research in practice

A transitional approach to safeguarding

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The case for change

(Holmes, 2021)

› Adolescents may have **distinct** safeguarding needs - often 'contextual' / extra-familial (inc online contexts) and are underpinned by complex social and biological drivers

› **Harm and its effects** do not abruptly end at 18; **the brain** may continue developing until mid-20s… but support may stop at 18

› People don't fit into neat boxes! Different types of harm; vulnerability / resilience are situational and dynamic

› **Transition** to adulthood is process not an event, we may need care and support without having Care & Support needs™.

› Promoting **resilience** and dynamic **developmental** needs

› There are **moral** and **economic** drivers for a reimagined safeguarding system which is contextual, transitional and relational
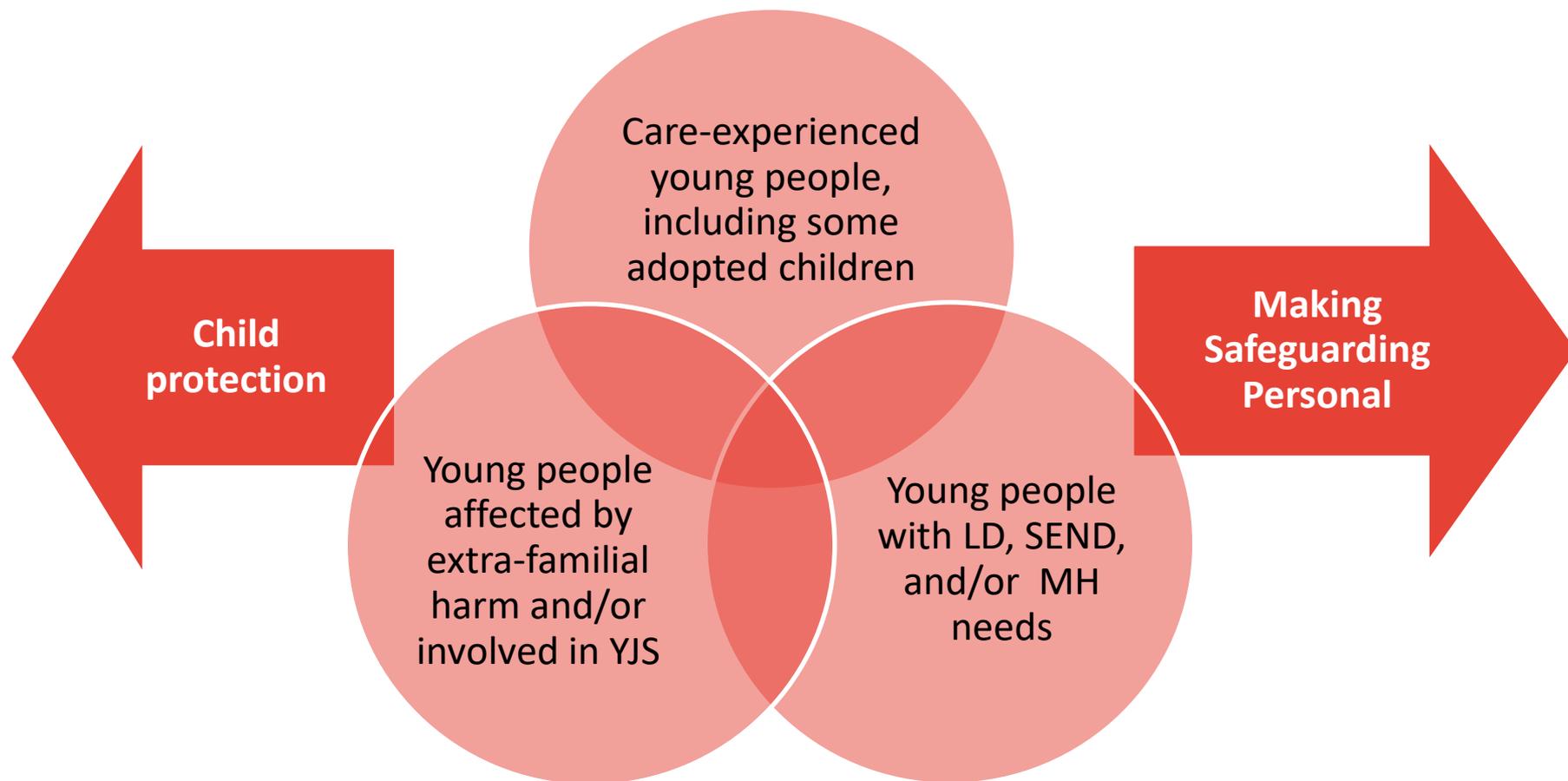
› **Boundary-spanning**: practice, policy, mindset

