first approach – understanding all areas that impact a child i.e., age, gender, class, ethnicity, neighbourhood '*
- *'Actively celebrating the small wins – being specific and congruent in praise 'I noticed when you did...'*
- *'An attuned, emotionally intelligent approach to practice; anticipating what a child might be feeling, and voicing this to check accuracy and give the child 'permission to ask for help'*
- *'Establishing shared goals with the child and working towards these 'doing with and not to''*
- *'Mapping exercises to understand friendships/networks'*
- *'Good relationship with specific spaces or people – the child feels comfortable and has 'permission' to seek support when required'*

What supports effective multidisciplinary working:

Mentalising the child and their family to understand how they are feeling

Listening, valuing and respecting one another's expertise and perspective

Enabling all to contribute to meetings – different perspectives have equal value, regardless of qualifications or seniority

Clear plans that avoid duplication

Understanding of the time required to make progress in complex situations

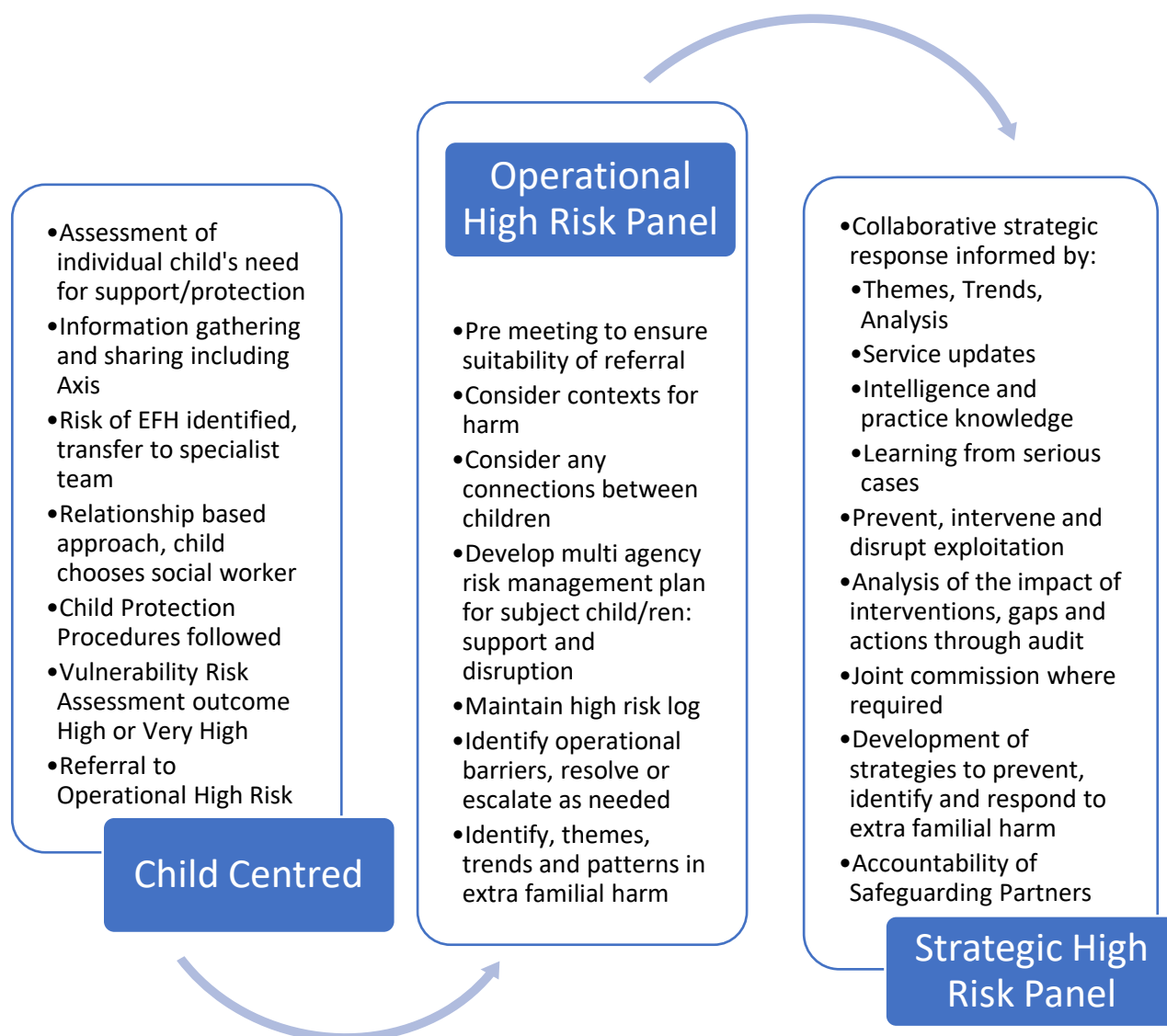
Being realistic about expectations of other professionals in the child's support network

A team around the child approach – shared ownership and responsibility

1.4. Our Work so far

In Hillingdon we have an engaged and motivated multiagency partnership that coordinates services to children who are vulnerable to extrafamilial harm. The activity of the safeguarding partnership is detailed alongside its outcomes in the Annual Reports which are published [here](#). We are committed to continue and build on the strong foundations set and innovative practice of services across the Partnership. Existing provision is set out in the Serious Youth Violence Review Executive Summary.

