

Safeguarding adolescents: balancing responses to risk and welfare

learning from research on sexual violence

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The International Centre

- Committed to increasing understanding of, and improving responses to child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking in local, national and international context.

Achieved through:

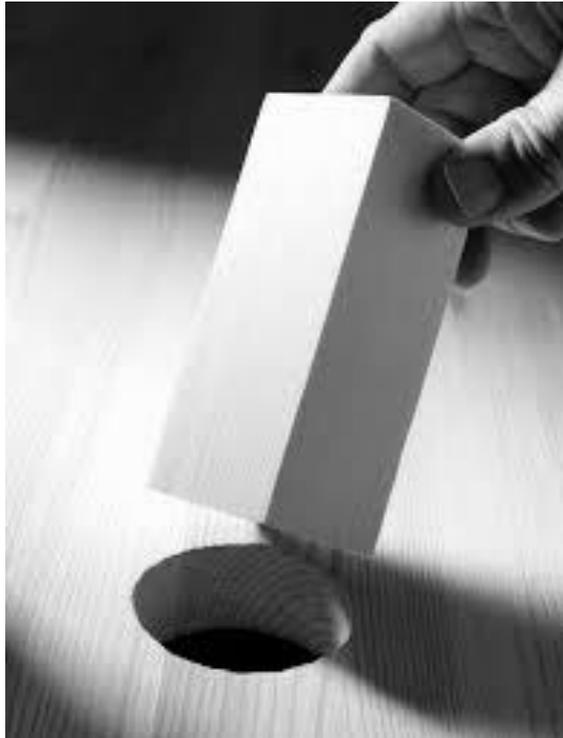
- academic rigour and research excellence
- collaborative and partnership based approaches to applied social research
- meaning and ethical engagement of children and young people

Overview:

learning from research on sexual violence

1. *'Square pegs in round holes'?* Challenges of safeguarding adolescents in current system
2. *Looking beyond the individual:* locating risk in relationships and contexts
3. *Working with young people's narratives of risk and resilience*
4. *So what?* A need for a new approaches?

Part 1: 'square pegs in round holes'



“When resources are strained, adolescents’ needs are frequently deprioritised in favour of those of younger children.”

(Gorin and Jobe, 2013)

Adolescence – what do we know?

- **SOCIALLY: Increasing influence of peers;** increasing independence and evolving capacity
- **LEGALLY: A ‘liminal space’** (Raby, 2006) : **legislatively and socially** – caught between status of child and adult – in law and in culture BUT still in need of (and entitled to) **protection as child.**
- **BIOLOGICALLY: Rapid brain development** (but must avoid deterministic thinking!); **Risk taking as evolutionary adaptation?** (Coleman, 2011; Hanson and Holmes, 2013)

Adolescence risks: perception vs reality

Perceived as:

- **more resilient (than younger children),**
- **more able to deal with maltreatment – seek help from professionals etc**
- **less likely to face significant risk**
- Studies suggest impact of maltreatment in adolescence has stronger association with negative outcomes than childhood only maltreatment. *(Rees et al., 2010)*
- **more likely to be blamed for contributing to/exacerbating risk**

‘Imperfect victims’ (Rees and Stein, 1999)



Imperfect victims – CSE research

- *‘... a lot of their attitude is ‘you’re just a little slapper – a slapper who likes sleeping with older men – they think it’s just kids coming onto older men.’*
- *‘They stereotype you, because of how my mum looks – she looks like she takes a lot of drugs - then they think stuff about you.’*
- *“People’s stereotype is ‘girls like that , that’s what they do”* (Comments from WWFU, CEOP Consultation, 2011)
- *“She tried to blame my upbringing for the people that I was associating with .. she kind of like blamed me for what had happened”* (Beckett and Warrington, 2015)

Language and identity

- “Promiscuous”
- “Manipulative”
- “Streetwise”
- “Risky choices”
- “Risky behaviour”
- “Absconder”
- “Sexually aware / experienced”
- “Putting herself at risk”
- “Aggressive”
- “Out of control”
- “Liar”
- “Boys being boys”
- “Glamour”
- “Will not engage”