Redefining adolescence and transition

› Some studies into brain development & effects on behaviour show some elements of brain growth – eg development to more mature affect regulation, social relationships and executive functioning - continue into the 20s. (Sawyer *et al,* 2018); Prior *et al,* 2011)

› "An expanded and more inclusive definition of adolescence is essential … Rather than age 10–19 years, a definition of 10–24 years corresponds more closely to adolescent growth and popular understandings of this life phase" (Sawyer *et al*, 2018)

What we mean by Transitional Safeguarding
(Cocker et al, 2021)
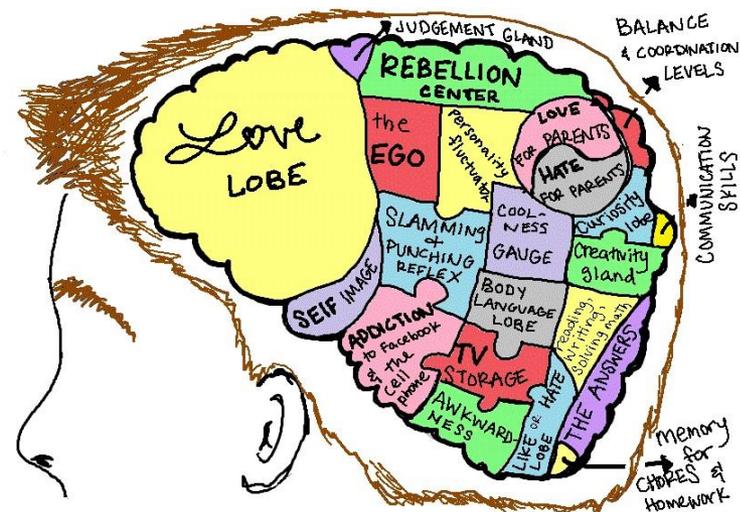
› *'an approach to safeguarding adolescents and young adults fluidly across developmental stages which builds on the best available evidence, learns from both children's and adult safeguarding practice and which prepares young people for their adult lives'* (Holmes & Smale, 2018)

› Not simply transition planning for people moving from CSC → ASC. It refers to activity that has often fallen **outside of the traditional notions of both 'transitions' and 'safeguarding'**, where these have sometimes been interpreted through a lens of eligibility, rather than in the wider sense of human experiences and needs.

› **Extends far beyond statutory duties** - highlights the holistic nature of effective safeguarding. This involves engaging commissioned services in a way that allows them to work creatively and flexibly.

› Not a prescribed model. A **principles-led approach** to policy and practice, being developed in different ways according to local circumstances.