Figure 4: Extrafamilial Harm Continuum of Support and Intervention



In recognition of the changing nature and scale of the harm children can experience we cannot stand still and are committed to respond through implementing a strategic response to harm focused on relationships with children, families, and the communities in which they live. They will be supported by a well-trained and motivated network of professionals who promote effective, child-centred locality work and a solution focussed strategic leadership.

This strategy highlights the areas we will be focussing on over the next three years with the aim to embed a locality approach that focuses on building Stronger Communities and Stronger Families that safeguard children. To optimise success, we have identified some key aims and underlying principles:

- 1) To maintain and develop our existing structures and foundation of good practice
- 2) To reinforce our relationship-based approach with children and their families.
- 3) To empower children, families, communities and professionals to recognise and respond to early indicators of need.
- 4) To be flexible and dynamic in approach, ensuring that we can adapt to meet the sometimes rapidly changing needs and priorities of communities.

We will do this through raising awareness of the contextual safeguarding approach, building relationships, consulting with children, families and communities, and by supporting the development of location assessments and plans that deliver meaningful change.

2. Local Implementation Framework

The contextual safeguarding approach will be piloted in a defined place, or 'locality'. This place will be identified through analysis of information from children, practice knowledge and intelligence about areas of high need in the Borough. It is important that a pragmatic and focussed decision is made about the parameters of the 'place' for example, a specific park, neighbourhood or street is more likely to be impactful than an entire ward of the Borough.

1. Safeguarding Partners and relevant agencies will pool information and data that supports a comprehensive understanding of the place and ensures that we build from a solid foundation of existing knowledge. This could include demographic statistics, crime reports, known risks and safety factors. The practitioner(s) coordinating the intervention should also visit locations to build relationships and inform their understanding of the environmental and social context.
2. Devise and deliver a programme of awareness raising and training for children, parents, communities, and professionals. This should encompass a range of methods and utilise a cascading approach, with all partners disseminating information and increasing knowledge about contextual safeguarding throughout the community.
3. Concurrently the Partnership will undertake a coherent program of engagement that includes:
 - a. Listening to children and families
 - b. Listening to the community, businesses, and existing support services

4. Coproduce a contextual safeguarding assessment that evidences areas of vulnerability, risk, resilience, and resource. A context weighting approach (see appendices) is used to consider the importance of each factor, and to establish and agree the plan.
5. The wider community and helping agencies work together to deliver the contextual safeguarding plan. This may involve allocating resources, doing things differently, connecting people, enhancing safe behaviours and locations, deploying targeted interventions, bidding for local initiatives, building resilience and celebrating diversity.
6. A set of Key Performance Indicators will be used to monitor the impact and effectiveness of the contextual safeguarding intervention. These will be specific to each area as they are informed by the findings of the locality assessment. Suggested measures include:
 - a. An increase in the number of children supported through a Stronger Families Plan
 - b. A reduction in the number, severity, and frequency of known incidents of extrafamilial harm
 - c. Monitoring the 'reach' of awareness raising activity
 - d. Community perception of increased safety

Statutory services will continue to support those children assessed as at high risk, considering opportunities for targeted support, intervention, and diversion for younger siblings.



Figure 5. Hillingdon Implementation Model

3. Strategic Delivery Plan

- The strategy is agreed and endorsed by the Safeguarding Children’s Board and by the Executive Leadership Group thus providing a high level of ownership and support to implementation
- The strategy and the implementation are rooted in national research and data and in local context and information
- The strategy builds on existing good practice across the partnership on both statutory and early intervention.
- The strategy includes comprehensive community engagement and coproduction in assessing the locality, developing actions, and reviewing the impact
- We will consult with the Hillingdon children to develop a definition of contextual safeguarding that is meaningful to them. We will continue to consult regularly as the context in which they live is often changing.
- The implementation will start in a pilot area identified through the Serious Youth Violence review. The pilot will run for up to 18 months with review points every 3 months. The pilot will report its findings to the Safeguarding Partnership Boards.

4. Governance and Accountability

Governance and challenge will be provided by Hillingdon Safeguarding Children Partnership Board. The Strategic High-Risk Panel will monitor progress against the strategic objectives on a quarterly basis, with onward reporting to the Safeguarding Children Partnership Board and Executive Leadership Group.

5. Appendices

Contextual Safeguarding Network [Contextual Safeguarding Research Durham University](#)

ListenUp! [Listen Up – Amplifying lesser heard voices in child safeguarding \(listenupresearch.org\)](#)

Pan London Exploitation Toolkit, 2021, accessed here:

https://www.met.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/central/services/accessing-information/child-abuse/the-london-child-exploitation-operating_protocol_2021.pdf

TCE Practice Principles [Practice Principles for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm - Tackling Child Exploitation \(researchinpractice.org.uk\)](#)