What do these phrases imply about the source of young people’s risk or their ‘troubling or harmful behaviours’

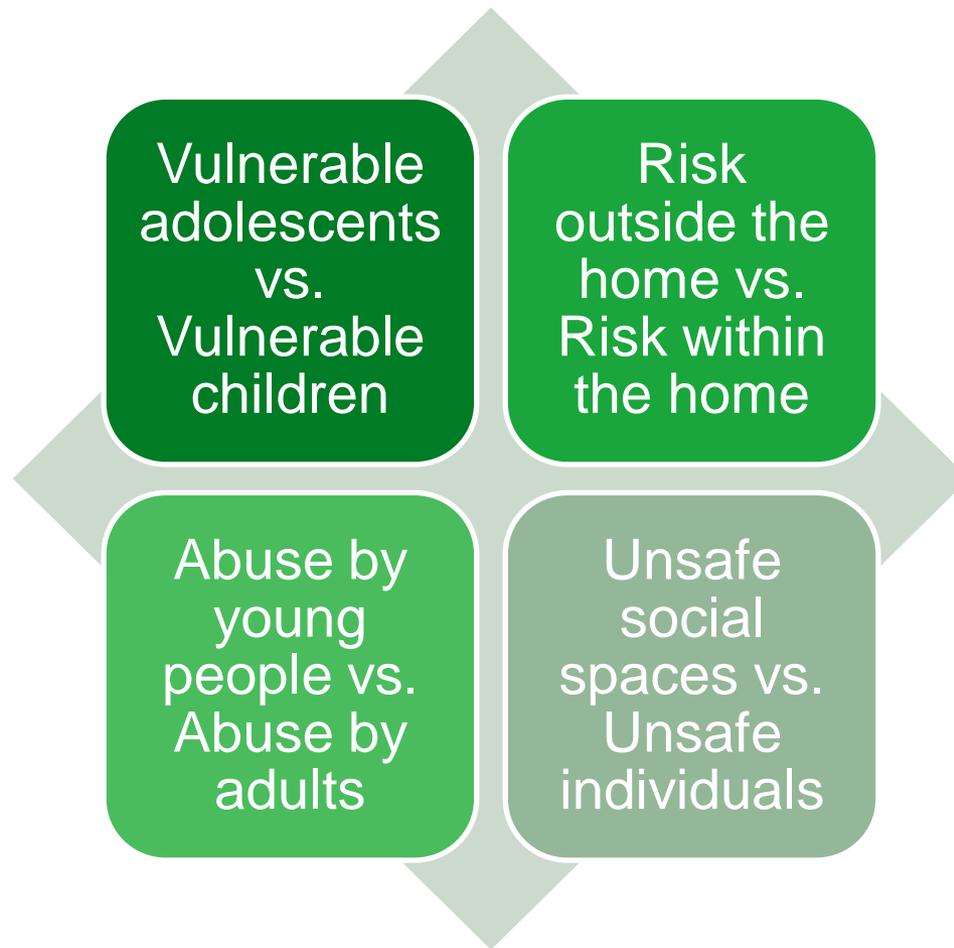
What impact does language have:

**on professionals?
on young people?**

Victim/ perpetrator overlap

- Learning from research on gang associated sexual violence (Beckett et al., 2013); (Firmin, 2015) and on young people who are victims of crime (HMIC/ Beckett et al., 2016)
- **Issues like CSE, harmful sexual behaviour, youth violence, domestic violence and going missing often intersect, affecting the same young people, in the same environments.**
- **Role of ‘peer group norms’** and difficulties of challenging or disrupting (e.g. hyper-masculine cultures; normalisation of sexual violence)

'Square pegs in round holes'? systems challenges



Firmin (2015)

