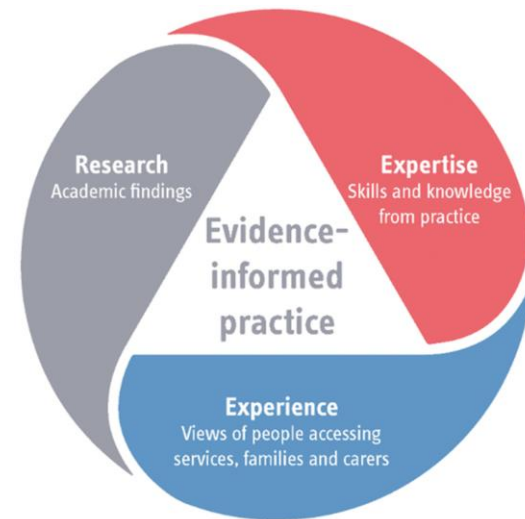
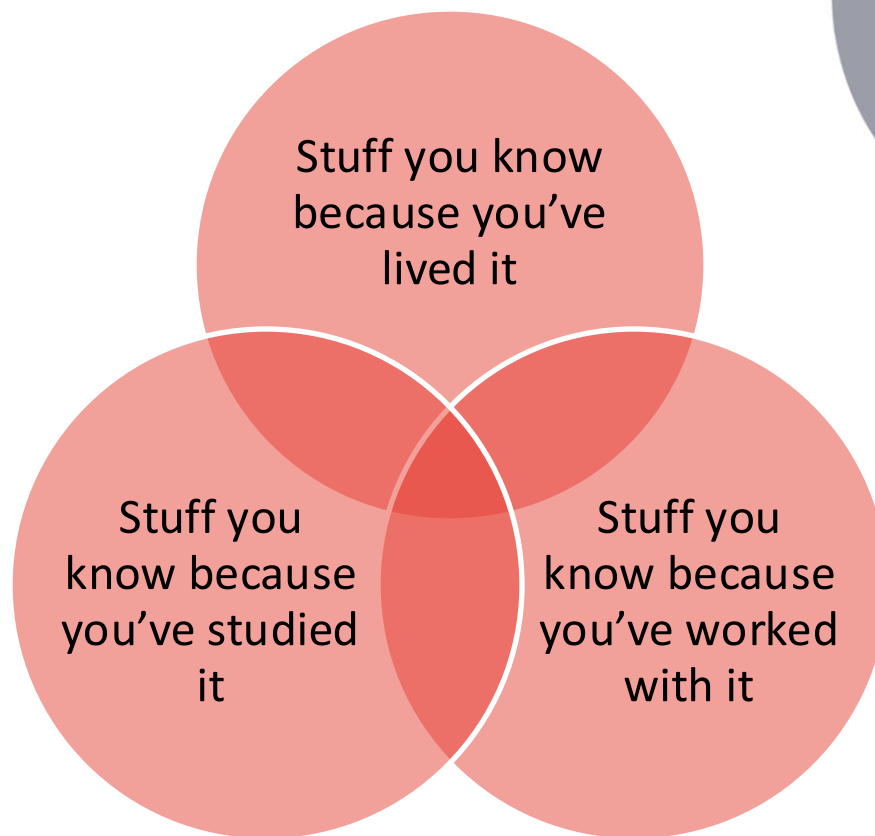


Transitional Safeguarding: an overview



Dez Holmes

Director, Research in Practice



Not mutually exclusive - beware assumptions...

Wanna do some evidence-informed innovation?





“many young people face a ‘cliff edge’ as they approach age 18 and risk being left without support during this critical life-stage.”

(Winterbottom et al, 2023)

Transitional Safeguarding means...

‘safeguarding adolescents and young adults fluidly across developmental stages which builds on the best available evidence, learns from both children’s and adult safeguarding practice and which prepares young people for their adult lives’

(Holmes & Smale, 2018)

- Transitional Safeguarding is a concept for **whole-system** change, underpinned by six key principles. (Holmes, 2018; 2022).
- ‘early help for young adults’ – **multi-agency**
- ‘young people’....‘youth’ as ‘persons between the ages of 15 and 24’ (United Nations, 2007)

Why Transitional Safeguarding?

