

**research
in practice**

Risk, rights, resilience & relationships: Redesigning our approach to safeguarding young people

Dez Holmes

Director

Research in Practice

@dez_holmes

Dartington



What makes adolescents so special?

- › The range, nature and causes of adolescent risks are different than those faced by groups younger / older than them → a distinctive set of interconnected needs.
- › The impact of maltreatment often manifests differently to that of maltreatment at a younger age.
- › Adolescence itself provides a unique array of strengths and opportunities as a result of social and physiological development processes.
- › **BREAKING:** they don't cope better because they're older

The case for change

- › Adolescents may have **distinct** safeguarding needs, the harms they face - and their routes to protection - are often 'contextual' and are underpinned by complex social and biological drivers
- › Harm and its effects do not abruptly end at 18; support may do
- › Transition to adulthood is a particularly challenging and vulnerable time for some people, we may need care and support without having Care & Support needs™
- › Need to consider promoting **resilience** and their changing **developmental** needs
- › There are moral and economic drivers for a reimagined safeguarding system which is contextual, transitional and relational.

If we designed from scratch...?

Contextual

- Harms, risks and protective factors
- Assessment, intervention
- Place-based approach?

Transitional

- Developmental perspective
- Fluidity over time
- Requires alignment of systems?

Relational

- Person-centred
- Relationships as vehicle and intervention
- Capacity building

Participative

Contextual and connected

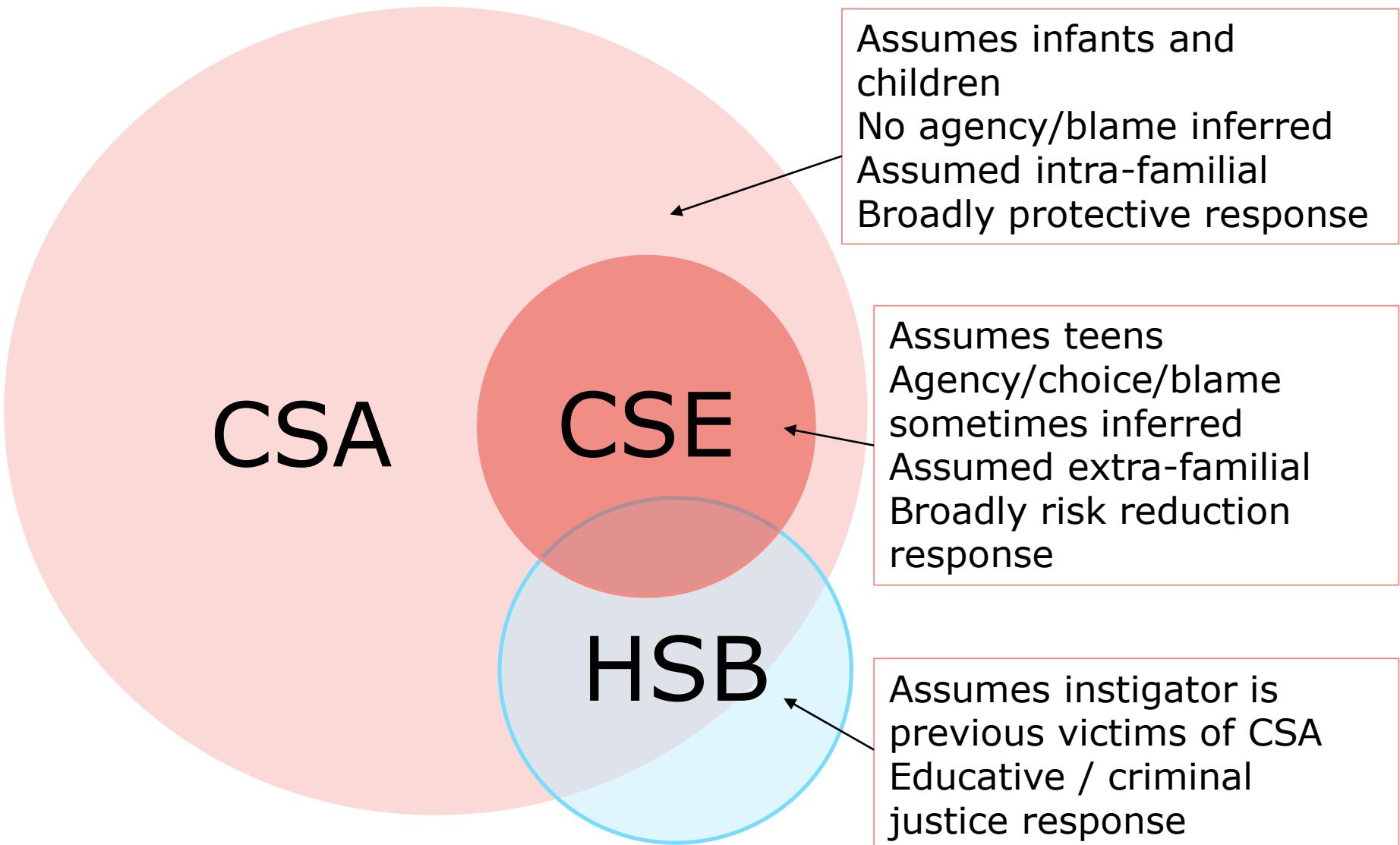
Greater Manchester Review of Children's Services (April 16) defined **complex safeguarding** as:

