



Warwickshire Safeguarding Strategy for Adolescents

2026-2029



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Foreword

Our partner vision is to work together to support, safeguard and listen to the voices of children, young people and families and to learn from each other to improve outcomes for families across Warwickshire.

We want all children and young people to be heard, safe, healthy, skilled and happy and access the right support, from the right person, at the right time.

As children and young people grow older, the risks they face increasingly come from outside their home and family environment. These external risks—often referred to as extra-familial harm—can have a serious and lasting impact on young people, their families, and the wider community. In Warwickshire, we recognise that the fear of violence, exploitation, and other harms can prevent children from enjoying safe and fulfilling childhoods.

This strategy sets out the Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Partnership's (WSCP) ongoing commitment to working together to address all forms of extra-familial harm. The WSCP Business Plan for 2025-27 outlines the priority to 'Enhance our joint approach to ensure children are safe within the community from risk of harm outside their home and are visible to services'.

Our focus is on targeting the contexts and environments where these harms occur, fostering safer spaces for children and young people across our county.

We will coordinate a multi-agency response that prioritises prevention and early intervention, ensuring that children and young people at risk receive the right support, from the right person, at the right time in accordance with Warwickshire Spectrum of Support. For those already experiencing harm, we will provide targeted protection and support to reduce risks and help them recover and rebuild their lives with stability and resilience.

Our approach also includes a strong focus on identifying, disrupting, and holding to account those who seek to harm or exploit children and young people in Warwickshire.

The voices of children and young people are central to this strategy. Everything we do will be informed by their lived experiences, as well as the insights of their families, communities, and professionals across our partnership. We will continue to build our approach on robust multi-agency intelligence and strong community engagement.

This strategy has been shaped by the contributions of our partners, stakeholders, young people, and families. We extend our sincere thanks to everyone who has shared their time, insights, and experiences to help us build a safer Warwickshire for all children and young people.

Endorsed by our Delegated Safeguarding Partners.

Our vision

‘Empower adolescents to feel safe, heard, and supported, building resilience through early intervention, and strengthening partnerships across services and communities to provide effective safeguarding at the right time.’

Our definition of adolescent

For this strategy, Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Partnership has adopted the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF definition of an adolescent which relates to children 10 - 19 years of age.

It is recognised that we work with young adults beyond this parameter, such as those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and care leavers, and we will focus on transitional safeguarding for young adults up to the age of twenty-five. Our strategy and programme therefore include explicit commitment to improving our offer to this age group and preventing vulnerable young adults from harm and exploitation.



Introduction

This Safeguarding Strategy for Adolescents outlines our priority areas for the next three years alongside core principles that will guide the work of the partnership to safeguard children and young people from extra-familial harm. It replaces the Warwickshire Exploitation Strategy 2020-2023.

Adolescence is a time of exploration, increasing independence and risk taking. Young people are increasingly influenced by a whole range of environments and people outside of their home, including within their peer groups, school, the local community, and online settings. Understanding and responding to harm posed within these settings, often outside of the control of parents and families, is known as Contextual Safeguarding and requires a different response. Most young people negotiate this period of transition without serious consequences. However, some young people are exposed to risk and harm in these extra-familial contexts, as set out in Section 8 of this strategy.

While some young people are at greater risk, including those with SEND, young people with no apparent vulnerabilities can experience forms of extra-familial harm in Warwickshire.

An awareness and response from a wide range of partners is required when working to safeguard adolescents and our strategy is about how we join up efforts across our partnership to prevent

and tackle safeguarding concerns.

We need to ensure that we promote resilience and young people's ability to respond to changing challenges. Our role is not only to protect, but also to prepare young people for different transitional periods during adolescence, including the transition to adulthood. Central to our ambition is to ensure all young people and their families receive the help they need at the earliest opportunity to enable them to thrive.

We are aware of the increasingly complex and evolving nature of the risks to young people and commit to keep evolving together from the learning as we collaborate with young people, families and partners with the aim of building collective capacity.

There are numerous interrelated issues which need to be considered and addressed in progressing this aim. The WSCP and its individual partners have in place a range of policies, strategies and protocols that impact on the lives of adolescents, as listed in Appendix 3, which should be referenced in appropriate circumstances alongside this overarching strategy.

Engagement with children and young people

We engaged with over 100 young people from a wide variety of settings and circumstances to develop this strategy. This included youth clubs, young people's forums, schools and those who are directly impacted by the harms this strategy is seeking to address. Young people have expressed concerns about unsafe areas in their communities, the presence of concerning adults, the availability of drugs, and the impact of knife crime. They valued trusted adults they could relate to, talk to, and who listened without dismissing their concerns. They felt there were

barriers to knowing where to get help, stigma associated with asking for help, and adults not understanding modern struggles for young people. They wanted an ability to report worries anonymously and greater access to safe spaces. Young people value honesty and want adults to consult with them when decisions are being made. We have reflected on these views to ensure this strategy seeks to address their concerns.



Warwickshire context

Understanding the context in which children and young people live their lives is an essential feature of effective multi-agency intervention. Our collective data identifies local challenges and the priorities to be addressed through the strategy.

In Warwickshire, in 2024/25:

Approximately

11.6%

of Warwickshire's population are adolescents aged **10-19 years**



51/49%

split between **proportion of female and male adolescents** respectively



50%

of **sexual offence** victims are adolescents

20%

of **victims of violence** are adolescents

46%

of referrals to **Family Connect** are for adolescents



3.9%

relate to concern of harm **outside the home**



Adolescents suspected of **committing crime:**

67%

violent crime

18%

sexual offences

67%

18%

Adolescent **victims of crime**

71%

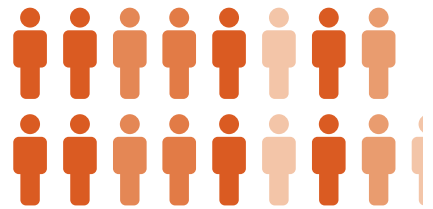
violent crime offences

22%

for sexual offences

16.4%

of adolescents are from **black, Asian, and other ethnic groups**



18%

of **violent crime suspects** are adolescents

34%

of **sexual offence suspects** are adolescents



0.4%

of adolescents were **not in or attending education, training, or employment (NEET)**

7% (187)

of **victims of crimes** committed outside the home in Warwickshire are adolescents



52%
male

48%
female

7% (187)

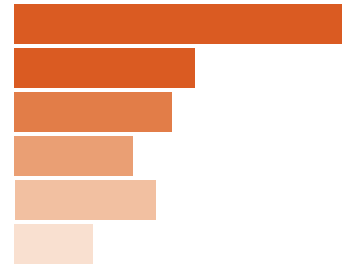
of **Families First Assessments** have concerns for adolescents **exposed to harm outside the home**



71% were identified as **being vulnerable to harm**

Identified concerns

for adolescents at risk or suffering **harm outside the home:**



58%
CCE

32%
CSE

28%
peer violence

21%
gang activity

25%
online grooming

14%
trafficking or modern slavery

19.8%

of those suspected of offences committed **outside the home** are adolescents



70%
male

30%
female



Our priorities

We will achieve our vision by working collaboratively with partners to deliver on the following priorities over the next three years:

Prioritise prevention and early intervention

We will strengthen the resilience of children and young people by ensuring timely access to appropriate support and early help. This preventative approach aims to address emerging vulnerabilities at the earliest opportunity, reducing the risk of escalation into extra-familial harm and enable children and young people to achieve positive outcomes and thrive.

Embed a contextual safeguarding approach across the partnership

Contextual safeguarding is central to our safeguarding approach. We will address the settings in which extra-familial harm occurs, with the objective of fostering safer spaces for children and young people across our county.

Provide effective protection and deliver the right level of support at the right time

We will develop and deliver targeted, evidence-informed support services for children and young people affected by extra-familial harm. These interventions will reduce exposure to ongoing risk, support recovery, and enable them to rebuild their lives with stability and resilience.

Enhance the multi-agency approach to identification and disruption of those who pose a risk to children and young people

We will continue to establish and strengthen a robust multi-agency approach that utilises local intelligence to proactively identify individuals and groups who pose a risk to children and young people, and to coordinate effective disruption of harmful activity.

Our core principles

Our principles guide our actions and decisions across the Safeguarding Children Partnership and workforce to protect young people from extra-familial harm. These are aligned to the Spectrum of Support, guiding responses to emerging concerns. By working together, we aim to create flexible services that respond to the needs of children and families, delivering the right level of support at the right time. This approach shifts the focus from managing short-term crisis to providing effective, early support for children, young people, and their families.

Understand adolescence

We seek to understand young people and recognise that adolescence is a distinct phase of development with specific needs, abilities, and risks. We will understand the growing contextual influences in their lives and consider the positive and negative impact of risks adolescents take in exploring their growing independence.

Work collaboratively to ensure the best outcomes for adolescents

The risks facing some adolescents, and the protective factors that help keep them safe, are located not only in families but also in their peer groups and wider communities. Services must therefore work in close partnership with these settings to enhance our shared understanding of extra-familial harm and identify effective and responsive measures to tackle it. Collaborative

partnership working between a range of services and organisations including schools and educational settings, voluntary and community sector organisations and faith groups is crucial to effectively respond to extra-familial harm and keep young people safe.

See adolescents as children first

We will see children and young people as children first and treat extra-familial harm as a safeguarding concern. We will be non-judgmental and ensure children and young people are not blamed or held responsible for the harm they face, paying particular attention to the language we use (see Warwickshire's Dictionary of Care). We will recognise that adolescents often face constrained choices they may feel powerless to avoid, and we will not expect them to respond or cope as if they were adults.