Mind the gap…

Child
protection

Care-experienced
young people,
including some
adopted children

Young people
affected by
extra-familial
harm and/or
involved in YJS

Young people
with LD, SEND,
and/or MH
needs

Making
Safeguarding
Personal

Credit: C. Cocker

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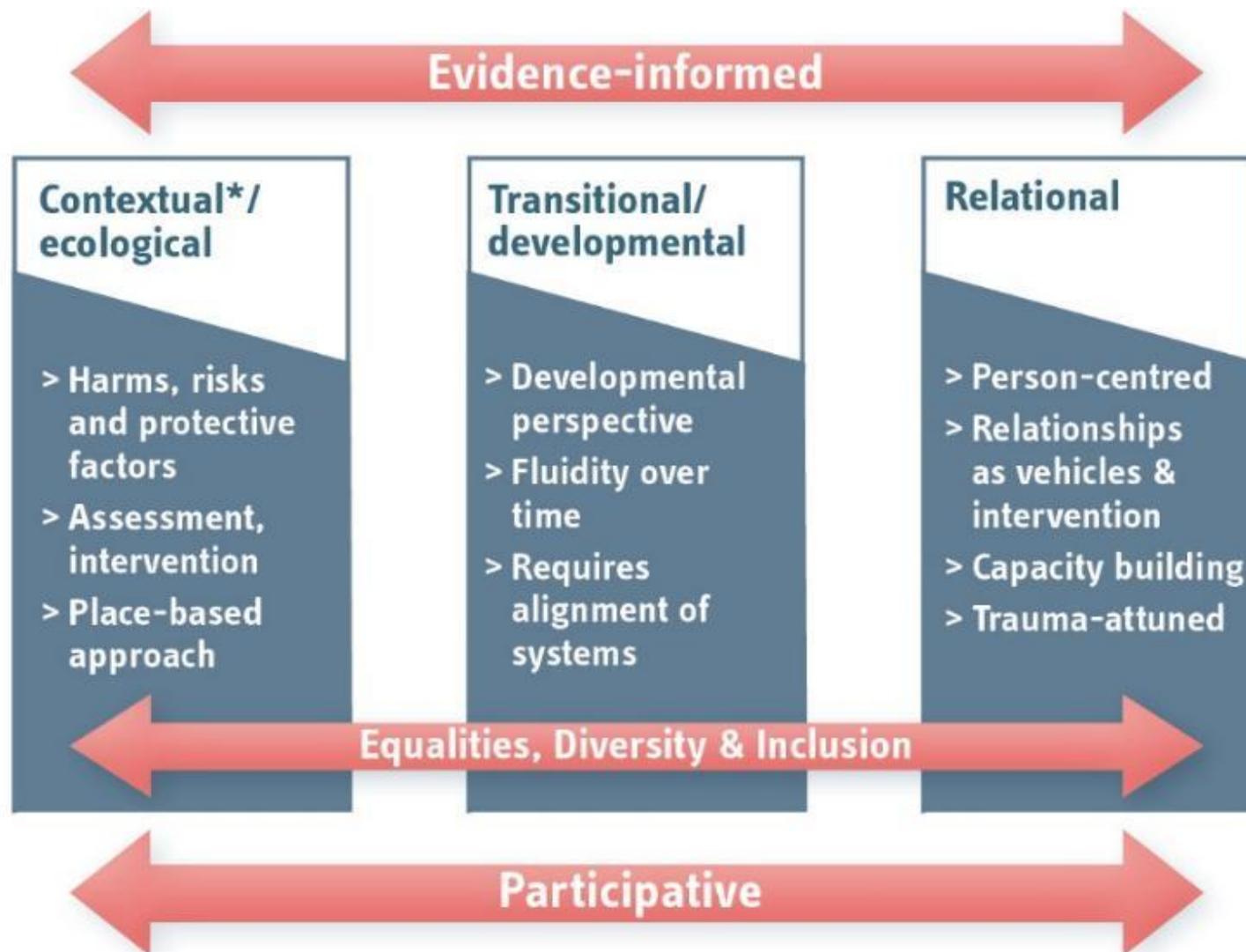
(Max, care-experienced young adult)

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

(Aisha, care-experienced young adult)