'Criminal activity (often organised), or behaviour associated to criminality, involving often vulnerable children where there is exploitation and/or a clear or implied safeguarding concern'

Links to 'contextual safeguarding' (see Firmin's work - <https://contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/>)

Why 'complex safeguarding'?

- Many forms of criminally associated behaviours result in children being harmed or at risk of harm
- Traditional models of safeguarding often don't take into consideration threat to children from outside the family
- CSE and other forms of exploitation such as trafficking, criminal (and arguably radicalisation?) are interrelated and can be strategically tackled together
- Methods used to groom and exploit young people *may* have similar outcomes for young people
- Services need to focus on the young person in a holistic way rather than concentrating on risks, incidents and indicators



- › Some established concepts (useful at the time) may need to be reconsidered as the evidence evolves...
- › CSE risk assessment toolkits & checklists - very few of the 'indicators' are based on robust scientific evidence, often used inconsistently, may be too general, or can create blindspots, and can undermine professional judgment (Brown 2016, 2017)
- › Some educational resources, most of which have not been tested scientifically. Good RSE is vital. However there are ethical issues of using these resources - they may be experienced as traumatic, and resources which focus on the 'choices' and behaviours of children, however well-intentioned, can inadvertently fuel a culture of victim blaming (Eaton & Holmes, 2017)

An awkward fit?

Sexual abuse

- CSE (gangs & groups)
- Sexual abuse by peers
- Sexual abuse (IPR)
- Exposure to CSE
- Duress to engage in sexual abuse
- Online sexual abuse
- Intrafamilial CSA (other adults)

Physical abuse

- Adult to YP violence
- Mutual adult – YP violence
- Victim of gang-related or community violence
- Physical violence from partners

Neglect

- Familial neglect
- Neglect in custody
- Overly restrictive parenting

Emotional abuse

- Verbal abuse from family
- Verbal abuse between family & YP
- Bullying
- Exposure to CSE, drugs, gangs etc.
- Living with parental DV
- Abuse from partners



- › Adolescent agency in relation to risks makes adolescents 'imperfect victims' and makes addressing those risks (and their impact) a complex business. (Rees and Stein, 1999)
- › working within a child protection system that is designed primarily to meet the needs of younger children maltreated within the family (Bilston, 2006)

Mind the gap...