- › The current binary approach bears significant **human and economic costs**
- › Harm, trauma and development **don't stop at 18**
- › **Beyond statutory duties** – holistic, flexible, person-centred
- › We need a system not a service... drawing on the rich expertise across the multi-agency partnership and communities - **whole place whole person**
- › Because **binaries reinforce binaries**: childhood Vs adulthood; victim Vs perpetrator; vulnerable Vs culpable
- › **Safeguarding is a verb, not a noun**

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)

Now I've left care I get really lonely. That's a big thing for my safety I think, but no one talks about it as safeguarding. Unless you're worried about my child, I won't hear from you [children's services] again.

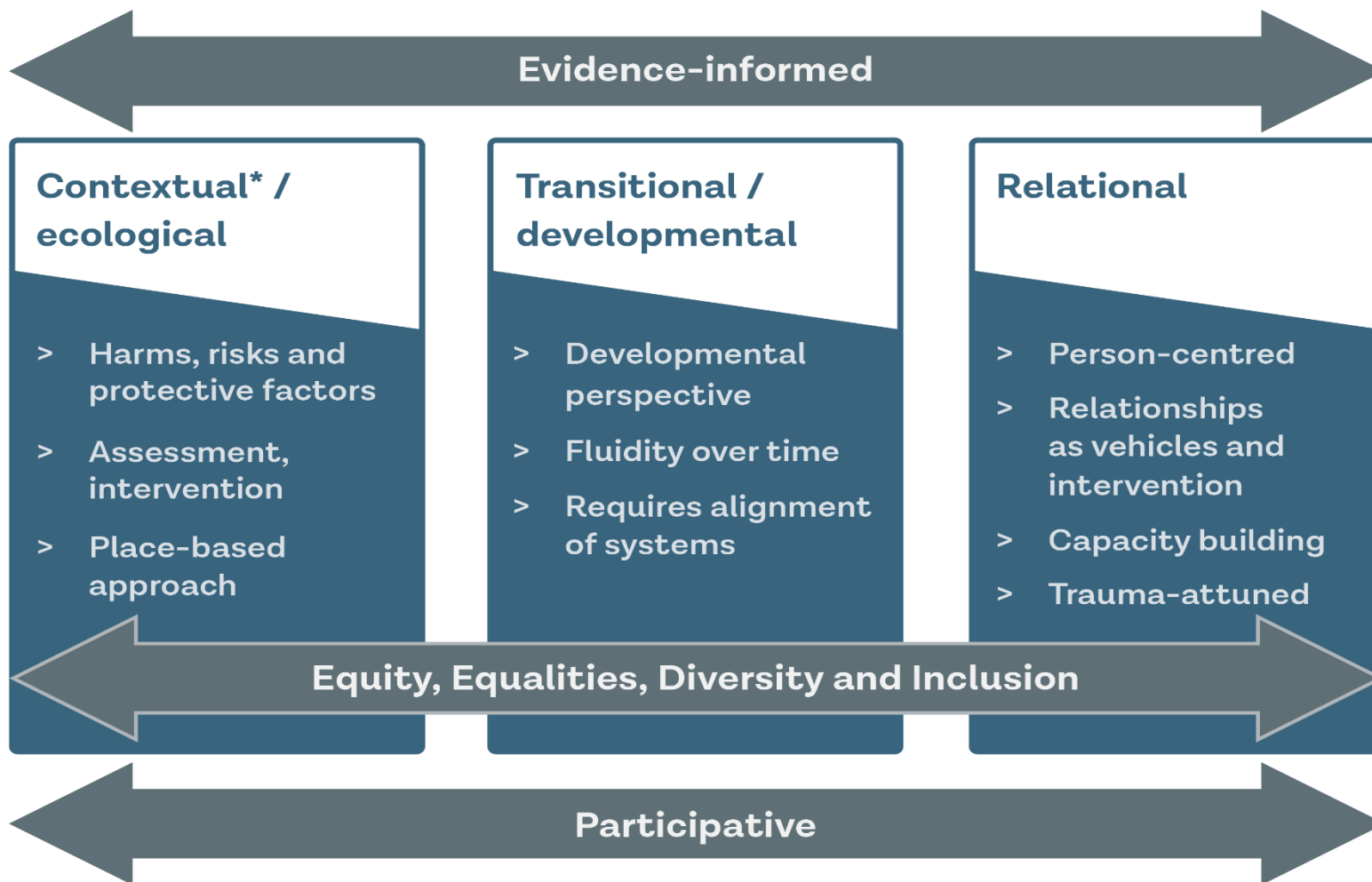
(Aisha, care-experienced young adult)

I couldn't wait to get to 18, I thought that once I was an adult everything would change. It hasn't worked out that way. I really wish I was a kid again so that you could lock me up.