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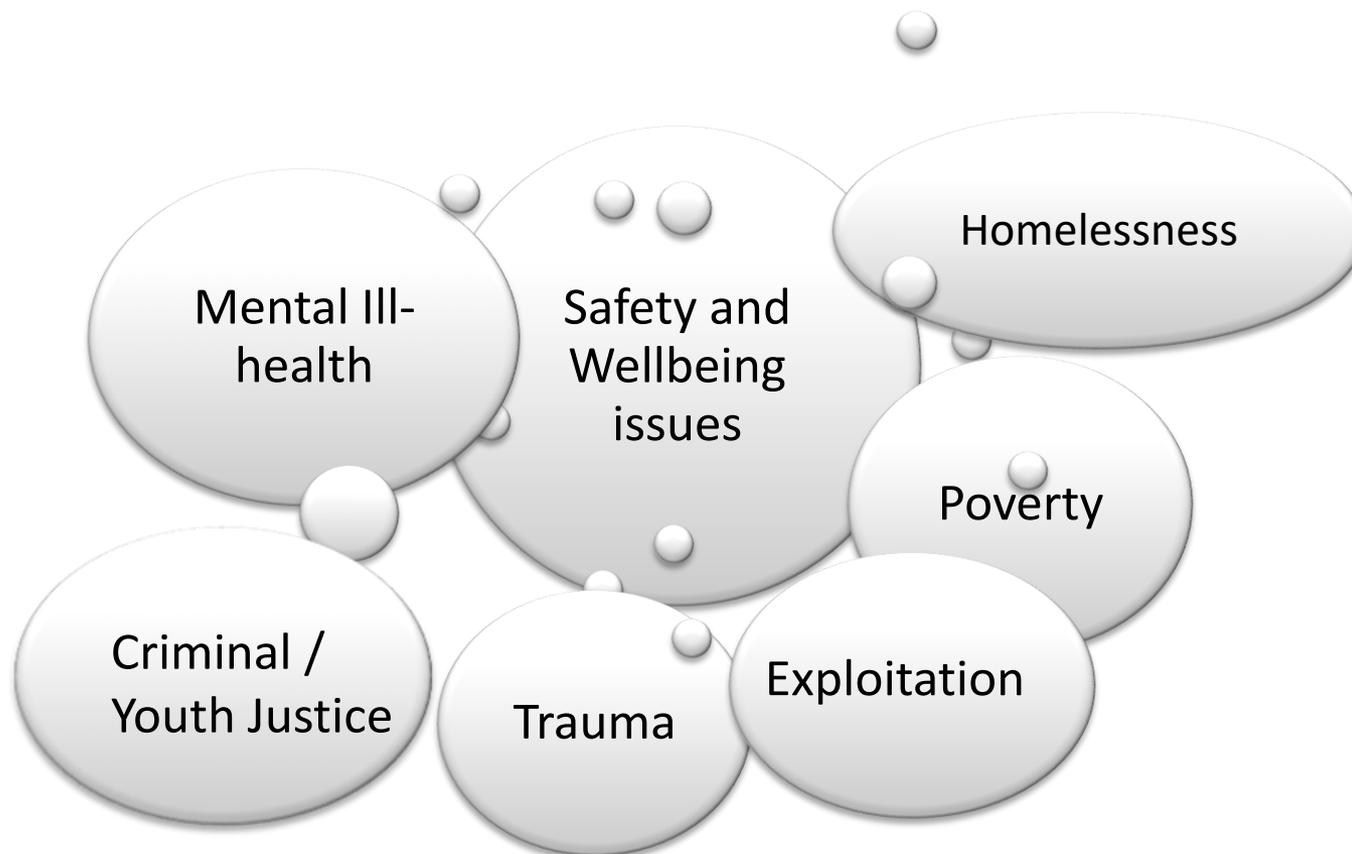
(Kelly, young adult)

Key principles
(Holmes, 2018)

Evidence-informed

Contextual*/ ecological
- Harms, risks and protective factors
- Assessment, intervention
- Place-based approach

Transitional/ developmental
- Developmental perspective
- Fluidity over time
- Requires alignment of systems

Relational
- Person-centred
- Relationships as vehicles & intervention
- Capacity building
- Trauma-attuned

Equalities, Diversity & Inclusion

Participative

See Firmin's work:
www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk

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› *If an adult says they don't want safeguarding support, we can't act...* This doesn't mean we 'walk away' (Cooper, 2019). Making Safeguarding Personal and Transitional Safeguarding both emphasise curious, tenacious, relationship-based practice.

