



The Pickle in the Jar and Other Stories: Thinking with Stories from Boys Who Have Displayed Harmful Sexual Behaviour about Safety, Risk and Children's Rights

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Thank you so much for joining my CYCJ webinar 'The pickle in the jar and other stories: Thinking with stories from boys who have displayed HSB about safety, risk and children's rights'. It was a really special experience for me and I'm so grateful for the kind and generous feedback. Given the sensitivity around the subject and the care I am trying to hold around the stories I was gifted during my PhD, CYCJ and I decided not to record the webinar. Below are different references to cited and I have also included the final few slides with my ideas around resources, reports and literature that might be useful in practice.

There were a couple of questions about my thesis and publications:

This is my thesis [The pickle in the jar & other stories: social and spatial dimensions of safety, risk and rights of boys who have displayed harmful sexual behaviours - Durham e-Theses](#)

This is a paper reflecting on the important of participation of young people and the role of Urban Planning in creating contextual safety [Full article: Participation, protection and the porcupine's dilemma: towards the inclusion of lesser heard young voices](#) – this relates to the 'lifescape' of 'public spaces'

This is a paper exploring the balance of participation and protection rights in research [The Balancing Act: Reflections From Three Projects on Negotiating Participation and Protection in Doing Research With Children and Young People on Violence and Abuse - Janelle Rabe, Cait Jobson, Lynne O. Cairns, 2025](#)

I hope to publish more from my thesis and also (hopefully) have a paper coming our very soon with Professor Simon Hackett and Dr Janelle Rabe where we argue for moving the frame of understandings and responses to HSB from criminology to childhood studies. I will post this on my LinkedIn page when it's published:

www.linkedin.com/in/lynneocairns7

These are slides on tools and resources that could help make children's rights 'real' in practice (related to my findings):

doing the right(s) thing



Article 1 (definition of a child) is of fundamental importance for challenging perceptions and assumptions related to viewing HSB through the lens of adult sexual offending.

Article 2 (no discrimination) really matters given the strong feelings and responses that HSB can engender and is unambiguously articulates that rights are unconditional.

Article 3 (best interests of a child) highlights that people with responsibilities for young people, as duty bearers, must do what is the best interests for the 'child'. This places an onus of 'us' to ensure we always act in young people's best interests even when they have behaved in ways that have caused harm.



rights & wrongs (a hononym)



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Rights Respecting?

Scotland's approach to children in conflict with the law



Claire Lightowler, CYCJ
January 2020

Thank you to Beth-Anne McDowall for clarifying the meaning of hononym in the chat! A hononym word that is spelled and sounds the same but can have different meanings. Harmful behaviour is intrinsically getting something wrong, sometimes very wrong, with significant consequences for those harmed and those who harmed. Orienting responses to HSB (and other forms of harm) through a children's rights-based framework is essentially using rights in response to wrongs. I love Claire Lightowler's report 'Rights Respecting?' and would I

encourage others to read this, especially if in any doubt of the importance of children's rights when children and young people get things 'wrong'.

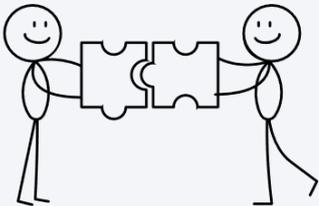
[Rights Respecting? Scotland's approach to children in conflict with the law - Children and Young People's Centre for Justice](#)

words matter....

TALKING ABOUT RISK

what/where/when are we worried about
never risk without safety
locating risk
'invisible' risks

words & picture approach
Turnell & Essex



Through the stories in my research, I reflected on how risk saturated many of the boys' everyday lives. Risk felt like it was 'everywhere' and could get 'stuck to you'. This highlights the importance of how we talk about risk to, around and about young people. This includes:

- Being clear about what/where/when we are worried about – risk isn't static and our risk work needs to reflect different times of the day, patterns and different spaces.
- We shouldn't focus on risk without also considering the safety of young people. The absence of risk does not equate to the presence of safety. When we are assessing and managing risk we must also consider where the young person feels safe.
- We need to think about where we 'place' risk as young people may absorb the sense they are 'a risk'. During the critical developmental windows of childhood and adolescence, this could create self-identities of 'being a risk'. We need to differentiate risk making/taking behaviours from the young person as a whole human being. Similarly, systems and practices need to work against creating systemic and social identities of individual young people 'being a risk'.
- We also need to understand, articulate and mitigate risks that may be less visible in our risk assessments and responses including everyday violence and fears, bullying and social isolation.