Child protection
('rescuing babies
from harm in the
family')



**Making
Safeguarding
Personal** ('Person-
led, risk-enablement,
choice & control')

Six key principles underpin all adult safeguarding work

- › **Empowerment:** People being supported and encouraged to make their own decisions and informed consent.
- › **Prevention:** It is better to take action before harm occurs.
- › **Proportionality:** The least intrusive response appropriate to the risk presented.
- › **Protection:** Support and representation for those in greatest need.
- › **Partnership:** Local solutions through services working with their communities. Communities have a part to play in preventing, detecting and reporting neglect and abuse.
- › **Accountability:** Accountability and transparency in safeguarding practice.

(Department of Health, 2017)

Rescue Vs Reform



It's about relationships

So it is in relationships with other people that one learns to understand oneself. And by understanding one's self, one begins to understand other people. Thus the world of relationships is both the problem to be solved and the means to its solution.

(Howe et al, 1999)

*To develop normally, a child requires progressively more complex joint activity with one or more adults who have an irrational emotional relationship with the child.
Somebody's got to be crazy about the kid.*

That's number one. First, last, and always.

(Bronfenbrenner, 1971)

Adolescence and attachment (Shemmings, 2011)

- › Children who have experienced abuse/neglect *may* experience 'disorganised attachment' (though beware pathologising)
- › DA in infancy can lead to dissociative symptoms in adolescence and early adulthood, Likely to do things to make adults reject them.

Research shows that attachment security in adolescence exerts precisely the same effect on development as it does in early childhood: a secure base fosters exploration and the development of cognitive, social and emotional competence.

Redefining adolescence and transition

- › Some studies into brain development and effects on behaviour show some elements of brain growth – eg development to more mature affect regulation, social relationships and executive functioning - continue into the 20s (Sawyer et al, 2018)
- › “An expanded and more inclusive definition of adolescence is essential for developmentally appropriate framing of laws, social policies, and service systems. Rather than age 10–19 years, a definition of 10–24 years corresponds more closely to adolescent growth and popular understandings of this life phase” (Sawyer et al, 2018)
- › BUT biological studies to define capabilities of adolescents should be treated with caution, not misinterpreted in reductionist ways (Moshman, 1999).

Adolescent development

The characteristics of transitions include:

- › An eager anticipation of the future
- › A sense of loss or regret for the stage that has been lost
- › A sense of anxiety about what is unknown
- › A major psychological readjustment
- › A degree of ambiguity of status during the transition

Key areas of development:

- › Physical development (puberty, brain development)
- › The role of the family
- › Identity
- › Peer relationships (risks and opportunities)
- › Health (and mental health)