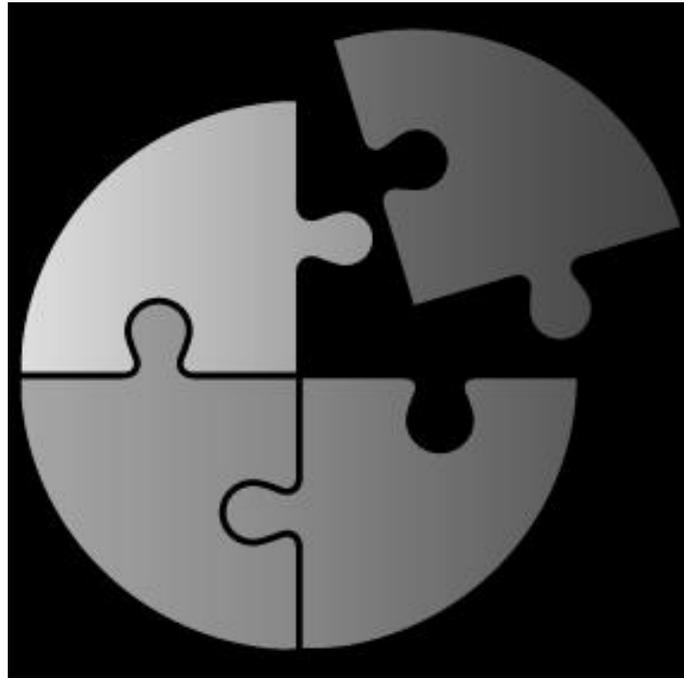
Current safeguarding processes and systems

- **Historically reactive:** responses based on disclosure
- Response **weighted to 1:1 intervention** with those exploited/exploiting
- **Reliance on relocation** and use of secure
- **Failure to account for interconnected nature of adolescent vulnerability** (outside of siloes)
- **Connected cases and peer-group influence not captured** by child and family assessment
- **Young people's own perspectives continue to be sidelined**
- **Practice and policy responses develop in a siloed fashion**

Michael Ungar: *Nurturing Hidden Resilience in Troubled Youth* (2004)

- Tendency to **locate the source of ‘troubling behaviours’ displayed by ‘high-risk’ young people in the *individual* rather than *relationships* and *contexts* to which they belong**
- **Failure to incorporate the meanings and logic of the young person in our understanding of what is going on – *how do they see it? What needs do these behaviours serve?***

Part 2: *Looking beyond the individual:* locating risk in relationships and contexts