Respect the voice, experience and expertise of children and young people

Given the complexity of adolescent safeguarding and development, professionals must avoid a one size fits all approach and recognise each young person's unique circumstances. We will ensure young people can shape the support and safety planning tailored to their needs, and influence services in Warwickshire. To respond effectively to their experiences of harm, our approach must be informed by them, ensuring they feel listened to, heard and involved in key decisions.

Focus on strengths, utilising a trauma informed and relational approach

We will work in a trauma informed and strengths-based way with young people affected by extra-familial harm. Young people who have been exposed to adverse childhood experiences or extra-familial harm may experience emotional, physical, sexual and relational trauma. Professionals working with young people will recognise the emotional needs underlying young people's behaviours and respond appropriately. We will ensure our services and professionals prioritise safety, trust, collaboration, choice and empowerment in their interactions with young people. We will focus on the strengths and protective factors inherent in a young person and their family and see these as foundations on which growth, change and safety can develop, rather than focusing on the problem or what is not being done.

Value diversity and challenge inequalities, discrimination and disproportionality

We will value the diverse range of experiences of adolescents in Warwickshire and respond to the needs, and tackle inequality of all genders, ethnicities, sexual identities and beliefs, socio-economic status, and those with SEND. We will develop inclusive, culturally competent, and anti-discriminatory practice which challenges unconscious bias, promotes self-reflection for practitioners, and provides equal opportunity for all. We will build a comprehensive picture of young people affected by extra familial harm and will recognise and respond to disproportionality.

Work collaboratively with families and treat parents and carers as partners, whenever safe to do so

We will prioritise a joined-up, family-centred approach, utilising the strengths of families as experts in their own lives. We will engage effectively with parents and caregivers in understanding the issues affecting their young people and provide them with practical support to help manage risk outside the home and keep them safe. While many factors associated with extra-familial harm are beyond the direct control of parents and carers, strengthening their understanding, safeguarding capacity and resilience can enhance the family as a protective factor for the young person. We will actively involve parents and carers in the safety planning for their children, whenever safe to do so.



Understanding adolescence

Although children and young people can experience extra familial harm at any age, it is most seen during adolescence.

Adolescence is a word used to describe the process of developing from a child to an adult and linked to beginning at the ages of 10-12 and ending at the age of 18 when UK adult status is gained. However, as the term relates to a transitional stage of physical and psychological development most research currently suggests that the brain does not fully develop until someone reaches the age of 25, meaning adolescence exists even when someone has reached the legal age of adulthood. For the purposes of this strategy, adolescence is recognised as 10-19 years of age in accordance with the world Health Organisation definition.

Adolescence is a time of huge change, not just in how teenagers look, but in how they feel and act. Behind these changes there is significant neurological remodelling of the brain, making thoughts and actions faster and more organised. This means that the parts of the brain responsible for making decisions, controlling impulses and instinctive behaviour, and understanding consequences are still very much under construction. Meanwhile, the parts of the brain that handle emotions and rewards are highly active. This can lead to teenagers being more prone to risk-taking, acting on impulse, and experiencing stronger emotions.

Understanding these significant changes helps us to make sense of why teenagers sometimes behave in ways that seem confusing and highlights the incredible potential for learning and growth during this unique stage of life and the opportunity for choosing and influencing all paths. It is important that professionals take cognisance of adolescent development when considering their actions and training to enhance this understanding is offered to the multi-agency partnership.

Adolescence is therefore a time of vulnerability to risks and developing skills, propensities, adaptations, social contexts and social relationships that can feed into risks but also provide unique opportunities to build resilience in the face of them.

As young people develop physically to look like young adults, it has been recognised that professionals have not always considered their developing brains and have expected them to act and make decisions as if they were an adult; referred to as adultification. This can lead to lapses in safeguarding and unfair treatment, which must be consciously avoided. Research has shown that black young men and women are more likely to experience adultification; adultification bias within child protection and safeguarding.

Adolescent neglect

Adolescent Neglect, described as the persistent failure to meet a young person's basic physical or psychological needs likely to result in the serious impairment of the young person's health or development, can sometimes go unseen. However, older children still need care and support. Neglect can present as challenging behaviour e.g. poor engagement with education, violence and increased risk-taking (offending or anti-social behaviour, substance misuse, early sexual intercourse), with the young person incorrectly being seen as 'the problem'. Adolescence is a time of increasing independence and exploration or risk-taking. This can lead to actions being written off as 'typical teenage behaviour' instead of a sign of neglect. Their behaviour should be seen in context of their lived experience and potential trauma and issues such as mental health should not be taken at face value but explored.

Neglect in older children adversely affects the development of emotional regulation and higher executive functioning and can build on the harms of earlier life neglect. It heightens vulnerability to extra-familial harm, potentially leading a young person to look outside the family home for a sense of belonging and identity, introducing risks such as radicalisation and exploitation.

Professionals must be aware of the signs of adolescent neglect and take opportunities to build safe and meaningful relationships in which they can recognise their vulnerabilities.

Understanding impact of trauma

An effective response to child exploitation and extra-familial harm requires a collective understanding of how trauma impacts on development and behaviour, and how individuals perceive and respond to threats and support. This means recognising the wide-ranging impacts of trauma and attending to non-verbal means of communicating an experience of trauma.

It also means recognising how decisions, language, processes and interventions by a professionals and organisations can compound traumatic experiences and impact on a child or young person's engagement and ability to develop trusting relationships. Enabling children and young people to exercise voice, choice and control, all of which are undermined by trauma is important, as is a recognition that 'non-engagement' or 'negative' coping strategies may be a direct or indirect result of trauma.

Trauma informed practice helps us to hear the voices of young people, removing bias, stigma, labelling and revictimisation. Practitioners use intensive and consistent practice to process trauma, respond to behaviours, reduce fears, stress and anxiety, and promote wellbeing.

We recognise that vicarious trauma can be experienced by those working to support and protect traumatised individuals, often in distressing circumstances.

Prevalence of extra-familial harm

During adolescence the nature of the risks faced by young people, and the way that they experience these risks, often differs from earlier childhood – as do their needs. Specifically, young people may be faced with a new set of complex risks – ones not posed by families, but instead by peers, partners and adults unconnected to their families. These risks:

- Often manifest in extra-familial environments including schools, public spaces and online platforms
- Are informed by peer norms and relationships
- Involve young people perpetrating, as well as experiencing harm
- Can present as the result of perceived ‘choices’ a young person has made or continues to make despite professional or parental intervention
- Often feature grooming, coercion, criminality, and serious risks of significant sexual and physical harm that creates a climate of fear and reduces engagement with services
- Often beyond the control of parents and rarely instigated by parents
- Can lead to family breakdown and disrupt child/parent relationships following a rapid escalation in risk and disengagement from education
- Can continue into adulthood, particularly for young people during the 18-25 transitional period

Child criminal and sexual exploitation

Exploitation affects communities nationwide, including Warwickshire. Child criminal exploitation (CCE) is a growing concern, with children targeted by criminals, gangs and organised networks. They may be forced to distribute drugs and money locally or across County Lines, work in cannabis factories, shoplift, steal cars, commit burglary, use violence, or experience labour exploitation. Many are also sexually exploited within these situations or groomed specifically for that purpose. Although national attention has increased, [Child Sexual Exploitation \(CSE\) nationally](#)^[1] remains prevalent, and professionals must stay alert to the signs.

In 2024/25, 292 children in Warwickshire were referred as being at risk of, or experiencing, exploitation (67% linked to CCE and 33% to CSE) an 18% rise on the previous year. At least 10 County Lines operations involving children were identified, with activity becoming increasingly localised ^[2]. Nationally and locally, boys are more often criminally exploited and girls more often sexually exploited, though both forms affect all genders. Most referrals involved young people aged 14-17.

Any child can be at risk, but vulnerabilities such as poverty, early neglect, substance misuse, parental imprisonment, disability, poor mental health, school exclusion or being in care increase exposure. Prevention focuses on reducing these risks through early intervention. A 2025 CSE profile is guiding local priorities, with a similar CCE profile now requested.

Young people missing from home, education and care

Going missing can be symptomatic of wider problems in a child's life. Vulnerability due to their age, level of understanding, or the significance and seriousness of the circumstances that led to the missing episode may be present and increase the risk of extra-familial harm. It is therefore vital that missing episodes are not seen as isolated incidents. Work to identify the causes of the missing incident and preventing them reoccurring is crucial, and the response must be considered as a safeguarding issue. The Warwickshire Missing Children Protocol provides a framework for a co-ordinated and consistent response by agencies to reports of children who go missing.

Adolescents aged 10-17 years represent 98% of all children going missing in Warwickshire with predominant ages between 14 and 16 years. In 2024/25, 540 children went missing, 29% doing so repeatedly, leading to 1726 missing episodes through the year. 23% were children in care. This volume and frequency pose a significant challenge for multi-agency partners and consequently a focus on reduction is a key priority of the WSCP.

Children missing from education are potentially exposed to higher degrees of risk and are at increased risk of being criminally exploited or being groomed and exploited by gangs, as well as other forms of harm both within and outside of their homes.

781 children in Warwickshire were missing from education in various forms during 2024/25. It is essential that all agencies work together with the Children Missing Education service to identify and re-engage these children back into appropriate education provision as quickly as possible.

This strategy challenges partners to identify adolescents who are at risk of going, or who have gone missing from home, education, and care, and, when a missing episode is associated with a risk of harm, to develop a proportionate pathway of safeguarding and support, seeking to prevent further instances from occurring.



