

7-minute briefings: Transitional Safeguarding

Background

When young people turn 18, the laws and services that relate to them change overnight – but their needs do not. Transitional safeguarding is about recognising this and making sure young people continue to receive the help they need to stay as safe and independent as possible. It is an approach that focuses on developmental stages rather than age and uses aspects from both adult and child safeguarding to support young people safely through their transition from childhood into adulthood. *“Those working with adults should be curious about the childhood of the adult they are supporting. And those working with children should be ambitious about the adult they are helping to create.”* (Dez Holmes, 2021)

Why is transitional safeguarding important?

Child safeguarding is designed for younger children and does not always work well for adolescents, who have different needs. The adults' safeguarding system developed from different theories, comes under different laws, and has different processes – but many of the environmental and structural factors that increase a child's vulnerability continue into adulthood. The difference between the two systems means that young people entering adulthood can experience a 'cliff-edge' in terms of support.

- An adolescent engaged in gang-associated harm may receive a criminal justice response rather than be recognised as a victim of criminal exploitation.
- A young adult experiencing sexual exploitation may not be eligible for a safeguarding response unless they have a formal mental health diagnosis or diagnosed learning disability.
- A young person who is subject to a child protection plan may find that support stops when they turn 18, despite being just as vulnerable as a child leaving care, who would be entitled to ongoing support.
- A young adult experiencing domestic abuse may be offered little support for their own safety. If they become a parent, children's services may consider their child to be at risk.

Transitional safeguarding aims to address this.



How does this fit with safeguarding children and safeguarding adults?

Safeguarding children focuses on explicit protection from harm, but transitional safeguarding does not expect that formal services will remove or lessen risk for all young adults, as many young people who received a service through children's services will not meet the criteria for Adult Social Services intervention.

A child-centred approach is about focusing on keeping children at the centre of safeguarding efforts while also considering the needs of the whole family in line with working together to safeguarding children 2023.

The Care Act 2014 definition for safeguarding adults can apply to young people aged 18 and above, and the children's legislation can apply to those under 18. If a young adult aged 18 or over meets the Care Act definition for safeguarding adults, formal safeguarding duties apply. If they are still receiving children's services, they are considered to have needs for care and support and safeguarding adult duties apply even if these are not eligible needs under the Care Act.

Making Safeguarding Personal is about recognising an adult's rights to freedom of action, choice and control, and to make decisions that may seem unwise where mental capacity is not in question; it is about respecting people's preferred outcomes and taking account of their preferences, history and circumstances to achieve a proportionate tolerance of accepted risk.

Is this about an adults s.42 safeguarding enquiry or a children's s.47 safeguarding investigation?

Transitional safeguarding is about safety generally, not just formal investigations.

Find out more

- [Transitional safeguarding and the role of social work with adults](#)
- [Transitional safeguarding – adolescence to adulthood](#)

What sort of services can help?

Transitional safeguarding aligns services for children and adults and encourages partnership cultures to respond to the changing needs of adolescents and young adults. These might include, for example, improved responses to young people at risk of child sexual exploitation, drug or alcohol support services, life skills training, healthy relationships and preparing for adulthood services.

Transitional safeguarding is an emerging area of interest, and the development of services targeted specifically at young adults is only just being recognised as an important area where investment could lead to better outcomes and reduced service access in the longer term.