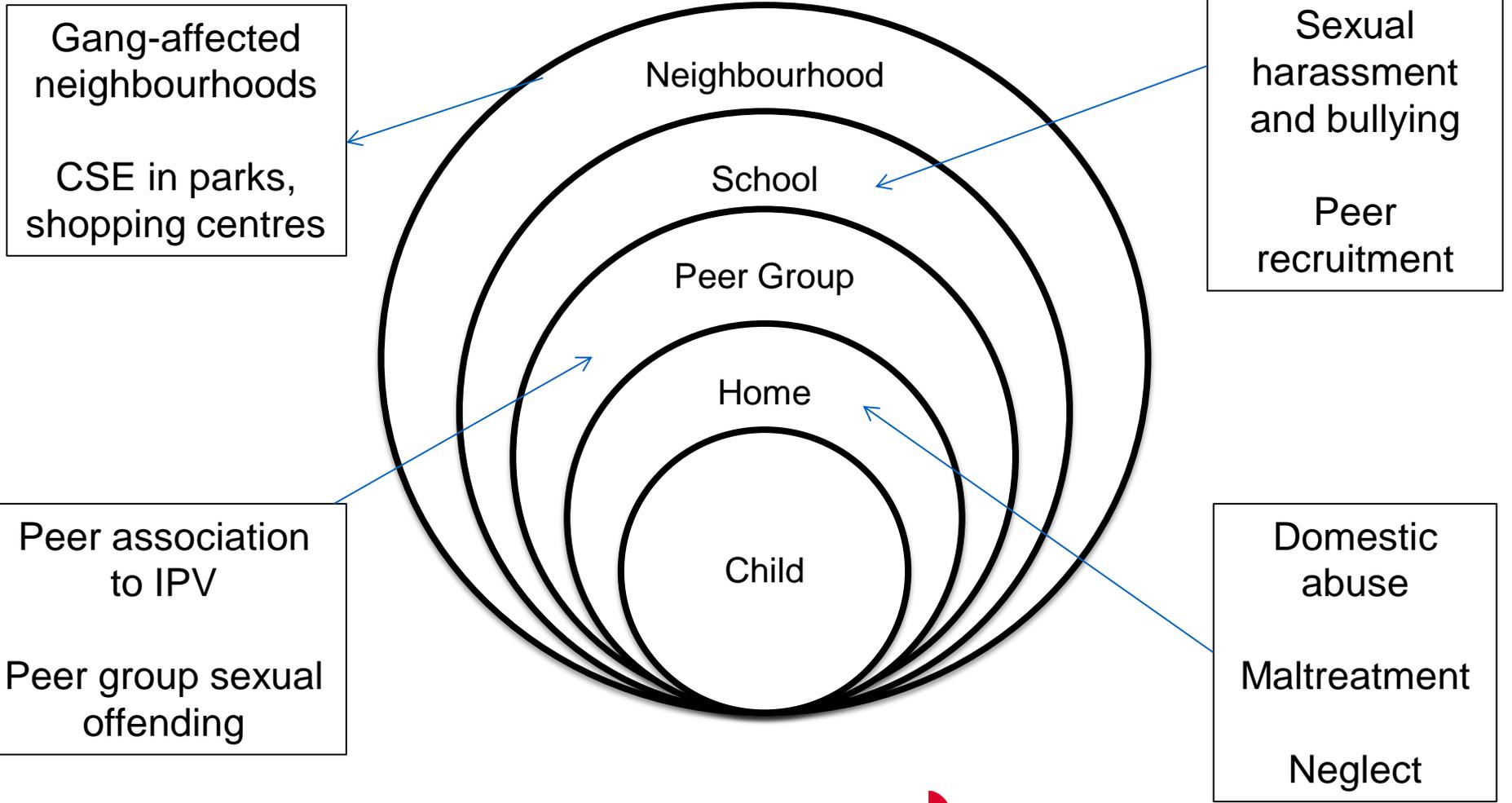


Firmin et al. (2016)

“As young people get older their experiences of abuse are often associated with public environments in which they spend their time. Yet child protection procedures routinely intervene with individual young people and their families rather than the public environments where abuse occurs.”

• .

Contextual perspectives on risk



Evidence base for model

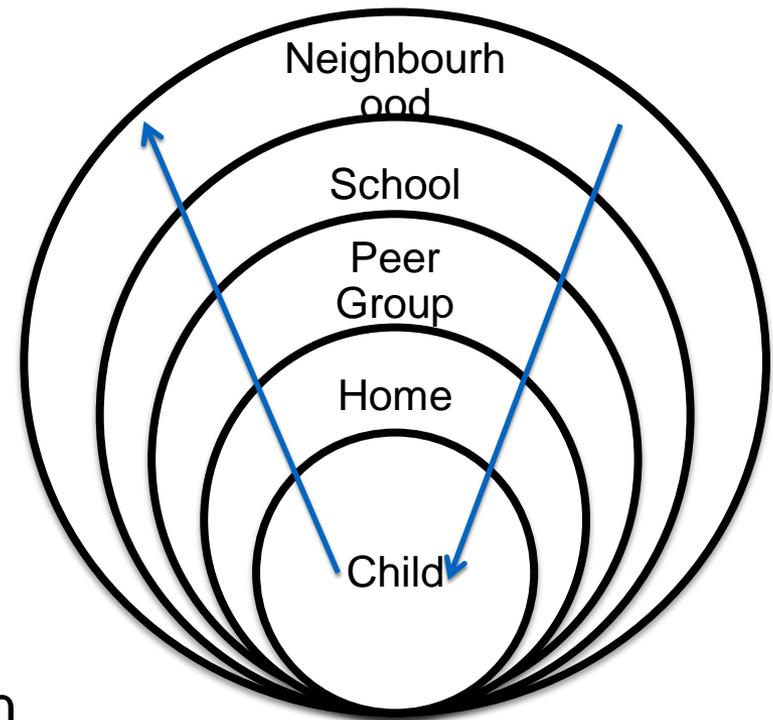
- Nine cases, (six rape and three murder), one police force, randomly sampled (once selection criteria had been applied)
- 145 young people, 160 homes, 21 peer groups, 30 schools and 9 neighbourhoods