Online harm and abuse

The internet is a wonderful resource used by young people to make friends, communicate and socialise and is often a positive part of children's lives. However, some young people can experience abuse and inappropriate content through social media, online gaming and messaging apps. Some harmful content is illegal, like child sexual abuse images or content promoting terrorism. Other material might not be illegal but can still cause children harm, such as content promoting eating disorders. The increase in the use of Artificial Intelligence for harmful purposes and widening accessibility of technology to young people is heightening exposure to harm. Online platforms are therefore a significant component in many well-being and safeguarding concerns.

At least 35% of police recorded Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation has an online element. The online space plays a role in facilitating contact abuse and exploitation of children with perpetrators using platforms to build trusting relationships to groom and abuse them. It may lead them to experience other types of abuse including cyberbullying, emotional abuse, and sexting. These crimes are often hidden, and victims may not recognise the abuse or feel able to report the abuse themselves.

The sharing of photos and videos online has become normal daily behaviour with the majority of 12-18-year-olds owning smartphones. This increase in ease of sharing imagery raises concerns around young people producing and sharing sexual imagery which may expose them to risks, particularly if the imagery is shared further, including embarrassment, bullying, blackmail, and increased vulnerability to sexual exploitation. Young people may experience this type of harm from adults or peers and can involve people they know in the offline world as well as those they only interact with online.

Professionals working with young people must be alert to these dangers and assess how they interact with these platforms to identify any potential risks. Services should have procedures in place to guide their responses when concerns are identified in accordance with Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) procedures, and support young people to identify what content may be harmful, know not to share it with others, and know how to seek help and support if they come across anything that worries them. Training is available to help keep children safe from online harms, accessible via the WSCP website.

Modern slavery and trafficking

Modern slavery can take many forms including the trafficking of people, forced labour, servitude and slavery. It involves the illegal exploitation of people for personal or commercial gain and is often a hidden crime, where people are tricked, coerced or forced and lose their freedom. Human trafficking refers to the movement or recruitment of people through these means for the purpose of exploitation.

There are increasing numbers of children and young people identified as victims of modern slavery in the UK. The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is the process used to identify and support victims. Statutory agencies (including police and local authorities) have a duty to report where children are suspected to be a victim of modern slavery.

In 2024, 75% of referrals to the [NRM](#) were for children in situations including child sexual and criminal exploitation, forced labour, and domestic servitude³. Some children and young people are trafficked internationally into the UK from other countries or are victims of modern slavery during their travel (often for forced labour). British children and young people are also targeted for exploitation and grooming and are trafficked around the UK. In 2024/25, 70 children in Warwickshire were referred to the NRM as potential victims of modern slavery and trafficking, an increase from 57 children in 2023/24 and 30 children in 2022/23.

Warwickshire, led by Warwickshire County Council, is participating in a Home Office pilot to devolve decision making for child victims of Modern Slavery. Identification and referral of victims have increased by over 250% in the county since commencement of this process.

Training on Modern Slavery, Human Trafficking and NRM is available to all professionals through a package of e-learning modules and direct delivery by specialist staff.

Serious youth violence

In 2024/25, 24 children in Warwickshire were convicted of serious violence offences, including robbery, drug supply and serious assaults. Serious violence against the person offences has risen by 45% since 2023/24, and 31 children were convicted of weapon-related offences. A small number of very serious incidents have also influenced public perception of violence with Warwickshire. Although serious violence remains relatively small in scale, its impact on young people, families and communities is significant.

Warwickshire has developed an all-age serious violence strategy focused on prevention. Through analysis and case reviews, community safety partners have identified early-life, trigger and escalating factors that increase risk. A multi-agency prevention model will support early identification and intervention, while services such as WYJS and family support teams continue working with those already involved.

Young people who offend

There are many varying and complex reasons young people may end up involved in crime. Their offending behaviours often mask underlying vulnerabilities: from early childhood trauma and neglect to school absence and exclusion, poor mental health and growing up in poverty. Young people also offend because of being exploited to do so. The WYJS is dedicated to working with adolescents aged 10 to 17 years who have offended or are at risk of offending. The mission is to prevent youth crime and support young people in making positive changes, working to 'child first' principles to ensure the best possible outcomes. There is a strong focus on prevention, early intervention, and diversion delivered by a dedicated youth work team pathway. During 2024/25 there were 349 offences committed by 114 children, representing 0.21% of all 10-17-year-olds in Warwickshire.

Peer on peer abuse

Peer on peer abuse occurs when a young person is exploited, bullied, or harmed by their peers of a similar age. It is an increasing problem and can occur in a range of different situations, including online and offline bullying and exploitation, domestic abuse (abuse in their relationships), sexual abuse and harassment (including sharing indecent images), harmful sexual behaviour (behaviour outside of their normative parameters of development), gang activity, and violence. Peer on peer abuse is harmful to the victim and the perpetrator and can have a detrimental impact on the rest of their lives if not addressed quickly. It can often occur in education establishments and schools and colleges play a key role in addressing it.



Radicalisation and extremism

Spotlight



Focus on young people national data confirms that more young people are linked to terrorism offences in the last 4 years. The online space where most of their radicalisation occurs plays a key role in this. Channel referral information also confirms that young people are at great risk of radicalisation. (Warwickshire Prevent Action Plan 2024 – 2026). In Warwickshire, 2025/26 saw a significant rise in the number of referrals made with the highest proportion of these concerning the 12–17 age group.

Radicalisation occurs when someone adopts extreme political, social, or religious views that may lead to harmful, hateful, or violent ideologies, including terrorism. It is an increasing form of harm affecting young people and requires a safeguarding response. Although Warwickshire is generally a safe place to live, children and young people are widely exposed to harmful material online, originating from global sources.

Radicalisation is no longer limited to extreme political or religious ideologies. There is growing concern about online misogynistic content, particularly within the so called “manosphere”—a collection of websites, blogs and forums promoting toxic masculinity, misogyny, and anti feminist beliefs. Parents, educators and safeguarding professionals are increasingly

alert to its influence. The internet, social media and gaming platforms are now key spaces where extremist ideas are promoted and where young people are targeted for radicalisation. Such content may appear harmless or humorous at first but can lead to significant harm, affecting a young person’s beliefs, relationships, and sense of safety both online and offline. Early intervention is vital to prevent them from being drawn into extreme views or terrorist activity and to ensure they receive the support they need.

While all children can be vulnerable to radicalisation, certain factors increase risk, including neurodivergence, mental health difficulties, and social isolation. These vulnerabilities can make young people more susceptible to manipulation, coercion or online grooming by extremist groups.

Warwickshire’s Prevent programme, including the Channel Panel, is a county wide initiative working with Warwickshire Police, the Regional Counter Terrorism Unit, local authorities and the wider community. Its purpose is to safeguard individuals from the threat of terrorism and recognise the significant harm caused when young people become involved in, or supportive of, extremist activity. As of 2025, the greatest concerns relate to radicalisation linked to causes associated with international terrorist threats, alongside the continued rise of online extremist and misogynistic influences targeting young people.

Risk factors

Educational neglect

All children, no matter their background or needs, have the right to a high-quality, inclusive education including post 16. Professionals working with children and families have a legal and moral duty to protect this right and promote equal access. Failing to support a child's learning or meet attendance requirements due to persistent absence is a serious safeguarding concern that often links to wider neglect and increases vulnerability to risks such as exploitation and associated harms. National data and serious case reviews show that neglect is the most common reason for child protection plans. Being in school for these children is important to keep them safe within a protective environment, as well as supporting their social, emotional, physical, and academic growth. In Warwickshire during 2024/25, 320 school age children were missing education.

Exclusion from mainstream school is a particular trigger point for risk of serious harm that has a major impact on children's lives, which if unavoidable, requires immediate wrap-around support if alternative provision is not found quickly to compensate for the lack of structure, sense of belonging and rejection the exclusion can cause. Positively, there is a downward trend in the number of children and young people excluded from provisions.

A child-centred approach is vital. As outlined in Working Together to Safeguard Children and Keeping Children

Safe in Education (2023), professionals must understand that barriers to attendance are often complex. Early identification and support, sensitive assessment, and coordinated family support to remove the barriers are key to overcoming these challenges. To tackle educational neglect effectively, professionals across education, health, social care, and the voluntary sector must work together. Education Support Workers are embedded in children's services supporting adolescents exposed to extra-familial harm, aimed at coordinating the provision of appropriate education or training.

Healthcare neglect

Mental and physical health support is essential for young people, who often face complex barriers to accessing care. Practitioners must recognise signs of harm and understand that repeated missed appointments usually reflect vulnerability and disengagement, not non compliance. Non attendance can indicate untreated health conditions, unmet mental health needs, or wider instability such as going missing, exploitation, or family conflict. Health professionals should explore the reasons for missed care, share concerns with safeguarding partners, and actively re engage the young person. Persistent non attendance must be treated as a safeguarding issue, with timely referrals and coordinated communication between health, social care, and other agencies to ensure appropriate support.

Poor mental health and wellbeing

Children and young people with poor mental health and wellbeing may be more vulnerable to extra-familial harm. Mental health difficulties may arise from experience of trauma, abuse or exploitation and can lead to self-harm. Access to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), provided by RISE in Warwickshire, can be challenging due to increasing demand in numbers and complexity of young people in need of support and limited resources, as highlighted in the Warwickshire 2023 Mental Health and Wellbeing Joint Strategic Needs Analysis (JSNA). Mental health referrals for young people have been rising year on year nationally and in Warwickshire, causing significant delay in provision of support.

Substance misuse and vaping

Drug and alcohol misuse can lead to, and increase, a wide range of physical, psychological and social problems. It can emerge alongside other vulnerabilities, such as mental health difficulties, familial, social or financial difficulties, and experiences of trauma and abuse. Young people with substance misuse and dependence can also have increased vulnerability to exploitation and other associated harms outside of the home. Vaping-related exploitation is a pressing issue affecting communities across Warwickshire and nationally, including the use of vapes laced with dangerous synthetic drugs (Spice).