As a practitioner, I often used Andrew Turnell and Susie Essex' 'words and pictures' approach and wonder if this could be useful for practitioners to think about how they can talk about what people are worried about, why and what they are doing. The simplicity of the process belies the complexity and challenge of talking about distressing and difficult things in ways that can make sense to children, young people and parents. As Turnell and Essex (2006) note,

it is not just parents who struggle as professional are 'often at a loss regarding how to communicate the enormity of the events to children caught up in situations of abuse' (p. 72).
Turnell, A. and Essex, S. (2006) Working with Denied Child Abuse: the Resolutions Approach.
Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education.

participation is protection!

Article 12 (respect for children's views) relates to all young people, under 18, as having rights to have their views listened to, especially on matters affecting them, and adults need to take these seriously. We can't just pay attention to those deemed deserving and need to pay particular attention and respect those whose voices are not heard.

constellations of contexts - safety

Article 15 (freedom of association) young people have rights to meet up and socialise.

Article 31 (leisure, play and culture) What do rights to play mean for adolescents who can experience explicit and implicit exclusions? How do we consider rights to play in digital spaces that also protect them from harm? We need to consider how young people are supported to socialise safely, individually and collectively, and ensure that we don't ignore constricting and collapsing contexts of young people who are or become socially isolated.

Often young people are unwelcome in social spaces where they could be safer leading them to create safety at the edges. We must prioritise safety and guardianship beyond a narrow focus on risk and anti-social behaviour. Children's rights are unconditional and not for those young people we deem deserving.

focusing on futures

Articles 3, 6, 15 and 39 are particularly relevant for how we hold in mind a young person's future:

Article 3 (best interests) brings into focus the aim and rationale of any response to a young person's harmful behaviour. This is not just about what we do but about how we do it, particularly micro moments of practices that can leave legacies on developing lives.

Article 6 (life, survival and development) is perhaps the most fundamental right when we consider the needs of young people who have displayed HSB. This compels the focus from just stopping the behaviour to understanding the complexity of young people's lives, ensuring practice is focussed on longer term, holistic and relentlessly future focussed aims. This compels us to interrogate how we may inadvertently contribute to iatrogenic harm and hopelessness through our interventions.

Article 15 (freedom of association) futures, in participant stories, were connected to having fun, friends and freedom. Hobbies, interests and socialising cannot be seen as extras but as fundamental in paving paths to positive futures.

Article 39 (recovery from trauma and reintegration) many young people who display HSB have experienced difficult lives. . Due to and despite of their behaviour, they need support that develops identities beyond their difficulties, and 'recover their health, dignity, self-respect and social life' (UNCRC, 1989).

focussing on futures



Hackett, S. et al. (2024) 'Life course outcomes and developmental pathways for children and young people with harmful sexual behaviour', *Journal of Sexual Aggression*, 30(2), pp. 145–165. doi: 10.1080/13552600.2022.2124323.

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NOTA
Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

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Life course outcomes and developmental pathways for children and young people with harmful sexual behaviour

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ABSTRACT
Most outcome studies for children and young people who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour have focused on sexual recidivism as their primary outcome measure. Relatively little is known about broader life outcomes for children displaying such behaviour, nor about the processes involved with longer-term developmental success or failure. This paper examines long-term life course outcomes for 69 adults in the UK who presented with abusive sexual behaviour as children. Between 10 and 20 years after their childhood sexual behaviour problems, few in the sample had sexually reoffended, but general life course outcomes were much less positive. A range of individual, relational and social environmental factors appeared to be associated with successful and unsuccessful outcomes. Successful outcomes were associated with stable partner relationships, wider supportive relationships, and educational opportunity and achievement. The findings highlight the importance of broad-based, developmental interventions in assisting those with childhood sexual behaviour problems to live successfully.

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KEYWORDS
Children; adolescents; harmful sexual behaviour; juvenile sexual offending; disclosure; life course

Practice impact statement
The findings outlined in this paper support a move away from a traditional focus on clinical programmes of 'sex offence specific work' with young people towards more developmental approaches that focus actively on wider individual, relational, and socio-environmental factors associated with disclosure and resilient life outcomes. This includes, but is not restricted to, interventions that are future-oriented and that promote the skills necessary for the development of supportive personal and intimate partner relationships. The importance of wider health promotion, general wellbeing and educational success is also emphasised.

....stopping a child from sexually abusing others is a necessary but insufficient intervention goal. Despite the low reported sexual recidivism rates for children and adolescents with harmful sexual behaviour, many policy responses are still uniquely concerned with the risk of reoffending, and consequently much practice remains weighted towards this issue as a primary concern. Simply stopping a child from continuing something that, even without intervention, is not likely to continue is hardly a triumph, especially if in the process that child's broader life chances are ruined or severely inhibited by the consequences of our interventions and policies.