Categorisation of young people	Frequency	Percent
Complainant	9	6.2
Suspect	76	52.4
Witness	45	31.0
Other	15	10.3
Total	145	100.0

'Dependent agents': a contextual account

Young people who abuse their peers:

1. Are social agents
2. Informed/ constrained by a range of socialisation sites
3. Dependent upon those who manage or navigate those sites
4. Social change located in dual 1:1 intervention to address actions and shift in the social conditions in which they act



Ongoing policy & practice challenges

- Confusion as to best policy fit for issues –CSE/ VAWG/ DV/ SYV
- Silo working between serious youth violence & SVE
- Inconsistent coding and data analysis
- Inadequate information sharing
- Primarily reactive rather than proactive and preventative response
- Gendered assumptions around (sexual) violence
- Short-term funding initiatives
- Systems designed around risk by individuals/adults/within the home/of younger children

Part 3: *Working with young people's narratives of risk and resilience*



Young people recognising risk

I thought it was right. I thought it was normal. I thought ‘why they not letting me have a boyfriend?’ ‘Why they saying it’s wrong?’ Everybody has a boyfriend. But I didn’t realise then how it should be equal and stuff.

Sophie, 17

You might go back to people’s houses and have a party and you might not want to miss that... like have a laugh - you want to get involved when people are doing stuff – like your friends. You don’t want to be left out all the time...you’re thinking ‘Oh, you’ve only got one life – why don’t I just live it?’ - Like do what I want - take as many risks as possible.

Lorraine, 15

(Warrington, 2013)

Understanding adolescent response to risk

- Adolescent choices and approaches to risk informed/constrained by developmental processes and the actions of others in their past and present
- Adaptive responses to previous harm (trauma?)
- Choices and behaviours are, at times, not in their longer-term best interests
- BUT will have 'goals, aspirations and values that are consistent with their longer-term well-being (though may be relatively hidden) (Hanson and Holmes, 2014: 24)

Resistance and agency

Young people's strategies

- non- disclosure; partial disclosure
- non compliance or rebellion
- avoidance or non-engagement, and
- defiant or abusive behaviours.

I think that's why I did it (ran away) – I just did the opposite of what they said. I thought that if they said to me that I shouldn't do it, I would just do it. I think to be honest that made me want to do it more. The more that they told me not to –the more I would do it.

(Lorraine, 15 in Warrington, 2013

After what happened, I never tell my social worker anything no more. If she [my social worker] needs me then she'll come to me, but I never ask her nothing or tell her nothing no more because I don't trust her.

(Sean, 15 in Warrington, 2013)

Uncomfortable parallels

Danger that services reproduce power imbalances that already characterise young people's lives

Workers expect you to tell them everything about your lives but then they tell you nothing about theirs . . . that's how the men work too – they find out everything about you then don't even tell you their real name

Illy

(Warrington, 2013)

“I was basically a puppet. When they wanted me, I had to do it. When they didn't want me, I heard nothing” (Beckett and Warrington, 2015)

Resistance and agency

Young people's reasons for resisting support for CSE:

- i. desire to maintain control over sensitive information – particularly in the context of an absence of trust in workers and organisations
- ii. the avoidance of shame and embarrassment;
- iii. a desire to avoid additional trauma and difficulty anticipated from police involvement
- iv. the avoidance of conflict
- v. fears about physical safety being exacerbated by service involvement
- vi. a desire to challenge or resist authority to assert own power

As likely to demonstrate resilience/engagement in protective choices, as simple examples of defiance?

Resistance, agency and context

Young people's own resistance to professional interventions is often underpinned by the lack of legitimacy they give to professionals who fail to recognise the wider context in which both risk and young people's emerging sexual identities are negotiated."

...the efficacy of professional interventions is determined by young people's willingness to engage, and that those services which keep young people informed and involved in decision making processes are most likely to be valued by young people.