In 2024/25, 492 young people in Warwickshire were referred for substance misuse treatment services, with a particular rise in 14-16-year-olds. 32% of children referred were considered vulnerable to exploitation.

Separated children (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC))

Separated children are children and young people who are seeking asylum in the UK but who have been separated from their parents or carers. They are cared for by the Local Authority and as of March 2025 there were 89 being cared for by Warwickshire representing 12.2% of the children in care population. UASC are alone, in an unfamiliar country, may be surrounded by people unable to speak their first language and may be unaware of their rights and who they can trust. They may have experienced harm and trauma in their country of birth, on their journey to the UK (during which Modern Slavery often occurs), or in the UK due to vulnerability to exploitation.

Homelessness

Children and young people who are homeless or living in inappropriate circumstances can face significant increased risk of abuse, violence, criminality, and exploitation. This is often due to previous experiences that have contributed to them becoming homeless or heightened vulnerability because of being homeless, as well as an escalation of their health and care needs. There is an overlap between the factors understood to cause both exposure to harm outside the home, such as exploitation and violence and youth homelessness. They include poverty and exclusion, family breakdown, leaving the care system and difficulties with mental health or trauma.

In 2024/25, 20 young people aged 16 and 17 in Warwickshire presented as homeless.

It is important that organisations identify homelessness as a safeguarding concern, provide effective support to keep adolescents safe, and signpost to services in accordance with the Warwickshire Joint Housing Protocol for homeless 16- and 17-year-olds.

Children in care and care leavers

Children in care and care leavers may be more vulnerable to being harmed outside the home due to the situations and experiences that led to them being brought into care. Other factors

increasing their risk can include resultant placement unsuitability and disruptions causing instability, and separation from support networks, often leading to missing from care events.

Adolescents have become the fastest growing group of children coming into care due to parents being unable to protect them. Warwickshire Families First programme focus is to help families overcome challenges and stay together so that children remain safely at home or move into the care of relatives if needed. Where that isn't possible, the priority should be for children to stay close to home and family networks, avoiding out of area moves that often heighten risks, unless circumstances dictate otherwise.

As of 31 March 2025, there were 484 children in care in Warwickshire aged 10-17 years, representing 66.6% of the children in care population.



Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)

Children and young people with SEND are statistically more vulnerable to abuse and neglect due to factors such as communication barriers, dependence on adults, social isolation, misinterpreted behaviour, and limited understanding of abuse. Many have communication, learning or neurodivergent needs that are not fully met within current service structures, and delays in assessment especially for neurodevelopmental or social communication needs.

Warwickshire Safeguarding Children's Board's Spectrum of Support outlines thresholds for intervention and key risk indicators for children with SEND, including escalating behavioural concerns, low school attendance, limited engagement with services, family stress or breakdown, and inadequate access to specialist help. Practitioners must recognise individual needs and the heightened vulnerability of children with SEND to safeguarding concerns highlighted in Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024, such as bullying, isolation, neglect, sexual abuse, exploitation and radicalisation, both online and offline.

Practitioners should receive targeted training on SEND-related risks, promote inclusive practice, and use total communication approaches. Assessments must be completed promptly to prevent delays in support.

The Warwickshire SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-29 emphasises early identification and strong multi agency collaboration to reduce exposure to harm.

Socioeconomic deprivation

Socioeconomic deprivation significantly increases a child's risk of exploitation by creating vulnerabilities like material hardship, parental stress, and lack of resources, which can lead to grooming, gang involvement, and various forms of exploitation, including online. Poverty can mean a lack of basic needs, limited social opportunities, and increased exposure to domestic abuse or substance misuse within the household, all of which heighten a child's susceptibility to various forms of harm and exploitation.

The 2021 Report on Child Poverty by the Children's Commissioner states child poverty has been rising in absolute and relative terms for nearly a decade and we are seeing growing rates of child poverty in Warwickshire. In 2019/20 there were 15,305 (14.5%) children under 16 in relative low-income families. There is a wide variation across the 5 district and boroughs regarding deprivation rates. The Tackling Social Inequalities in Warwickshire Strategy 2021 – 2030 outlines action being taken to address the challenges and a specific Warwickshire Child Poverty Reduction Strategy to be developed for 2026-2030.

What young people told us about safety in Warwickshire

During May 2025 Warwickshire Youth Service conducted a survey with 307 young people in a variety of professional contexts: at open access youth clubs, within targeted 1 to 1 youth work sessions, specific groups and with young people in school settings. The main findings of the survey are presented in this image.

A primary concern for the partnership is where young people reported feeling safe. 37% said they felt safe at school, 77% felt safe at home, and 55% felt safe at a friend's house. Just 10% felt safe being out in the community after dark, and only 31% felt safe being out during the day.

Other areas of concerns are nearly a quarter of all young people surveyed would consider carrying a weapon, over 60% face challenges with their mental health, and online risks remain a significant concern. These areas, along with others outlined below, will need further exploration so that the partnership and all concerned with the safeguarding of young people can fully understand what underlines the responses.

YOUTH SERVICE SURVEY 2025 TOP 10 SURVEY FINDINGS



01. Health

When asked what places young people felt **safe** to be in, **37%** said at school, **77%** said in their home, **55%** said at a friend's house. Also, **10%** said they felt **safe** being in the community in the dark where as **31%** said they feel **safe** being out in the community during the day

When surveyed, **63%** of young people said they faced challenges with their **mental health**. **35%** said they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their current **mental health**. **43%** have a diagnosis or waiting for a diagnosis for a medical condition



02. Safe Spaces



03. Carrying a Weapon

When asked, **45%** of the 16-18 year olds surveyed said they were **sexually active** with **20%** of 14-15 year olds and **3%** of 11-13 year olds saying the same

21% of all young people surveyed would consider carrying a **weapon** with **28%** of the 16-18yrs asked said that they would consider carrying a **weapon**



04. Sex



05. Smoking & Vaping

When asked, **24%** of 14-15 year olds said they have tried **Class B drugs** with **37%** of 16-18 year olds said they also have. **Alcohol** use rises steadily from **27%** of 11-13yrs olds saying they have drunk rising to **67%** of 16-18 year olds

24% of 11-13 year olds said they have tried **vaping** with this increasing to **58.7%** of 16-18 year olds. However **smoking tobacco** was much lower with **4.7%** of 11-13 year olds saying they have **smoked** moving to **33%** of 16-18 year olds



06. Drugs & Alcohol



07. Aspirations

43% of young people said in the last year that they have accessed a **youth club** for support with **48%** having been to the **dentist** or **GP**, **27%** visited **A&E** and **20%** have been supported by **CAMH's**

52% are satisfied or very satisfied with their **life** right now with **20%** saying they were dissatisfied

61% of young people feel **hopeful** about their **future** and potential job opportunities



08. Accessing Support



09. Online Risks

4.2% of 16-18yrs olds across England are currently **NEET**. We found **12.9%** of the young people surveyed in Warwickshire said they were not in **education** or **training** currently

From the survey, we found **32%** of young people have witnessed online **self harm or suicide content**. **28%** have been exposed to **extreme diet and surgery content**. **27%** violent crime & **22%** rape and porn



10. Education & Training

Survey of 307 young people aged 11-18 who attend a youth club or receive support from a Warwickshire Youth Worker (May 2025)

Transitional safeguarding – understanding and supporting key adolescent transitions

Transitional safeguarding is an approach to safeguarding adolescents and young adults across developmental stages. It focuses on safeguarding young people from adolescence into adulthood but also recognises key changes in a young person's life, understanding transition is a journey not an event, and every young person will experience this journey differently.

The needs of young people do not change or stop when they reach 18, although the laws and services supporting them often do. Many of the environmental and structural factors that increase a child's vulnerability continue into adulthood, resulting in unmet needs and costly later interventions. Children's and adults' safeguarding systems have developed from different theoretical foundations, are governed by different legislation, and operate with different thresholds and processes, which do not align well with transitional safeguarding. For vulnerable young people who are not supported due to a learning difficulty or disability, there is limited availability of holistic wrap around support at this key stage. This can make the transition to adulthood harder for those facing ongoing risk, creating a 'cliff-edge' in terms of support.

Transitional safeguarding therefore requires changes in practice and across systems involving all agencies, ensuring traditional eligibility criteria is not applied at the expense of preventive work and safeguarding support needed to keep young people safe where they are experiencing harm outside the home or continuing effects from it. It requires practitioners, leaders and all involved in services for children and adults, to consider how they might work together and think beyond child and adult silos for the benefit of young people at key life stages. Colleagues involved in safeguarding adults have a particularly important role to play and need to develop new approaches to create opportunities for flexible support. Some young adults might require help to be safe and healthy, even if they don't have formally defined care and support needs.

In Warwickshire, Children and Families Family and Adolescent Support Team have a key focus on linking children and adult services to provide the joined-up support required, working to an agreed protocol and closely with services such as adult safeguarding, housing, mental health and substance misuse. Where possible, work with the young person

commences prior to attaining 17 years of age to enable trusted relationships to be established, effective planning with adult services, and continuing delivery of safeguarding support into adulthood. This includes signposting to other organisations to help prevent these young adults from going into crisis. We will seek to develop pathways for young people aged over 18 to access safeguarding and relevant support which empowers them to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives as independent adults.