› *The CA2014 stops us from working with a person unless they have Care & Support needs...* The prevention and wellbeing principles are key here (DHSC, 2020). Not all support to be safe = statutory Safeguarding.

› *But in the yes of the law...*The law reflects common understandings at a given point in time. See CSE / marital rape.

› *We can't afford to do different...* We can't afford not to...

Structural factors require connected systems

Mental Ill-health

Safety and Wellbeing issues

Homelessness

Poverty

Criminal / Youth Justice

Trauma

Exploitation

Interconnectedness of harms and adversities requires a highly integrated system of support, whereby attention is paid to childhood/adolescent experiences. Commissioning may be a key lever for change

Spot the difference…

› *The Mental Capacity Act 2005… confirms that it should be assumed that an adult (**aged 16 or over**) has full legal capacity to make decisions for themselves (the right to autonomy) unless it can be shown that they lack capacity to make a decision for themselves.* (MCA Code of Practice, 2007)

› CCE: W*here an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any sexual/criminal activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or (c) through violence or the threat of violence. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.'* (Home Office, 2018)
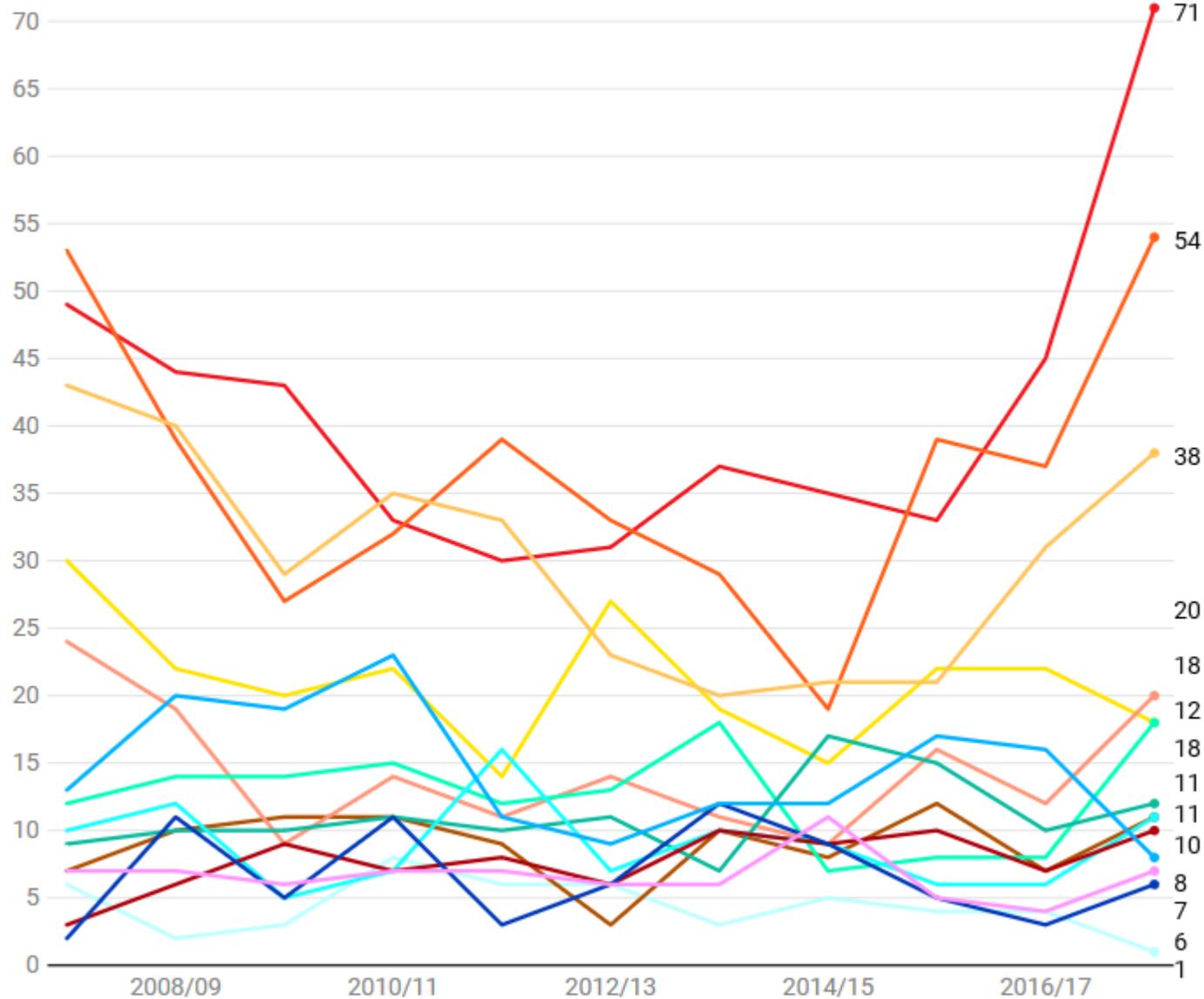
Chart: The Conversation UK • Source: Office for National Statistics • Get the data