- (Firmin, Warrington and Pearce, 2016)

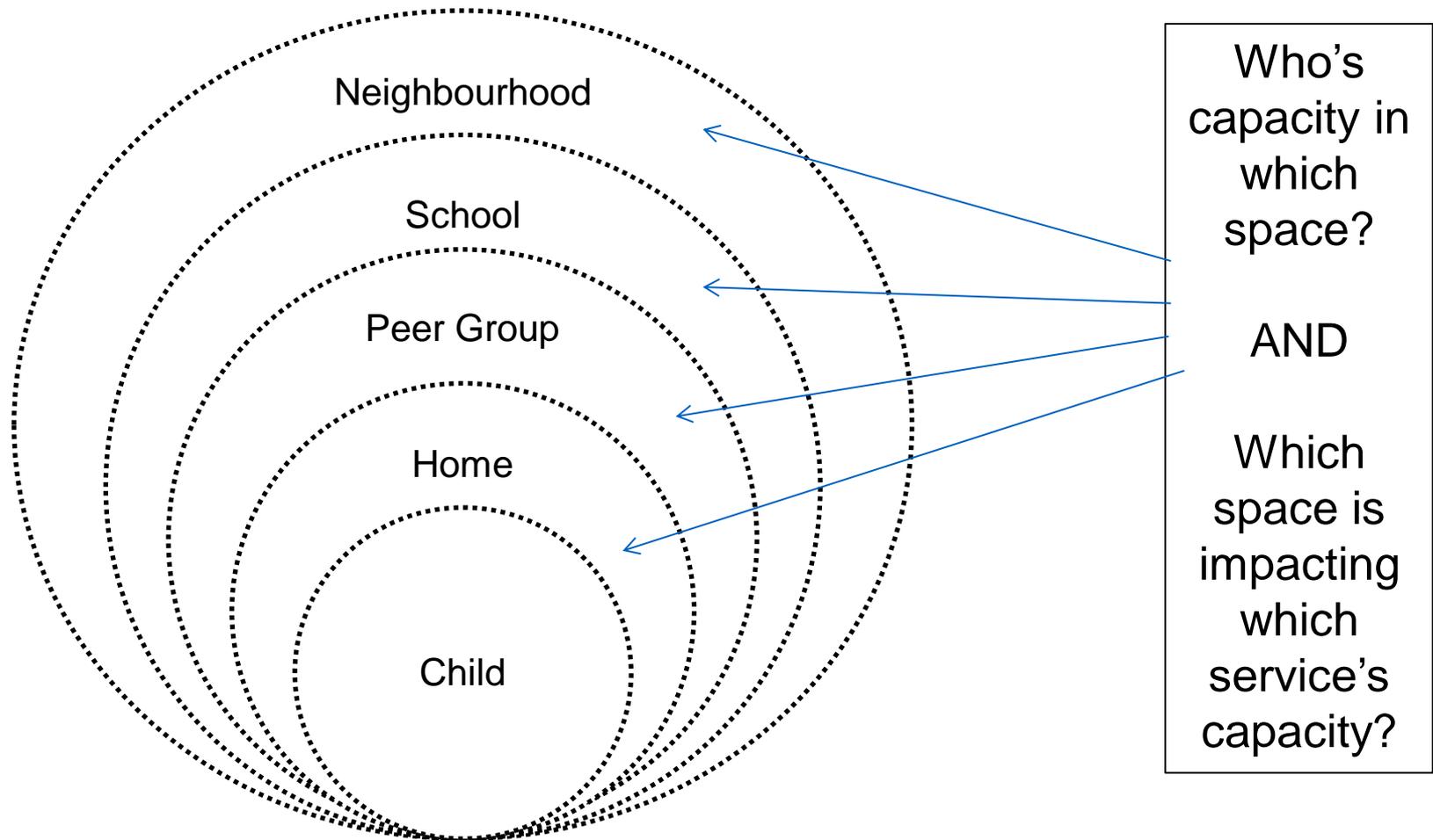
Part 4: So what? The need for a new approaches