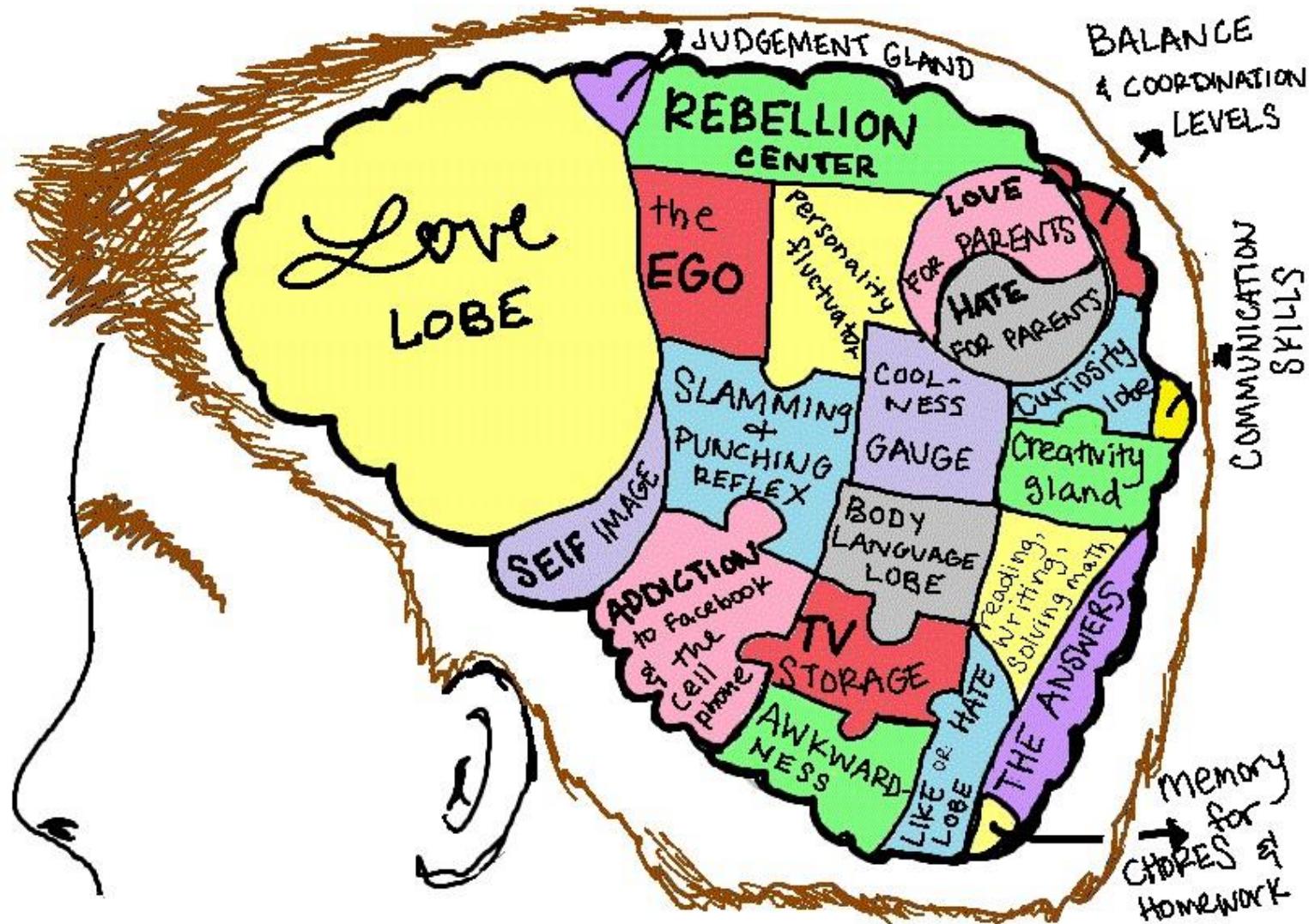
(Coleman, 2014)

Family relationships

- › If parents are absent/disengaged, or where there is conflict/violence – outcomes likely to be worse.
- › Risk factors –
 - › harsh/erratic discipline
 - › lack of employment (parents)
 - › parental mental health problems
 - › parental substance misuse (Coleman, 2014)
- › Authoritative parenting – warmth, structure, age-appropriate autonomy.
- › Behavioural vs. Psychological control (Holmes *et al*, 2013)

Peer relationships (Coleman, 2014)

- › YP remain hugely influenced by parents' attitudes and behaviour.
- › Friends provide:
 - › companionship
 - › a reliable alliance (someone to be on your side)
 - › help (in times of need)
 - › intimacy (someone to share things with)
 - › self-validation (to show you are accepted by others).
- › Open to the negative influences if have low self-esteem and low levels of support from home (Cotterell, 2007)
- › Influence of social media – threats and opportunities.