Vulnerability and justice

	YP in general population	YP in custody
Learning disability	2–4%	23–32%
Comms impairment	5–7%	60–90%
ADHD	1.7–9%	12%
Autism	0.6–1.2%	15%
Any head injury	24–42%	49–72%
Head injury (LoC)	5–24%	32–50%

Young adults involved in the CJS have often themselves been victims of crime. Many have a history of being exposed to violence, including in the home, abuse, neglect, bereavement relating to the deaths of parents, siblings and other close relatives, and criminal behaviour by parents and siblings. These traumatic events have frequently occurred from a very young age and, the traumatic effects may be raw.

(House of Commons Justice Committee, 2016)

With not to: Resilience and participation

› **Relationships** are paramount to promoting resilience. (Coleman, 2014)

› **Self-efficacy** - commonly associated with resilience, is an area that professionals can exercise some influence (positively or negatively!)

› Children's **rights to protection and participation are mutually dependent and indivisible.** (UNCRC)

› "[User] Involvement supports development of effective safeguarding practice, informed by people whose self-confidence, self-esteem and resilience can be developed through that involvement." (Droy and Lawson, 2017)

› 'Both/and not either/or' (Lefevre *et al*, 2019)

› Harm reduction principles?

(Hickle and Hallett, 2016)

YP are active partners in their own safeguarding

YP are not held responsible for their own harm
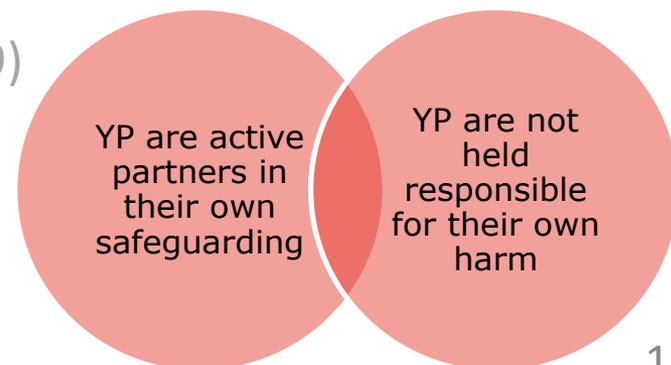
What could we do?

› Deliberative learning from other services and parts of the wider system where transitional approaches are more embedded (SEND?)

› 'Drawing down' best practice from safeguarding adults into safeguarding adolescents: rights-based approaches, MSP, wellbeing focus…**Making Safeguarding Personal for young people?** (Cocker et al, 2021)

› Considering how Contextual Safeguarding and Complex Safeguarding and other innovations in children's safeguarding might inform safeguarding of young adults: place-based, partnership approach

› Reflect on how safeguarding responses can overlook – even exacerbate – vulnerability…Iatrogenic interventions?