We want children and young people in Warwickshire to be supported at all key transitional stages of adolescence in addition to preparation for adulthood. Where safeguarding concerns exist, we want this priority to consider the diverse needs and experiences of children and young people and the various transitional stages of adolescence that include:

- Physical, psychosocial and neuro-developmental changes associated with puberty
- Education, training and employment changes, for example transition from primary, secondary, further education, training and post statutory school age into employment
- Gender, sexuality and other identity changes
- Changes in primary caregiving and care experienced children
- Emotional and mental health difficulties and diagnosis

Warwickshire's safeguarding partners must seek to continue to work together to support effective transitions for young people in these circumstances, considering and evaluating provision and addressing any gaps that exist.

What we seek to achieve

- Young people receiving support to manage transitions and the complexities of housing, financial issues, independent living, and access to education, training or employment
- Agencies working together to create an environment of structural support at key transition stages and focused goals that are developed in partnership with young people
- Agencies working together to continue providing programmes of support that help keep young people safe and to understand the impact of harmful behaviour, awareness of opportunities and choices, and coping skills
- Young people provided with access to support to combat poor physical or mental wellbeing, substance misuse, isolation, and managing negative peer or family pressure
- Young people supported to build upon their existing strengths and strengthen their social, personal and community-based resources and support networks

Summary of our multi-agency offer

We will strengthen the resilience of children and young people by ensuring timely access to appropriate support and early help. This preventative approach aims to address emerging vulnerabilities at the earliest opportunity, reducing the risk of escalation into extra-familial harm and enabling children and young people to achieve positive outcomes and thrive.

We offer a range of services across the Spectrum of Support through our partnership to meet the varying needs of children and young people, including a diverse and well-established voluntary and community sector provision. Some of these services are highlighted here:

Specialist services	• Multi-Agency Child Protection Team • Children in care and leaving care • Family Adolescent Support Team (FAST) • Trafficking and exploitation team - Police	• Youth Justice Service • Harmful Sexual Behaviour Service • Specialist commissioned services • Voluntary and community sector • Specialist Education Provision
Family Help	• Children with Disabilities Team • Children and Adolescents Mental Health Services • Family Connect • SENDAR	• Additional resourced provisions and units in mainstream schools • Warwickshire Youth Service • Police -PCSO's and Safer Neighbourhood Teams • Voluntary and community sector
Early Support Services	• Early Support Officers • Police -PCSO's and Safer Neighbourhood Teams • Cyber Choices • Health - RISE/Substance Misuse Services	• Warwickshire Youth Service • Mental health and pastoral support teams in schools • Voluntary and community sector
Universal services	• Early years settings, schools and colleges • Open access universal youth offer including leisure services • GPs, health visitors and school nurses	• Community Help Points (safe places for children and young people) • Voluntary and community sector

Delivering on our priorities

Prioritising prevention and early intervention

Ensuring young people receive the right intervention at the right time is a key objective of the partnership in Warwickshire. Young people should not have to wait for harm to escalate to be provided with support. We will build resilience amongst children and young people so they can reach their full potential through the care of their families and communities. Where needed, we will provide early support as soon as possible to prevent vulnerabilities from escalating into harm. Communication and engagement with young people and families is critical in ensuring information, advice, guidance and support can be accessed for the right families at the right time.

To support a preventative approach, it is key that all sectors understand the early warning signs of potential problems. As a partnership, we need to identify when young people are placed at increased risk and share information and intelligence. The WCSP training offer for harm outside of the home, can be accessed at safeguardingwarwickshire.co.uk. The extension of the learning hub to colleagues within education settings has been fundamental to ensuring all partners have a good level of knowledge about issues impacting on adolescent safeguarding.

Spotlight



Through Families First funding in Warwickshire, we have established an exciting partnership with the Child Sexual Abuse Centre of Expertise (CSA Centre), offering a comprehensive series of evidence-based webinars led by the centre and access to resources to enhance knowledge, understanding, and practical skills related to child sexual abuse, including technology-assisted offending with the ever-increasing threat from online abuse. We have additionally commissioned a training offer in 2026 for all practitioners across the Warwickshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership to raise awareness and understanding about Contextual Safeguarding and Extra-familial Harm, Street Gangs and Organised Crime, Safety Planning, Neurodiversity and Adolescent behaviours including self-harm, and Disrupting Exploitation.

Spotlight



Operation Talkative is a partnership initiative aimed at preventing and diverting knife crime in Warwickshire.

Recognising the limitations of traditional police enforcement, it emphasises early intervention to prevent escalation into serious criminality.

The initiative calls on the community to share information about individuals carrying knives, which is crucial for police and community safety partners to take preventive measures and ensure safety in Warwickshire.

Funding through the Home Office Safer Streets initiative was secured to focus on locations in the county where women and girls told us they feel unsafe to deliver environmental improvements and create safer spaces for all, as evidenced within the consultation process with young people.

We offer annual training to night-time economy workers, such as taxi drivers, hotels, B & B's, and licenced premises including door supervisors, bars, nightclubs, and fast-food venues

and have worked with District and Borough licensing teams to make child exploitation training a mandatory condition of their licence. Reporting of concerns from such sectors has successfully led to intervention prior to harm being perpetrated and investigations on several occasions. We conduct Operation Makesafe at licenced premises across the county to test the impact of this training.

We will equip and empower children and young people with the knowledge and resources about how they can keep themselves safe online, in their homes, schools and communities. This includes enabling them to understand risk, how to engage in healthy relationships including between peers, and where to access support when they need it. We know that extra-familial harm is aggravated by evolving online environments and technology adaption, and 'digital dangers' is built into our work with young people to highlight risks. Schools play the leading role in providing information, delivering key messages through statutory sex and relationships education (RSE), personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) classes and targeted workshops.

Spotlight



We work preventatively with children and young people in education and other settings across Warwickshire to promote healthy relationships, equality and respect. We have invested in delivering training to schools across Warwickshire, commissioning a theatre company, Loudmouth, to educate children on risks of abuse and exploitation, providing accessible advice on how to stay safe. 139 sessions were delivered in mainstream and non-mainstream settings, reaching 13,012 children and young people aged 8-18 years.

Education can mitigate adolescent harm by educating our children and young people on the risks and dangers, build resilience and support making positive choices, identify early signs of concerns, and foster a safe and supportive school environment. The Education safeguarding team has recently been extended so that schools and colleges across Warwickshire can seek guidance. There are Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL) and Head teacher forums which enable dissemination of information and best practice guidance amongst education colleagues, who are often the first responders to early signs of safeguarding concerns for adolescents. A coaching conversation approach has been introduced within Family Connect to ensure full consideration of all the factors around a concern.

National research demonstrates the positive impact of community awareness about exploitation and other forms

of extra-familial harm. A community that can identify this problem and that knows what to do about it will help protect children and young people, so we prioritise a whole-system prevention response as key to our aim to eradicate it. Through our Something's Not Right campaign in Warwickshire, we will make sure that there is a shared understanding of exploitation and other forms of extra-familial harm, including early signs that it may be happening and how to report concerns through publicly shared safety information that reaches all parts of our community. We seek to challenge the attitudes, behaviours and societal norms which foster these harms by raising understanding and intervening early where possible to prevent it.

We will work with young people and their families through innovative and evidence-based services that develop resilience and reduce the risk of extrafamilial harm, supporting young people to thrive. As outlined within the National Youth Strategy, positive activities enable young people to learn new skills, build resilience and healthy relationships, stay safe and boost their physical and mental health and wellbeing. We will continue to provide a range of social prescribing opportunities for young people to be involved in positive experiences. This includes opportunities to engage and work with young people in their own communities and in areas identified as potential hot spots through our detached and outreach youth work offer delivered by our young people services.

Spotlight



Youth services

Our youth services deliver a strong offer in the county which includes universal services from five youth centres, Holiday Activities, Food programme (HAF), Youth Clubs, targeted groups, one to one support, mentoring, detached youth work and outreach youth support in schools. We work closely with voluntary and community sector organisations providing support to young people in Warwickshire.

Further information on the range of opportunities and positive activities available for young people in Warwickshire can be found at [Searchout.warwickshire.gov.uk](https://searchout.warwickshire.gov.uk).

We will:

- Develop resilience of young people by providing talks, workshops and supporting PSHE lessons in schools around the risks and educate about services available to support
- Strengthen our outreach and detached youth work provision so that we engage and work with young people in their communities
- Work with community, voluntary and faith sector to enable agencies and communities to provide effective integrated responses to young people in relation to prevention
- Enhance the capability to provide clear and accessible information on relevant services and guidance for young people, families and professionals through the Family Information Service for extra-familial harm
- Implement an integrated harm outside the home multi-agency response to early support
- Expand our Contextual Safeguarding Champions network and improve the use of communication channels to promote awareness, understanding and recognition of extra-familial harm within the partnership and wider community and provide training so people can identify the signs of vulnerability in a variety of contexts
- Continue to embed locality-based, joined-up multi-disciplinary Family Help Hubs through the Families First for Children programme, providing seamless and effective support tailored to the needs of children and families
- Consider how data and information is shared and how this can be used to make communities safer through a coordinated response.
- Work with schools and educational settings to support robust inclusion practices aiming to keep young people in mainstream education wherever possible
- Support children and young people to get involved in positive activities, be involved in their communities and have somewhere to go and something to do through our universal youth offer
- Expand the provision of substance misuse treatment services for young people into targeted multi-disciplinary teams

Embed a contextual safeguarding approach across the partnership

Contextual safeguarding is an approach to understanding and responding to young people's experiences of harm outside the home which considers wider factors such as peer groups and the places young people spend time both in-person and online. A contextual safeguarding system aims to intervene in the environments where young people are exposed to harm, creating safer places and spaces for them.