(Kelly, young adult)

Key (non-negotiable) Principles

(Holmes, 2022
Cocker et al., 2024)



Care Act 2014 and Transitional Safeguarding

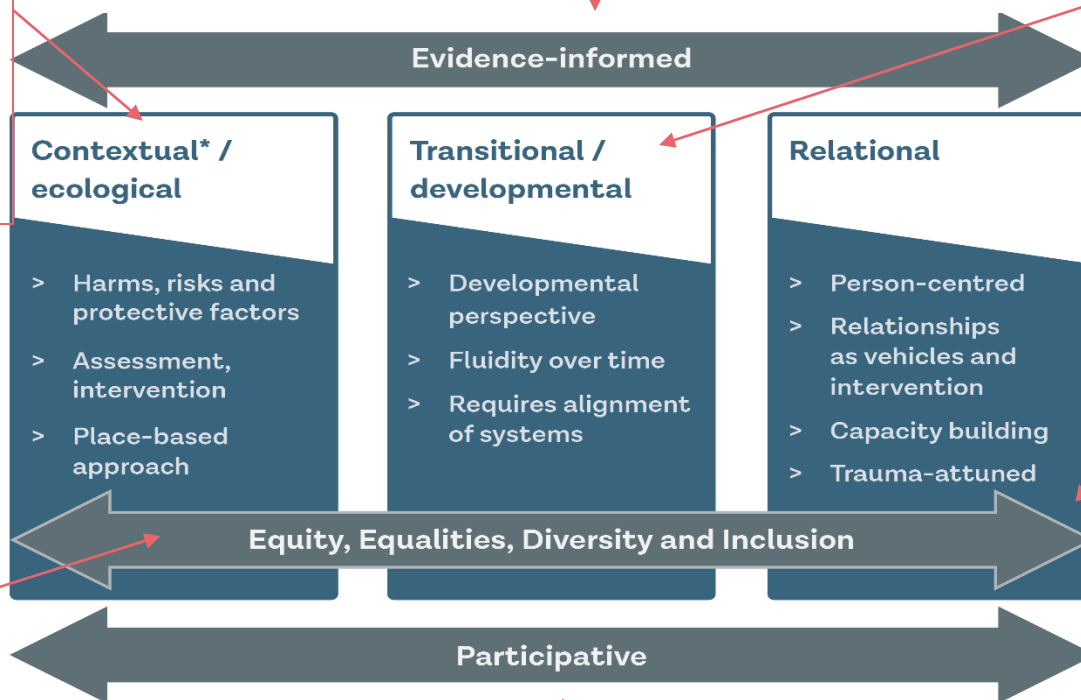
(DHSC, 2021)

- **Prevention principle** emphasises importance of preventing or delaying or reducing the need for care and support and can be applied to young people whose experiences mean they may need support to live safely.
- The **wellbeing principle** applies equally to those who do not have eligible care and support needs but come into contact with the system in some other way. Resonates with the need for an accessible offer of support for young people making the transition to adulthood.
- Requires that decisions take account of the individual's circumstances, rather than a person's age, appearance, condition or behaviour. Important in ensuring **proportionate and least intrusive responses**, AND in ensuring that needs and vulnerabilities are recognised.
- **A focus on eligibility at the expense of prevention?**
- The MCA underscores the importance of engaging with people in a way that centres their rights and expertise. Improved legal literacy could create a more coherent experience.

Utilising young people's view of the world.
Make sure we have the knowledge and skills
necessary to work effectively [and] in a reflective way.

Develop young
people's skills
and attitudes
rather than
remedy
'problem
behaviours'.