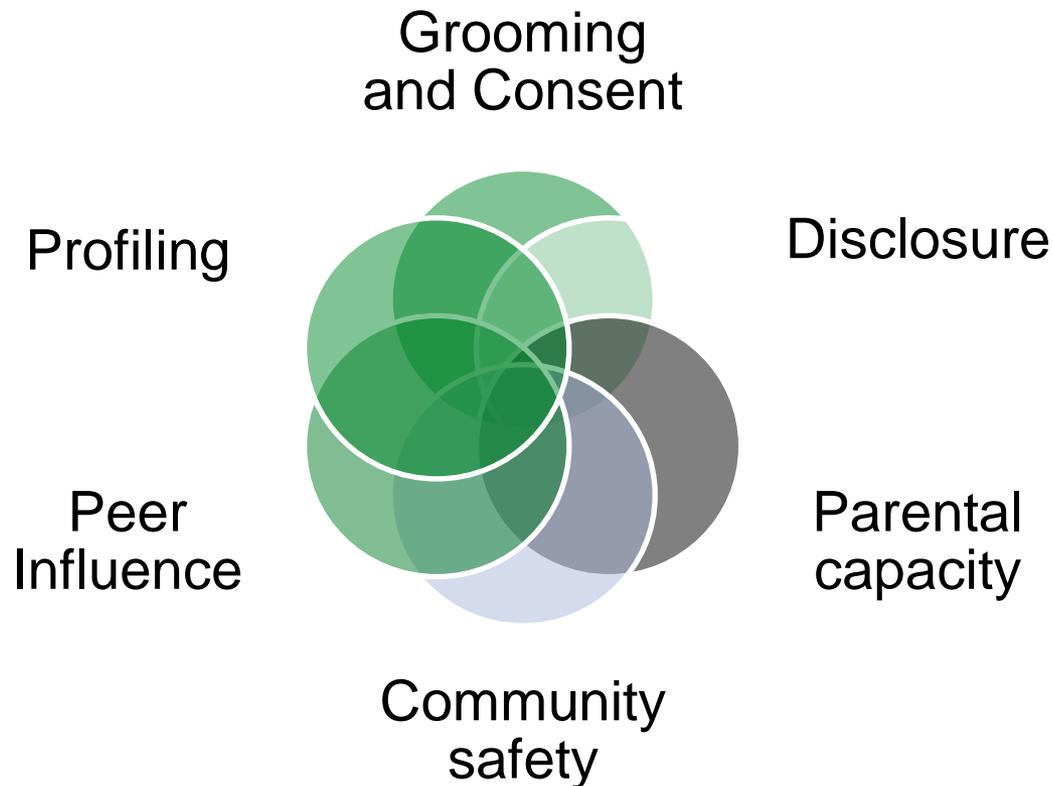
So what? Rethinking how we respond to adolescent risk

1. **Contextual perspectives**
2. **Recognising young people as partners in safeguarding**
3. **Support for practitioners**

1. Extending 'Capacity to Safeguard'



Strategy and training linkage



- CSE
- Teenage relationship abuse
 - Missing
- Substance misuse
 - Radicalisation
 - Trafficking
- Gang association and serious youth violence

2. Working in partnership with young people

Social worker: *I think child protection tends to be about putting controls around parents whereas when youngsters are at that sort of age they've got much more of a personal input to situations which needs to be reflected*