We are developing a contextual safeguarding approach in Warwickshire across our partnership. Warwickshire Children and Families service has contextualised our safeguarding systems, introducing a range of new processes with the support of multi-agency partners to better understand harm children and young people are exposed to outside of their home.

The Children and Family (Families First) Assessment has been revolutionised, providing ability to assess a range of often-interconnected harms, such as exploitation, peer violence, and gang activity, and creating one innovative holistic assessment that examines children's lived experiences and exposure to harm within all these contexts in order to develop plans to address the concerns.

A system of multi-agency Contextual Safeguarding Meetings (CSM) has been introduced to effectively respond to

concerns where a child or young person is groomed, targeted, or subjected to any type of extra-familial harm to improve management of identified risks within contexts outside of the home.

Locality Contextual Safeguarding Meetings (LCSM) have been embedded across the county designed to bring together key partner agencies and community services in the localities to target intervention in places of vulnerability and emerging risk referred and to monitor outcomes achieved towards making them safer. LCSMs also focus on peer groups of children and young people engaged in harmful activities, and those receiving safeguarding support where the current risk management process has not increased safety.

A Contextual Safeguarding Operational Group (CSOG) has been established to drive the operational delivery of the LCSM's and our contextual safeguarding arrangements across Warwickshire. This Group monitors the LCSM arrangements through analysing multi-agency data and outcomes to influence practice and coordinate approaches. It leads on the identification of themes, patterns and trends around child exploitation and vulnerability across Warwickshire, including scoping of local, regional and national developments in policy, practice and legislation, and feeds into the Adolescent Safeguarding Partnership Group of WSCP.

A network of Contextual Safeguarding Champions has been created to support raising awareness about Contextual Safeguarding across the partnership and develop multi-agency practice on the approach. The network encourages nominated people to act as leads within their services, taking on responsibility to be a point of contact for advice and support and to raise awareness about Contextual Safeguarding, by sharing knowledge and disseminating resources to help embed change and guide good practice. WSCP asks each organisation, or service area within larger organisations, to have a Contextual Safeguarding Champion and encourages appropriate people to sign up to the network. Further information can be found on the WSP website.

In 2025, a new Spectrum of Support threshold guidance was published through WSCP that now incorporates risk factors linked to extra-familial harm and provides a framework for professionals who are working with children to drive consistent and effective responses. The aim is to provide the right support at the right time, promoting early support and helping avoid escalation of needs.

A lead Adolescent Practitioner within Family Connect offers a contextual lens in relation to referrals received and decision

making. They link closely with the adolescence service ensuring concerns relating to exploitation and other forms of extra-familial harm are identified early to ensure timely intervention and are a champion for contextual safeguarding within the front door, sharing knowledge and providing advice both within the organisation and to partner agencies.

Moving forward, we seek to improve how we gather and record information about a range of contexts outside the home posing a safeguarding risk to young people so that we can address the wider environmental factors and extra-familial contexts that are threatening the safety of our young people within local areas across Warwickshire. We also seek to further develop links within communities to work in partnership with a wide range of individuals and organisations who can influence these contexts such as community safety, planning, housing services, local businesses and voluntary and community sector organisations. We will continually be informed by feedback from young people about what makes them feel safer. We will develop our work around understanding their peer groups, that play a significant role in shaping young people's social norms and the decisions they make, but for some, can also present a distinct risk as a setting in which abuse, and exploitation can occur.

Spotlight



The Student Voice is an interactive tool that some Warwickshire schools have introduced, capturing live contextual insight from students of where harm is occurring to enable faster, more effective interventions.

It is assisting school safeguarding teams in understanding the context of where extra familial harm happens to their students, utilising interactive maps of all the contexts that young people spend time in, so that students can report their experiences of where they are exposed to harm, enabling a proactive response from schools and partners to mitigate against the risk and make the contexts safer; building a culture of 'you said, we did' to empower young people.

We will:

- Undertake an audit review of our approach to contextual safeguarding and response to extra-familial harm, to identify best practice and areas for improvement
- Engage a broader range of services and organisations in the protection of young people in extra-familial settings. This includes local authority services such as housing and community safety, alongside educational settings, businesses, community organisations and faith groups
- Improve how we gather and record information about a range of contexts outside the home posing a safeguarding risk to young people, expanding the use of tools such as The Student Voice
- Enhance the use of context assessments and conferences with people having influence in the spaces and places to improve the response to identified concerns
- Explore new opportunities to work more closely with young people's peer groups as part of our safeguarding response
- Support the provision of safe spaces and help points by District and Borough councils within local communities, improving awareness amongst young people
- Build contextual safeguarding considerations into the design of public spaces, working in partnership with the Planning Service and Housing Services.

Spotlight



Within LCSM we seek to map contextual intelligence and deploy outreach youth workers in identified hot spot areas, working with young people after school, during the evening and at weekends with a focus on disrupting hot spots and improving the safety of young people outside their family home.

Our youth workers also deliver group work to youth clubs and workshops, sessions in schools, and individual support on a range of relevant themes, including healthy relationships, peer to peer abuse, keeping safe on social media, and keeping safe in your neighbourhood.

Provide effective protection and deliver the right level of support at the right time

We will provide young people who are affected by extra-familial harm with appropriate and targeted support that reduces the risks they face and helps them to recover and rebuild their lives. Extra-familial harm can have devastating and lifelong consequences for young people and can negatively impact on their social, emotional and cognitive development. Without support, affected young people may experience mental health issues, substance misuse and difficulties accessing education and employment.

Family and Adolescent Support Teams (FAST) were launched in 2023 to transform responses to adolescents facing increasingly complex situations from a range of often interconnected harms outside of their home exposing them to considerable risk as victims and offenders, with growing numbers entering care late. FAST's focus is to improve the support and protection afforded through a strengthening family's approach, working restoratively through a trauma lens to build and strengthen relationships and provide flexible and responsive support at the right time to maintain stable homes and keep young people safe. FAST has a trauma informed and multi-disciplinary composition, is uniquely resourced to provide support to address the key vulnerabilities and risks facing adolescents. It is co-located with the Police, Barnardo's, the Multi Agency

Child Protection Team (MACPT) and Youth Justice Service to reduce harm and improve outcomes. The team is locality based to build connections with communities and better understand challenges for young people through a Contextual Safeguarding approach. Return conversations conducted by missing children practitioners within FAST offer an opportunity to uncover information about why young people went missing, what happened while they were away, including exploring whether they have come to any harm, and discuss what needs to be put in place to prevent them from going missing again.

We provide commissioned services working in partnership with statutory and voluntary agencies to provide effective support to adolescents harmed outside of their homes. Through multi agency collaboration, the Warwickshire Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) commissions Barnardo's to provide therapeutic support to exploited children, and additional funding from various sources enables sexual violence advocacy and support for victims. Our offer includes use of social prescribing as a diversion to connect young people with their interests, funding initiatives such as the Music and Change (MAC) Project and Music Mentoring Arts and Poetry (MMA), as well as community resources such as gyms and boxing clubs, to develop their personal skills and improve their social, emotional, occupational, and educational potential.

Spotlight



Warwickshire are piloting a programme with the Home Office enabling decisions about whether a child is a victim of modern slavery (identified through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) to be made locally by those involved in their care. This ensures that decisions are more closely aligned with the provision of local, needs-based support through a local panel convened for the purpose. The process has reduced timescales for making decisions, led to a significant increase in the identification of victims, and has strengthened the safeguarding response and support provided, delivered through our collaboration with specialist workers from the Independent Child Trafficking Guardian Service (ICTG).

The partnership recognises that to be effective in improving outcomes for young people affected by extra-familial harm, practitioners need to continue to develop their knowledge and skills and be aware of new and emerging threats. We offer training tools and techniques to deliver best practice in our work to safeguard adolescents and support a culture of continuous improvement, including learning from local and national reviews and national research, as well as expertise from the lived experience of our young people and families. We seek to proactively

address concepts of ‘unconscious bias’ and ‘adultification’⁴ highlighted by child safeguarding practice reviews and research, which can negatively impact how young people seen, supported, and protected. We will ensure that our multi-agency workforce has access to training opportunities that prevent and tackle all forms of bias and embed anti discriminatory practice across the partnership.

Life experiences and transition points can exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and cause risk levels to rise rapidly. This includes changes in family circumstances, exclusion from mainstream school, being arrested or experiencing violence. Our approach to protection and support will include a focus on reachable moments, making sure that the right support is available for families and young people whenever it is needed.

Extra-familial risks and harms can involve young people perpetrating, as well as experiencing, harm. We have implemented a child-first approach across the safeguarding partnership. This means that we see children as children, recognise their needs, vulnerabilities, past trauma and constrained choices where exploitation is a factor, and help them build on their strengths and capabilities to build resilience and empower them to fulfil their potential. This also means that we prevent as many children encountering the criminal

justice system as possible, prioritising prevention and diversion to reduce unnecessary criminalisation. Operation Guarding, Warwickshire's response to dealing with cases where children share nude or sexual images of themselves, is an example of this. It promotes a proportionate, safeguarding-first response, focusing on education and support, in situations where an image has shared only between two children with no aggravating factors such as coercion or adult involvement. We introduced our Turnaround programme in 2022, an early intervention diversion programme for young people aged 10-17 years who have shown a propensity for crime or anti-social behaviour. It offers targeted, voluntary support from a dedicated youth work team to help them avoid further involvement with the justice system. The programme delivers tailored, holistic interventions to help young people address underlying issues, working with them to build resilience and achieve better outcomes.