We seek to
enhance young
people's personal
and social
development. We
promote the
welfare and safety
of young people



Respecting
and valuing
differences

Helping young
people develop
stronger
relationships
and collective
identities

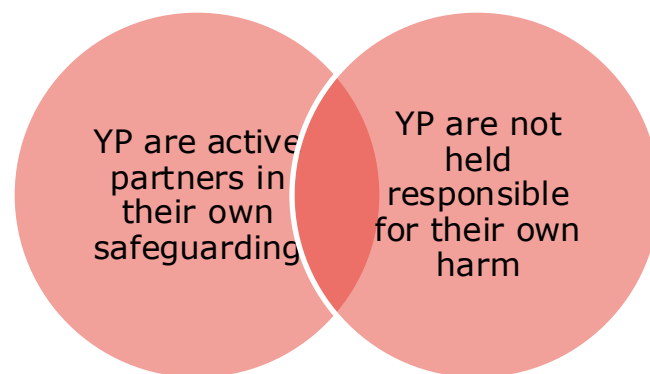
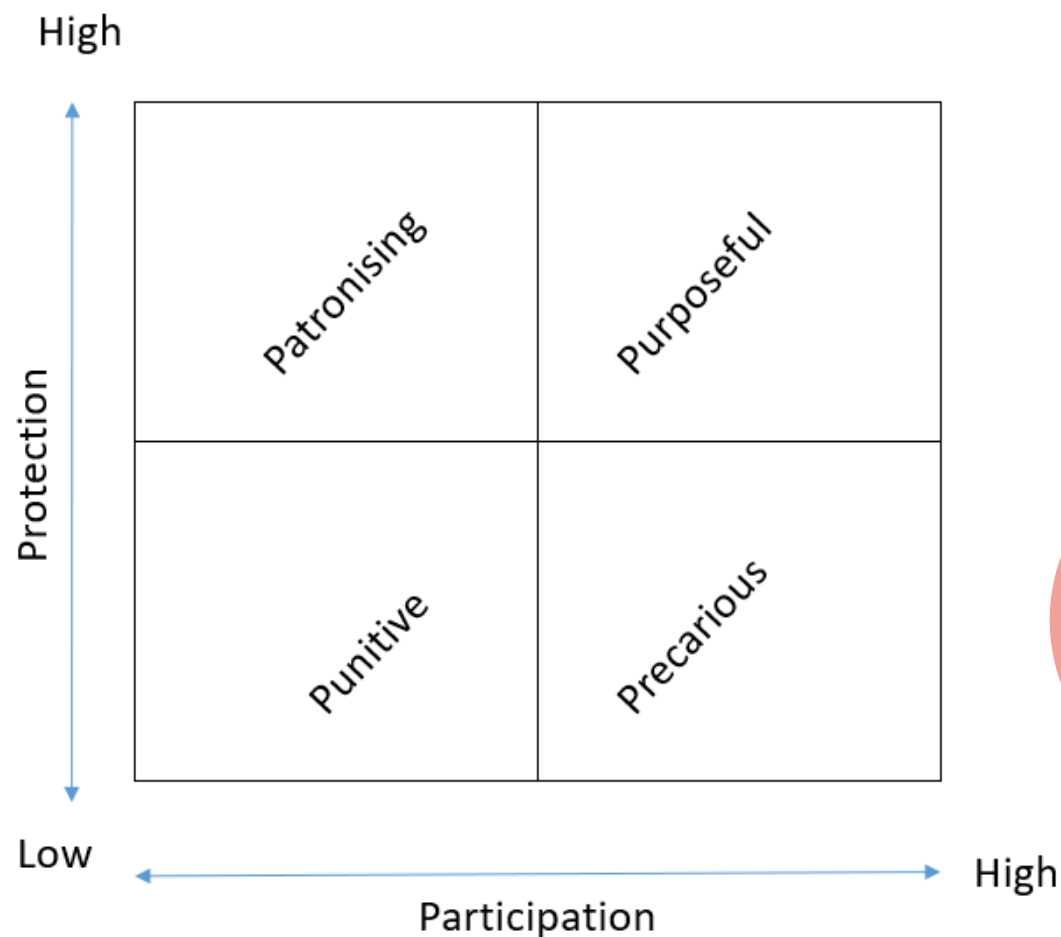
Treating young people with respect.
Promoting the voice of young people

1. **Collaborative:** Collaborating with professionals, children and young people, families and communities to inform decisions about safety.
2. **Ecological:** Considering the links between the spaces where young people experience harm and how these are shaped by inequalities.
3. **Rights-based:** Rooted in children's and human rights.
4. **Strengths-based:** Building on the strengths of individuals and communities to achieve change.
5. **Evidence-informed:** Producing research that is grounded in the reality of how life happens. Proposing solutions informed by lived experience.

The connection / read-across to the Transitional Safeguarding key principles is deliberate!