(Hackett et al., 2024, p. 03)

Thinking about how we support young people to have positive lives, beyond simply 'stopping the behaviour', I find this paper by Simon Hackett and colleagues really powerful. I heard Simon present this about ten years ago and after met regularly with the key workers of a boy I supported to think about the factors associated with 'positive outcomes' to try to build these into their plans with and around him. I suggest this paper offers us ways to consider what matters and there are lots of ways we can bring this to life in practice and planning

focussing on futures



clan
childlaw
resources for
children & young people

CYCJ
Children and Young People's
Centre for Justice

Offence grounds at a Children's Hearing: Understanding when offences will be disclosed

Claire Lightowler, Clan Childlaw
September 2024

The disclosure of offences can be a daunting process. There is considerable confusion about how offence grounds which are accepted at a Children's Hearing, or established and then dealt with through the Children's Hearing System (CHS), can be disclosed. Practitioners can help children and young people make decisions about accepting offence grounds with a full understanding of the disclosure implications. Practitioners can also support children and young people to understand what is on their 'criminal record', and what this means for them.

Why this matters?
The disclosure of childhood offending is most likely to affect children and young people when they are applying for employment, volunteering or educational opportunities, which

APPENDIX 3: Further support

Disclosure Scotland provide a range of materials about the disclosure system and forthcoming legal changes. **Guidance** from the 'Scotland Works For You' alliance, which aims to help people with convictions make more positive applications for employment, education or volunteering is available on Disclosure Scotland's website.

Who Cares? Scotland have a helpline to support Care Experienced people of any age across Scotland with issues, including disclosure. The helpline is open Monday to Friday from 12 noon to 4pm via 0300 107 7660 or help@whocares.scot.nhs.uk. There are also a range of videos and other resources on their website explaining disclosure.

Access to Industry can provide training to practitioners on disclosure.

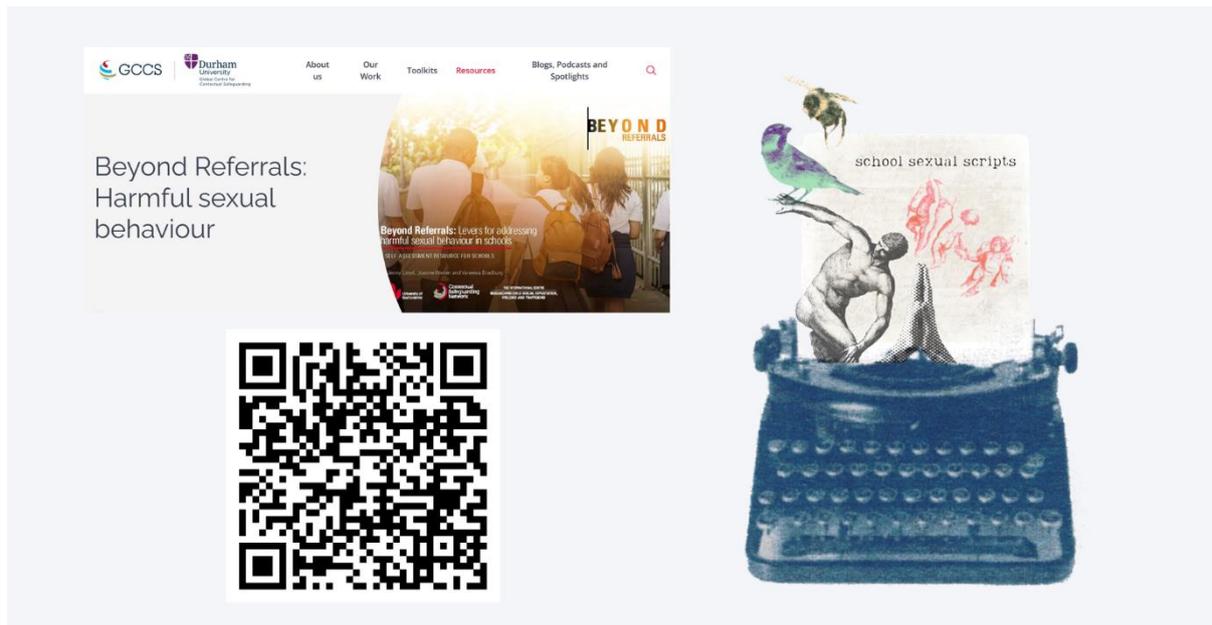
Nord Chapter Scotland help anyone in Scotland who has been involved with the criminal justice system to navigate the stigma and discrimination that they can face throughout their lives.