We will:

- Align our commissioned services to effectively support adolescents affected by harm outside the home, including sexual and criminal exploitation and serious violence
- Adopt a 'Child First' approach and treat children entering the Youth Justice System as children rather than 'offenders' or 'criminals', seeking to reduce unnecessary criminalisation
- Embed trauma informed practice across the partnership
- Develop our ability to respond flexibly to critical and reachable moments
- Equip and support the multi-agency workforce through high-quality learning opportunities, including training on anti-discriminatory practice and adultification
- Ensure that our workforce across the Safeguarding Children Partnership is equipped with the knowledge, skills and approaches they need to provide the right help for our children and young people and their families, including those with SEND, through training and ongoing practice guidance
- Work with the Safeguarding Adults Board and Adult Social Care to develop pathways for young people aged over 18 to access relevant support, safeguarding and protection from harm. This includes support and guidance on health and wellbeing, housing, financial management, independent living skills, and employment and training.

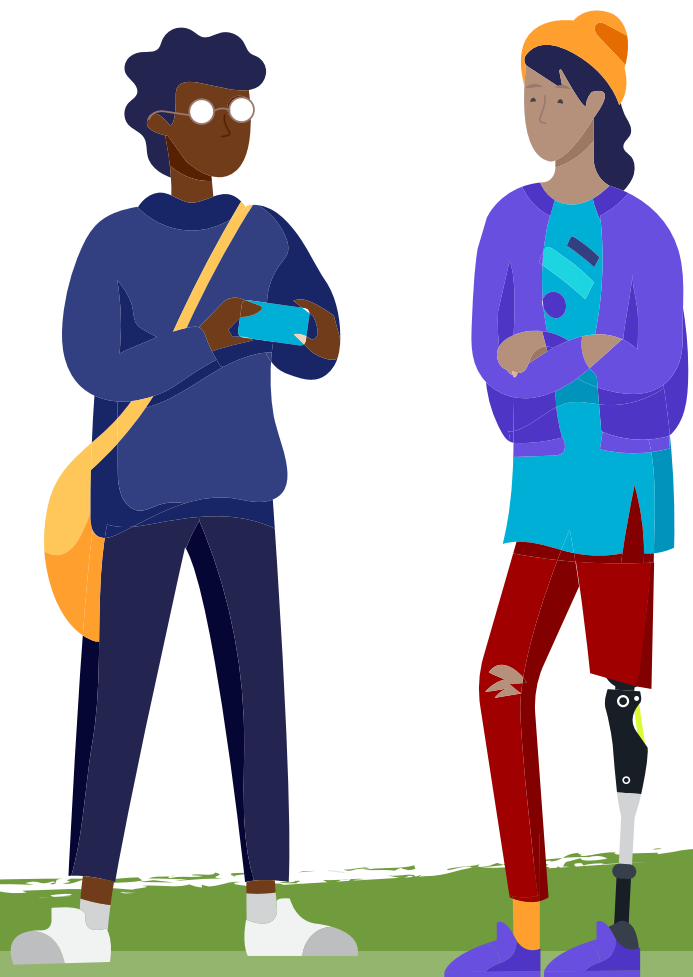
Enhance the multi-agency approach to identification and disruption

Whilst our priority is on preventing extra-familial harm from occurring and supporting children, young people and their families, it is equally important that we take responsive action against perpetrators of harm. Learning from national reviews emphasises the need for greater focus on disruption of perpetrators as part of our safeguarding response. Working together to understand the extra-familial harm taking place in Warwickshire is essential to effectively target, prevent and disrupt the offending.

Disruption is therefore built into plans created within multi-agency Contextual Safeguarding Meetings (CSM) established in Warwickshire to respond to concerns identified and effectively manage the risks. Locality Contextual Safeguarding Meetings (LCSM's) bring together key partners to share information and intelligence relating to locations and people of concern.

Local services can be invaluable sources of information in building a better understanding of extra-familial harm taking place in the local area. We will seek to build and maintain relationships with a range of individuals and organisations, including local businesses and providers, and those who have influence over places and spaces where concern has been identified.

Effective disruption of perpetrators involves the flexible use of both criminal and civil routes, including powers relating to licensing, health and safety, fraud and housing provision. We will act against both locations and people of concern. We also know that trust and confidence between agencies, communities and young people is key to encourage reporting of concerns and ensure we can act against those who take harm. We will explore opportunities to work with young people and our communities to build safer neighbourhoods.



We will:

- Ensure timely identification of perpetrators of extra-familial harm and pursue enforcement action against them
- Use the full range of disruption tactics available through both criminal and civil routes to protect children and young people, including powers available in relation to licensing, health and safety, fraud and housing provision
- Develop a local profile of extra-familial harm in the county which draws on information and intelligence from a wide range of sources to aid insight and disrupt perpetrators
- Enhance cross border information sharing and working arrangements with key regional authorities
- Empower and support young people, families and communities to report incidents of violence and crime.



Governance and measuring progress

The Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Partnership is responsible for overseeing the delivery, monitoring and review of this strategy.

Our governance framework sets out our relationships and how we will work together to deliver the Safeguarding Strategy for Adolescents as illustrated in Figure 1.. Work to address extra-familial harm affecting adolescents in Warwickshire sits across several partnership boards and subgroups. The framework shows how this work is connected across groups, reducing duplication and the need for multiple meetings considering similar issues.

Effective performance management is essential for continuous improvement. A robust framework will support a coordinated approach across partners to monitor implementation of the strategy and strengthen safeguarding responses. It will include indicators relating to extra-familial harm, risk factors, and the number of children and young people accessing prevention and early intervention services. Indicators will be grouped into prevention, disruption and system measures, providing clarity on aims and responsibilities.

While the Adolescent Safeguarding Subgroup will provide assurance and coordination, delivery will depend on partners, services and governance arrangements across the wider safeguarding system. Progress will be measured through partnership data,

trend analysis, audits, case learning, feedback from adolescents and families, and evidence of how intelligence informs prevention, support, disruption and system improvement. This will build on existing data, address gaps in knowledge and understanding, and follow an outcomes-based accountability approach to reporting performance, identifying issues and driving improvement.

Progress of the strategy will be reviewed annually by the Adolescent Safeguarding Partnership Group and updated as required to reflect local and national developments, including changes to statutory guidance and best practice initiatives.



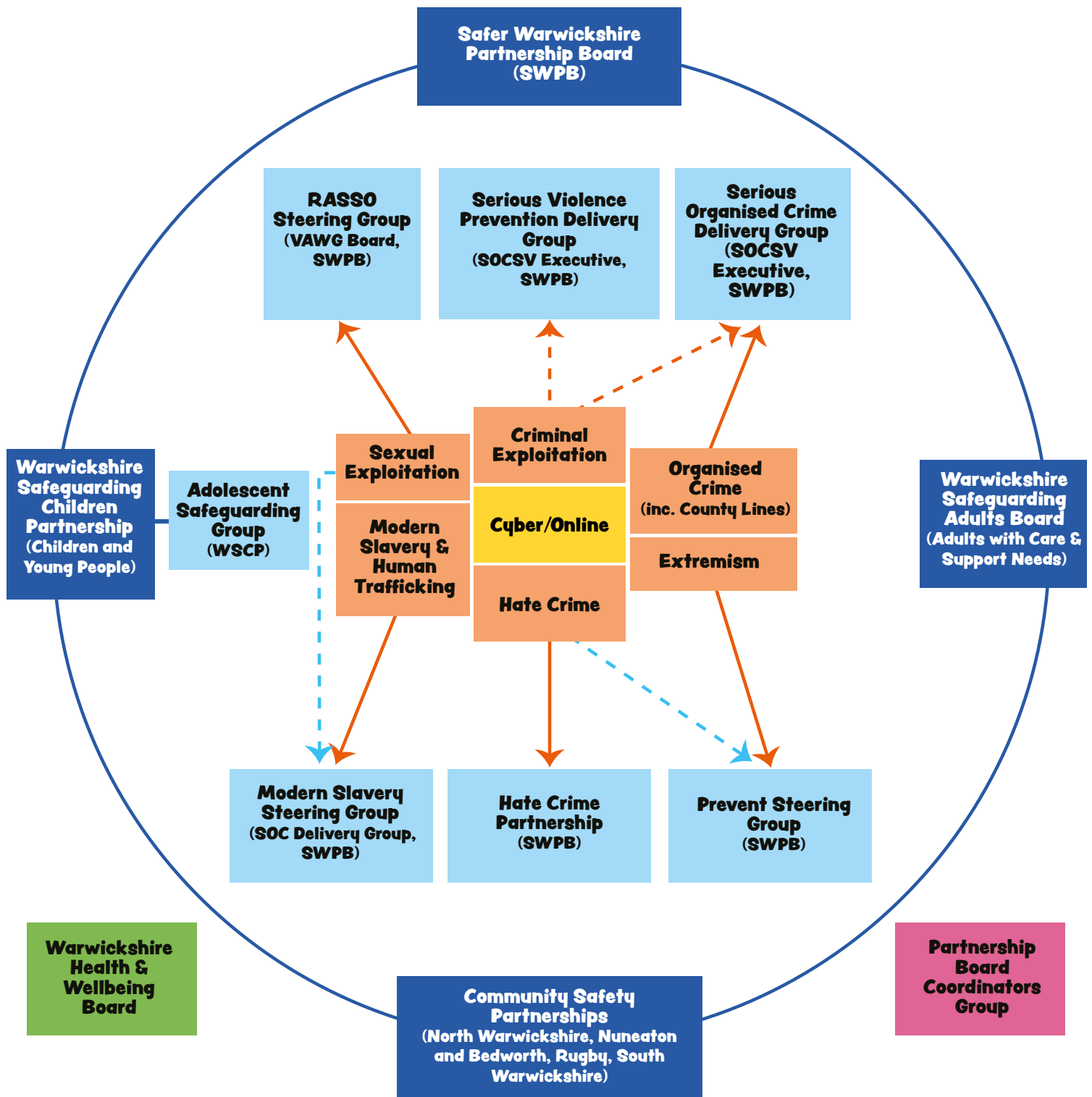


Figure 1 - Warwickshire Strategic Framework for extra-familial harm

Appendix 1:

How to get advice and report a concern

Before making a referral – please take a look at the [Spectrum of Support](#) document to decide whether your concerns require a referral to Children’s Social Care.