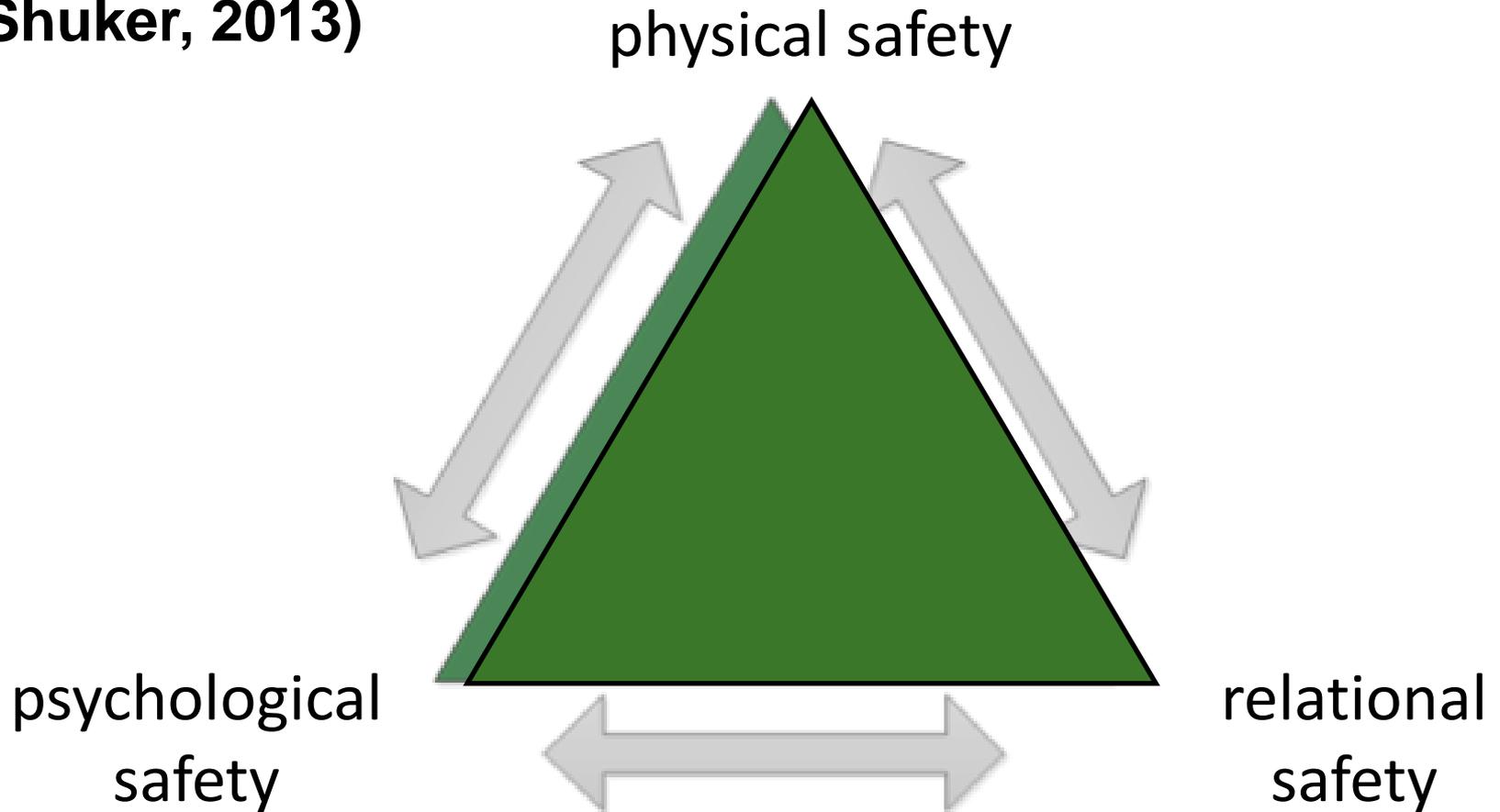
(Gorin and Jobe, 2013: p1338)

Project Manager: *if you don't adopt an approach which a young person can feel part of and which takes the time to involve her, they'll reject it immediately and in the long term that's going to make her less safe.*

(Warrington, 2013)

Multi-dimensional views of safety

(Shuker, 2013)



Reframing safeguarding as a partnership

Linking children's participation and protection rights

- Services ability to protect young people may be contingent on degree to which they offer young people choice and opportunity
- Recognition of the role of young people themselves in promoting their safety ('partners in care')
- Dialogue as a means to negotiate the tensions that occur in differing perspectives
- Requires professionals' to respond to young people's agency and victimisation simultaneously.
- Promoting young people's own abilities to make safe choices over the longer term.

3. Supporting workers

Without support to help them understand adolescent choices, harness adolescent agency and build engagement, workers can be left feeling demoralised and disempowered. They may also have little support to deal with the emotional impact of working with high levels of risk and frequent rejection, and can feel isolated and without the necessary levers to achieve change.

Hanson and Holmes (2014: 28):

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Recent learning project on schools

Current learning project on peer mapping

Two events in January next year..

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