Clan Childlaw provide legal representation for children and young people and provide training on issues, including supporting children on offence grounds. There is a free helpline if you want to know about a child or young person's rights or how the law affects them. The helpline is open Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm via 0800 120 0522 (free from most mobile phones and landlines), [email](mailto:email@clanchildlaw.org.uk) or [online form](https://clanchildlaw.org.uk).

Scottish Child Law Centre offer training on children's rights and provide legal information by email, adv@scclcc.org.uk.

Similarly, related one boy's worries about what he would disclose when he is grown up – Clan Childlaw and CYCJ's work on understanding disclosures is a really important guide. For some young people, these might be important discussions now but for others it might be looking at and knowing that there are other forms of support (appendix 3 in the report) and people that can help them think things through, at any point in their lives, so they don't have to worry

alone. As one boy said shared with me ‘you can’t change the past but you can change the future’.



From the stories shared in my PhD, schools were significant spaces that felt unsafe and hold powerful adult ‘sexual scripts’ that shaped how boys and their behaviour were seen, understood and supported. These seemed to be at the epicentre of ‘perfect storms’ of social constructions of childhood, heterosexuality and masculinity. The Beyond Referrals toolbox and associated articles are really useful ways that help shift the focus away from only individual young people to school cultures and conditions where abuse and harm can flourish. [Beyond Referrals: Harmful sexual behaviour | Contextual Safeguarding](#)

These were the references in different slides:

Introduction:

Heraud, R. (2013) ‘Unaware that I Was Walking Backwards’, in Engels-Schwarzpaul, A. and Peters, P. (eds.) *Of Other Thoughts: Non-Traditional Ways to the Doctorate: A Guidebook for Candidates and Supervisors*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 37–42.

Shaw, J. (2017) ‘Thinking with Stories: A Renewed Call for Narrative Inquiry as a Social Work Epistemology and Methodology’, *Canadian Social Work Review / Revue canadienne de service social*, 34(2), pp. 207–227.

Flat boys and soft eyes:

Brown, J. (1964) *Flat Stanley*. New York: Harper & Row.

Cooper, Andrew (2017) *Soft eyes: Observation as research*. In: *Observation in health and social care: Applications for learning, research and practice with children and adults*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, pp. 177-199

Samah, N. (2013) ‘Seeing with new eyes: Becoming a narrative inquirer in higher education practice’, in Trahar, S. (ed.) *Contextualising Narrative Inquiry: Developing Methodological Approaches for Local Contexts*. London: Taylor & Francis

Scottish policy landscape:

Kilbrandon (1964) *The Kilbrandon Report: Children and Young Persons*. Edinburgh, Scottish Home and Health Department Scotland.

UNCRC. 1989. *Convention on the Rights of the Child (Treaty no. 27531)* [Online]. Available: https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1990/09/19900902%2003-14%20AM/Ch_IV_11p.pdf
[The Promise Scotland | Transforming how Scotland cares for children, families, and care-experienced adults](#)

Scottish Government (2020) *Harmful Sexual Behaviour by Children and Young People: Expert Group Report* [Online]. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/expert-group-preventing-sexual-offending-involving-children-young-people-prevention-responses-harmful-sexual-behaviour-children-young-people/>

I would also highlight an amazing CYCJ report commissioned from the expert group: Moodie, K. (2021) *Harmful Sexual Behaviour by Children*. Glasgow. Children and Young People Centre for Justice. <https://www.cycj.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/HSB-in-Children-Report-May-2021-FINAL.pdf>

Scottish Government (2024) *Working with children and young people who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour: Evidence based guidance for professionals working with children and young people* [Working with Children and Young People Who Have Displayed Harmful Sexual Behaviour: Evidence Based Guidance For Professionals Working with Children and Young People](#)

Contextual Safeguarding is now in Scotland Child Protection Guidance [Supporting documents - National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021 - updated 2023 - gov.scot](#) – there are many resources, journal articles and blogs on our website so please look! [Resources | Contextual Safeguarding](#)

Ghost stories (legacies of knowledge and practice of adult ‘sex offending’ applied to children and young people)

Worling, J. (2013). What were we thinking? Five erroneous assumptions that have fueled specialized interventions for adolescents who have sexually offended. *International Journal of Behavioral Consultation and Therapy*, 8, 80-88.

Myers, S. (2002) ‘Language, discourse and empowerment: changing approaches to children and young people who have sexually abused others’, *Children & Society*, 16(5), pp. 334–345.

Masson, H. & Hackett, S. 2003. A decade on from the NCH Report (1992): Adolescent sexual aggression policy, practice and service delivery across the UK and Republic of Ireland. *Journal of Sexual Aggression*, 9, 109-124.

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