Balancing protection and participation

(Holmes, in Cocker et al, 2024)



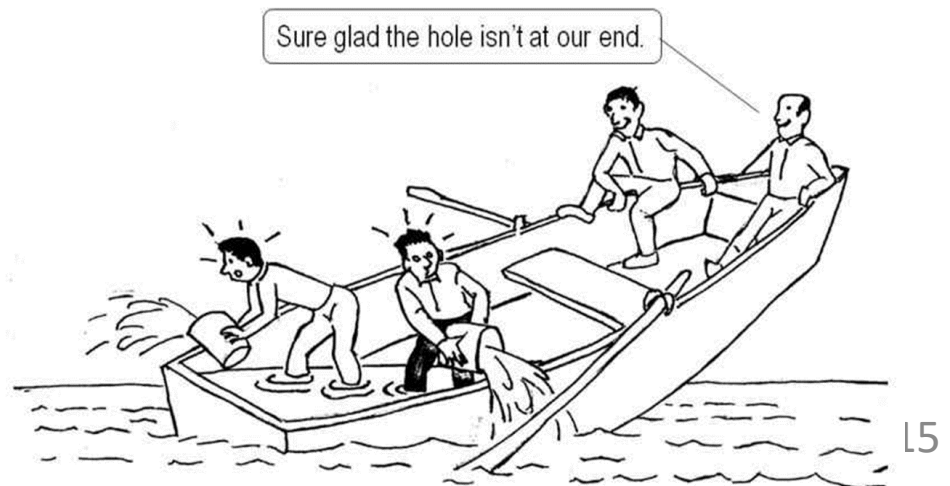
What's helping local areas to develop this

- › Explicitly co-owned local leadership of the agenda
- › Engaging with liminality and complexity
- › Expansive definition of 'partnership' – inc communities
- › 'A system not a service' - A salad not a soup
- › Active knowledge and skills exchange (Cocker et al, 2021)
- › Culture of innovation ('the soft stuff is the hard stuff')
- › Philosophy of practice
- › Place-based problem solving (rather than problem displacement)
- › Building the local case, diverse sources of evidence

- The economic context makes innovation as difficult as it is essential... BUT the current approach is remarkably poor value for money...
- Investing in preventative and recovery-oriented work to promote people's safety and wellbeing can play an important role in avoiding the costs of later intervention.
- Evidence from the UK and international contexts suggests that failing to help young people recover from harm and trauma can mean that problems persist and/or worsen in adulthood, creating higher costs for the public purse.
(Chowdry and Fitzsimons, 2016; Kezelman *et al*, 2015)
- The system (and the spend) is connected... Maternal wellbeing (SM, MH) and CP/care; care and criminal justice; mental health needs, costs Vs funding; family relationships and homelessness; domestic abuse and community violence etc.
- Resource constraints are **the lever** not just the barrier to adopting a Transitional Safeguarding approach

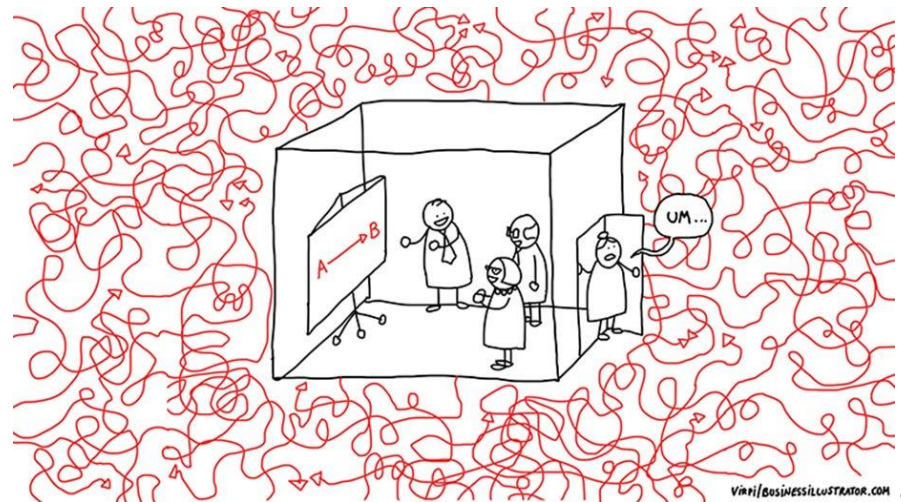
Boundary-spanning; systems leadership

- Boundary-spanning - reaching across borders, margins, or sections to build relationships, interconnections and interdependencies in order to manage complex problems. (Williams, 2002; 2011)
- ‘think like a system - act like an entrepreneur’ (Conway et al, 2017)
- *“leadership that bridges boundaries between groups in service of a larger organizational vision, mission, or goal”* (Ernst & Yip, 2009:1)



What can hinder...