Adolescent 'choices' and 'risk-taking' behaviours

- › Young people's 'risk-taking' - underpinned by *interacting* biological, social, environmental and neurobiological changes (Calkins, 2010)
- › Risk can be positive (Coleman, 2014)
- › Ego-syntonic risks
- › Adapted to harms experienced in earlier childhood
- › Unmet needs - seek to meet via risky routes
- › Misinterpreted as rational informed adult 'lifestyle choices' → Victims being denied appropriate support / permission to give up
- › Conversely, professionals can minimise adolescent choice and agency

Professional perception of adolescents

(Rees *et al*, 2010)

Young people aged 11-17 are often:

- › Less likely to be seen as at risk of long-term negative outcomes
- › Less likely to be referred to children services

They are often seen by professionals as:

- › More competent to deal with maltreatment
- › More resilient
- › More likely to be contributing to and exacerbating situations through own behaviour (and blamed)
- › More likely to be putting themselves at risk of harm

- Conceptions of vulnerability are central to the way risk is classified
- The totality of a YP's vulnerability may not always recognisable from apparently isolated incidents (Bradford, 2004)
- Factors interact in complex ways, and vary over time and between individuals
- Behaviour / 'choices' can eclipse all else
- Simplistic checklists / 'predictive' assessment tools are problematic
- **So, professionals *must* have time to really know young people to exercise judgment**

- › Responses and judgements that frame the child as 'promiscuous' and badly behaved (Jay, 2014; Coffey, 2014; Bedford, 2015)
- › Victims do not always have some sort of underpinning vulnerability; looking for evidence of the 'vulnerability' that 'caused' the sexual exploitation can lead to (or collude with) victim blaming (Eaton & Holmes, 2017)
- › Inadvertently compounding misconceptions through language. Describing victims as 'risk taking', for example, locates responsibility in the victim. The use of euphemisms and ambivalent language can allow risk to go unseen. eg describing perpetrators as 'lads' (Bedford, 2015) underplays threat; describing a 12-year-old girl as 'sexually active' or a 35-year-old male as a 14-year-old's 'boyfriend' (Beckett, 2011b)
- › young people (particularly those aged 16 to 18) who were being sexually exploited '*were invariably perceived to be consenting active agents making choices, albeit constrained, about their relationships*' (Pearce, 2014: 163)

Resilience & participation

- **Relationships** are paramount to promoting resilience (Coleman, 2014)
- **Self-efficacy, positive identity development, aspirations** - commonly associated with resilience
- Children's **rights to protection and participation are mutually dependent and indivisible** (UNCRC)
- Involves work with children individually and collectively to:
 - Access information, resources and support
 - Exercise autonomy & choice
 - Experience of a sense of control
 - Influence & inform change

(See Warrington, 2016)

Participation as protective

(Warrington, 2016)

Consequences of CSE	Benefits of participation
YP don't recognise exploitative situation	Critical thinking/better understanding (AYPH, 2014)
Lack of power/control	Agency and decision-making power
Isolation/sense of 'difference' (Reid & Jones, 2011)	Sense of belonging (Hagel, 2013)
Stigma	Approval/acknowledgement (Batsleer, 2011)
Low self worth/lack of purpose	Helping others (Batsleer, 2011, Levy, 2012, AYPH, 2014)

Protection and preparedness

I was in care all my life and you did keep me really safe. You wrapped me up tight in bubble wrap... but I'm 19 now and I kind of feel like I can't move my arms

(Max, care-experienced young adult)

The evidence invites us to challenge traditional assumptions regarding the capacity of adolescents and the maturity and self-reliance of adults, instead recognising that risk, needs and resilience are dynamic and contextual.

(Holmes & Smale, 2018)

When we deny young people self-efficacy...

"I was basically a puppet. When they [the police] wanted me, I had to do it. When they didn't want me, I heard nothing."



"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."



(See Camille Warrington's work)

Resilient young people need resilient practitioners...



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**That Difficult Age:
Developing a more
effective response to
risks in adolescence**

Dr Elly Hanson and Dez Holmes



**Understanding
adolescence**



**Young person-centred
approaches in child
sexual exploitation (CSE)**

- promoting participation and
building self-efficacy

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Thank you