

An introduction to adolescent safeguarding in secondary education.

Context

Secondary education colleagues have asked for professional development to increase knowledge, confidence and skills in relational practice and adolescent safeguarding, especially in response to risks and harms experienced by teenagers outside the home (also known as [extra-familial risks and harms or EFRH](#)).

As young people develop during adolescence, they explore new contexts, increase independence and experience more risks. They are influenced by norms of peer groups, new relationships, groups and communities not linked to family life, including via social media. These extra-familial situations include a wider range of risks and harms, including (but not exhaustively): serious violence, exploitation, peer-on-peer abuse, urban street gangs, and radicalisation.

Practitioners who work directly with students in secondary education settings may be used to organisational cultures and norms that support inclusive responses to adolescent development and to promote positive relationships, progress and educational attainment. However, these practitioners may not have built an awareness of the bio-psycho-social and relational dimensions of adolescent safeguarding.

All education colleagues must fulfil responsibilities under [statutory safeguarding guidance](#), and, importantly, work to nurture the awareness, agency and wellbeing of students. While undertaking these responsibilities, practitioners face the challenge of understanding and responding appropriately to the full range of needs, risks and harms present in the lives of children and teenagers today.

Purpose:

- Enhance relational leadership, teaching and support capacities, knowledge and confidence for tasks and challenges faced by secondary education teaching and support practitioners in direct work with students, and with one another.
- Learning activities are grounded in what secondary education teachers and support colleagues do, with key topics integrated within everyday practice experience.

Assessment of learning and evaluation.

- Informal observed assessment will be carried out and recorded via a mix of group discussions at the workshop.
- Feedback will be recorded in person in response to the learning objectives.
- Formal evaluation can be included with leaders of education organisations to track the progress in how practitioners apply the knowledge and skills in relational practice and safeguarding. A verbal agreement will be noted with participants.

By the end of the workshop, education practitioners will be more confident to:

1. Define key features of adolescent safeguarding and of relational, inclusive practice with students, and how these enhance secondary teaching and support work.
2. Identify contexts where risk and harm happen in the lives of students – such as takeaway restaurants, high streets, parks, alleys, and housing estates – and describe how to include this in education safeguarding practice.
3. Explain how to collaborate with children and young adults to explore perceptions of safety and harms, such as peer-on-peer harms, violence, and exploitation.
4. Outline some practice tools to involve children and young adults in safety-creation and for better quality information-gathering, understanding, reflection and analysis about strengths, needs, risks and harms.

About the facilitator

Colin Michel has worked in children and young people's services for more than 20 years as a manager, facilitator, and consultant in the voluntary and public sectors. Over the last few years, he has collaborated with local partnerships to support their development of adolescent safeguarding strategies. In 2022, Colin created Adolescent Safeguarding in London (ASIL) on behalf of the London Adolescent Safeguarding Oversight Board. He is currently working on the development of the second edition of the ASIL handbook.

Next steps...

A follow-up workshop, if helpful, could support colleagues in education settings to:

- Nurture and strengthen the agency of students with additional needs, including in work with neurodevelopmental needs and differences
- Investigate relational, inclusive practice and enrich understanding of the realities of teens' and young adults' lives, including how they can apply attunement and analysis in the classroom, as two key capacities involved in relational, inclusive practice.
- Apply light touch methods to recognise and record the value and impact of their relational, inclusive in the context of further education activities.
- Describe how a strengths-based focus can be used to explore situations and locations of safety, where students enjoy connecting with peers, professionals and adults.
- Explain how teachers and support practitioners can apply reflective tools to grow capacities for relational inclusive practice.