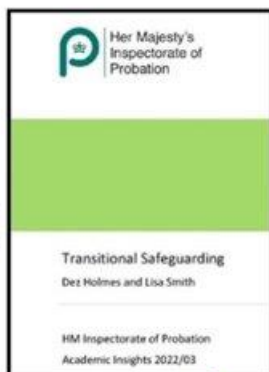
- › An eligibility / diagnostic criteria led construct of 'transitions'
- › Measuring service access rather than strategic needs assessment
- › Prevention being eclipsed by proceduralism / siloed funding
- › Using BAU tools and approaches to an exercise in imagination
- › Lack of space / permission to unlearn and experiment
- › Lack of opportunities for colleagues to learn from each other



research
in practice



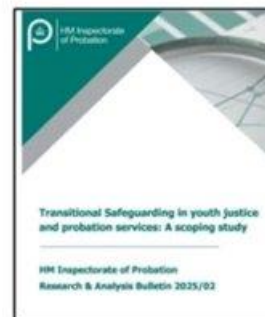
Transitional Safeguarding HMIP Insights Paper, 2022



Transitional Safeguarding Health Knowledge Briefing, 2023



Transitional Safeguarding in youth justice and probation, 2025



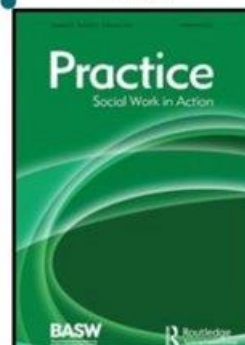
Transitional Safeguarding Briefing for sector leaders, 2025



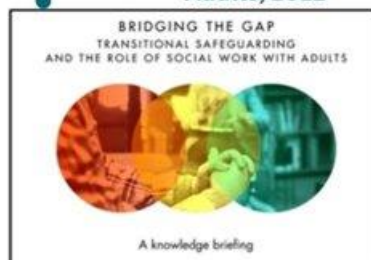
Transitional Safeguarding Book, 2024



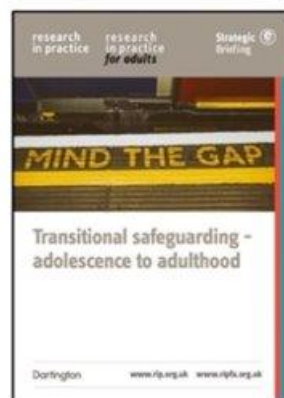
Special Issue 'Practice', 2022



Bridging the Gap: Transitional Safeguarding and social work with Adults, 2021



Transitional Safeguarding Strategic Briefing, 2018



The Innovate Project Researching youth, risk and complexity

Transitional Safeguarding as
innovation to address extra-familial
harm, 2019-2023

- Transitional Safeguarding (2018) original briefing:
<https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/all/publications/2018/august/transitional-safeguarding-adolescence-to-adulthood-strategic-briefing-2018/>
- Updated briefing for leaders (2025) [Transitional Safeguarding briefing for sector leaders: Strategic Briefing \(2025\) | Research in Practice](#)
- A short animation explaining what Transitional Safeguarding is and why we need it:
<https://vimeo.com/794130649>
- The role of adult social work & adult safeguarding to the Transitional Safeguarding agenda (2021):
https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/media/5420/67346_dhsc_trans-safe-report_bridging-the-gap_web.pdf
- Transitional Safeguarding and justice: <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2022/03/Academic-Insights-Holmes-and-Smith-RM.pdf>
- [Transitional Safeguarding in youth justice and probation services: A scoping study](#) (HMIP, 2025)
- The relationship between Contextual Safeguarding, Complex Safeguarding and Transitional Safeguarding (2019):
<https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/publications/2019/january/safeguarding-during-adolescence-the-relationship-between-contextual-safeguarding-complex-safeguarding-and-transitional-safeguarding-2019/>
- <https://www2.local.gov.uk/our-support/partners-care-and-health/safeguarding-resources/transitional-safeguarding-resources>