› Commissioning for complexity

› Build local capacity for system redesign, analysis, cost-benefit

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Money matters

› The economic context makes innovation as difficult as it is essential

› The current approach isn't great value…

› Investing in preventative and recovery-oriented work to promote people's safety and wellbeing can play an important role in avoiding the costs of later intervention

› Evidence from the UK and international contexts suggests that failing to help young people recover from harm and trauma can mean that problems persist and/or worsen in adulthood, creating higher costs for the public purse. (Chowdry and Fitzsimons, 2016; Kezelman *et al*, 2015)

› The system (and the spend) is connected… Maternal wellbeing (SM, MH) and CP/care; care and criminal justice; mental health needs, costs Vs funding; family relationships and homelessness; domestic abuse and community violence etc

What's helping local areas make the change

› Clear, credible, explicitly owned local leadership of the agenda

› Expansive definition of 'partnership'

› 'A system not a service'

› Meaningful engagement with communities

› Active knowledge and skills exchange (Cocker et al, 2021)

› Culture of innovation ('the soft stuff is the hard stuff')

› Practice informed strategy

› Collective, place-based problem solving (rather than problem displacement)

› Building the local case – data, inc people's lived experience

Safeguarding – a verb not a noun

› Binary notions of child/adulthood, victims/perpetrators, vulnerability / capacity can mean some people can 'slip through the net' or face a 'cliff-edge'.

› Many environmental / structural factors persist into adulthood, resulting in unmet need.

› Investing in preventative work to promote safety and wellbeing can help in avoiding costs (financial and human) of later intervention.

› Resilience, self-efficacy, social connectedness requires relational practice (and concordant policy).

› Does *not* propose all young adults facing risk should be protected via statutory means, nor does it propose a paternalistic approach to safeguarding young adults.

› **This is a systems leadership issue – Complexity, Coherence & Courage**

› **If not now, then when? If not you, then who?**

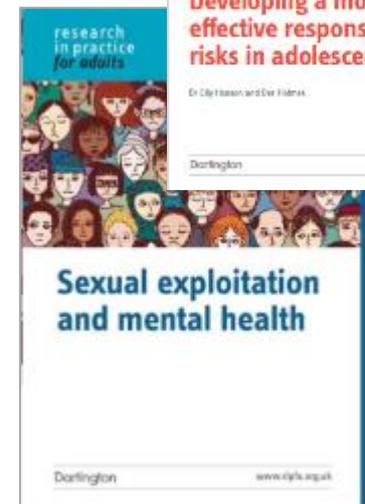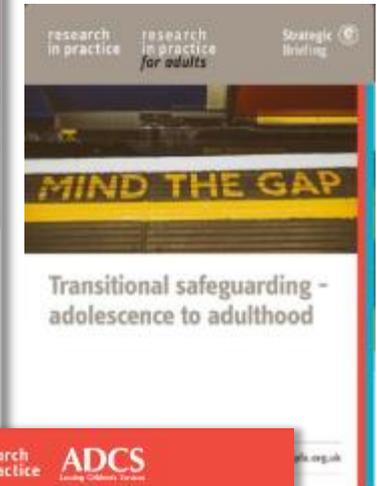# research in practice

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Thank you

› Transitional Safeguarding (2018) original briefing: https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/all/publications/2018/august/transitional-safeguarding-adolescence-to-adulthood-strategic-briefing-2018/

› The role of adult social work & adult safeguarding to the Transitional Safeguarding agenda (2021): https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/media/5420/67346_dhsc_trans-safe-report_bridging-the-gap_web.pdf

› The relationship between Contextual Safeguarding, Complex Safeguarding and Transitional Safeguarding (2019): https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/publications/2019/january/safeguarding-during-adolescence-the-relationship-between-contextual-safeguarding-complex-safeguarding-and-transitional-safeguarding-2019/