For urgent concerns – if you have an urgent child protection concern, call Family Connect.

Lines are open:

- Monday to Thursday – 8.30am – 5:30pm

Lines are open:

- Friday – 8.30am – 5:00pm

Out of hours

If you have an emergency outside of usual office hours, please contact the emergency duty team immediately on **01926 886922**

Emergency contact

If you think that a child is at immediate risk, contact the police immediately on **999**

Unsure about contacting Family Connect?

Check the West Midlands Regional Procedures Guidance for [referrals](#) or the Warwickshire [Spectrum of Support](#) for guidance which tells you which type of service a family may need to get support.

Alternatively, call ChildLine for advice on **0800 1111** or email them by visiting www.childline.org.uk

Warwickshire Something’s Not Right campaign website provides helpful advice and support if you are concerned about exploitation www.somethingsnotright.co.uk

Appendix 2: Signs of extra-familial harm

There are signs that may indicate a young person is experiencing extra-familial harm, including exploitation:

- Frequently absent from school
- Frequent missing episodes and being found in a different area to where they live or have no connections
- Travelling distances without means to do so
- Returning from missing episodes with injuries or dishevelled appearance
- Relationships with people older than them
- Changes in behaviour, for example are more withdrawn or isolated
- Estrangement from family and original network of friends
- Unexplained amounts of money, clothing, or other items and gifts
- Increasingly disruptive, hostile or physically aggressive at home or school
- Having extreme views or beliefs
- Peer group or associations of concern or establishing gang involvement
- Substance misuse or dependency
- Having multiple mobile phones or use of a phone that causes concerns, for example secretive, multiple callers or more texts than usual
- Self-harm or significant changes in emotional wellbeing
- Unexplained physical injuries and refusing to seek medical help
- Carrying weapons
- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Inappropriate or sexualised behaviour



Appendix 3: Connected strategies, policies and protocols

[Warwickshire Children and Young People Strategy 2021-2030](#)

[Child Friendly Warwickshire Plan](#)

[Warwickshire Police and Crime Plan 2025-29](#)

[Warwickshire's Dictionary of Care](#)

[Warwickshire Families First Spectrum of Support 2025](#)

[Warwickshire's Relational Practice Framework 2025](#)

[Warwickshire SEND Inclusion Strategy 2024-29](#)

[Warwickshire Education Strategy 2024-29](#)

[Safer Warwickshire Serious Violence Prevention Strategy 2023-30](#)

[Safer Warwickshire Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2023-26](#)

[Warwickshire Missing Children Protocol 2023](#)

[Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2025/26](#)

[Youth Participation Strategy \(part of the Children and Young People Strategy\)](#)

Appendix 4: Definitions

Adolescence	is the transitional stage of development between childhood and adulthood, typically occurring between the ages of 10 and 19 years. It is marked by rapid physical, cognitive, and psychosocial changes that influence emotional regulation, decision-making, and social interactions.
Adultification	is a form of bias in which children—particularly those from Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnic backgrounds—are perceived and treated as being more mature, less innocent, and less vulnerable than their peers. This misperception can lead to inappropriate expectations, reduced empathy, and failures in safeguarding, as these children may not receive the protection and support typically afforded to others of the same age.
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)	refer to highly stressful or potentially traumatic events that occur during childhood or adolescence. These may include physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, witnessing domestic violence, experiencing the death of a loved one, or living with someone who struggles with substance misuse. Such experiences can have long-term negative impacts on physical health, emotional wellbeing, the ability to build healthy relationships, and future opportunities in areas like education and employment.
Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)	is a serious form of child sexual abuse involving individuals under the age of 18. It occurs when an individual or group uses power, control, or influence to manipulate, deceive, or coerce a young person into engaging in sexual activity. This exploitation may be in exchange for something the child needs or desires—such as attention, gifts, or money—or for the perpetrator’s financial gain or enhanced social status. Importantly, the presence of apparent consent does not negate the abusive nature of the exploitation, as the young person may have been groomed or manipulated. CSE can take place both in person and online and does not necessarily involve physical contact.

Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)

refers to situations in which an individual or group abuses a power imbalance to coerce, control, manipulate, or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into engaging in criminal activities. This exploitation may occur:

- in exchange for something the child requires or desires
- for the financial gain or enhanced status of the perpetrator or facilitator
- through the use of violence or threats

Importantly, a child may be considered criminally exploited even if the criminal activity appears to be voluntary. CCE can occur without physical contact and may be facilitated through digital or online means.

Peer on peer abuse

refers to situations where children and young people are exploited or harmed by peers of a similar age, as well as by adults. In some cases, children who have experienced exploitation themselves may go on to recruit or involve other children in abusive situations. Peer on peer exploitation can also arise through sexual bullying in schools or other social environments. Additionally, exploitation may occur within or between gangs, where sexual activity is exchanged for protection, safety, drugs, or a sense of belonging. These dynamics highlight the complex and often hidden nature of abuse among children and young people.

Contextual Safeguarding

is an approach that seeks to understand and address the risks of significant harm that young people may face outside of their family environment. It acknowledges that the relationships and social settings young people engage with such as in their communities, schools, peer groups, and online spaces can be sources of violence, exploitation, and abuse. These external contexts are often beyond the direct control of parents and carers, and experiences of extra-familial harm can negatively impact the parent-child relationship. Contextual safeguarding therefore involves identifying and intervening in the environments where harm occurs, with the aim of creating safer spaces for children and young people.

County Lines	refers to the operations of gangs and organised criminal networks that transport illegal drugs from urban hubs to rural or coastal areas across the UK. These groups use dedicated mobile phone lines—known as “deal lines”—to facilitate drug distribution. Children and vulnerable adults are frequently exploited to move drugs and money, often under threat, coercion, or violence, and may be exposed to weapons and serious harm.
Disproportionality	describes the overrepresentation or underrepresentation of specific groups within a particular system or category, relative to their proportion in the general population. In youth justice, research indicates that children and young people from ethnic minority backgrounds are disproportionately impacted, with higher rates of sentencing and custody compared to their peers.
Early Support	refers to the provision of support at the earliest opportunity to prevent issues from escalating. It encompasses both universal and targeted services aimed at reducing emerging needs and preventing problems from becoming entrenched or more difficult to resolve.
Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP)	is a statutory partnership comprising Warwickshire Council, Warwickshire Police, Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Integrated Care Board and education is the fourth partner. These partners collaborate with relevant agencies including schools, healthcare providers, and voluntary organisations to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people across Warwickshire.
Extra-familial harm	refers to abuse or exploitation experienced by children and young people outside their family environment. This often occurs during adolescence, when peer relationships and social networks expand. Such harm may arise in schools, peer groups, communities, or online settings.
Gangs	are predominantly street-based groups of young people who identify as a distinct collective and are recognised as such by others. These groups are often involved in criminal activities and violence, posing significant risks to community safety and individual wellbeing.

Modern Slavery

involves the recruitment, transportation, harbouring, or receipt of individuals—including children—through coercion, deception, abuse of vulnerability, or other means for the purpose of exploitation. Under the Modern Slavery Act 2015, children are considered victims of trafficking regardless of consent or coercion, provided exploitation is the intended outcome.

Multi-Agency working

involves coordinated efforts between multiple organisations such as local authorities, police, health services, education and other partners to safeguard children and promote their welfare. This collaborative approach ensures a holistic response to safeguarding concerns.

National Referral Mechanism (NRM)

is a national framework for identifying and supporting potential victims of modern slavery. First responder organisations, including local authorities and police, are legally required to notify the Home Office when they encounter individuals who may be victims, ensuring access to appropriate support services.

Neglect

is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and emotional needs, which can severely impair their health, development, and wellbeing. Long-term neglect can lead to poor mental health, difficulties in forming relationships, risky behaviours, and increased vulnerability to further harm, including extra-familial exploitation.

Professional Curiosity

is the proactive and respectful approach practitioners take to understand a child or young person's lived experience. It involves asking thoughtful questions, exploring concerns, and not accepting information at face value. This approach is essential for identifying hidden risks and safeguarding children effectively.

Radicalisation

is the process by which an individual comes to support extremist ideologies, including terrorism. It often involves exposure to harmful narratives and influences that encourage violence or hatred, posing significant risks to the individual and wider society.

Safeguarding

as defined in Working Together to Safeguard Children, involves:

- Protecting children from maltreatment
- Preventing impairment of health or development
- Ensuring children grow up in safe and effective care environments
- Taking action to ensure all children achieve the best possible outcomes

Serious Youth Violence

refers to incidents involving weapons in public or community spaces, where the victim is aged between 10 and 19 years. These events pose significant risks to safety and wellbeing and often require multi-agency intervention.

Trauma

is the emotional and physical response to an event or series of events perceived as harmful or life-threatening. It can negatively affect neurological, psychological, biological, and social development, particularly in children and young people.

Trauma-Informed Practice

is an approach that recognises the impact of trauma on individuals and communities. It aims to create safe, culturally sensitive services that foster trust and empower individuals. Practitioners are encouraged to work collaboratively and support informed choices about safety and wellbeing.

The six core principles are:

1.**Safety****2.****Trust****3.****Choice****4.****Collaboration****5.****Empowerment****6.****Cultural
Consideration**