research in practice
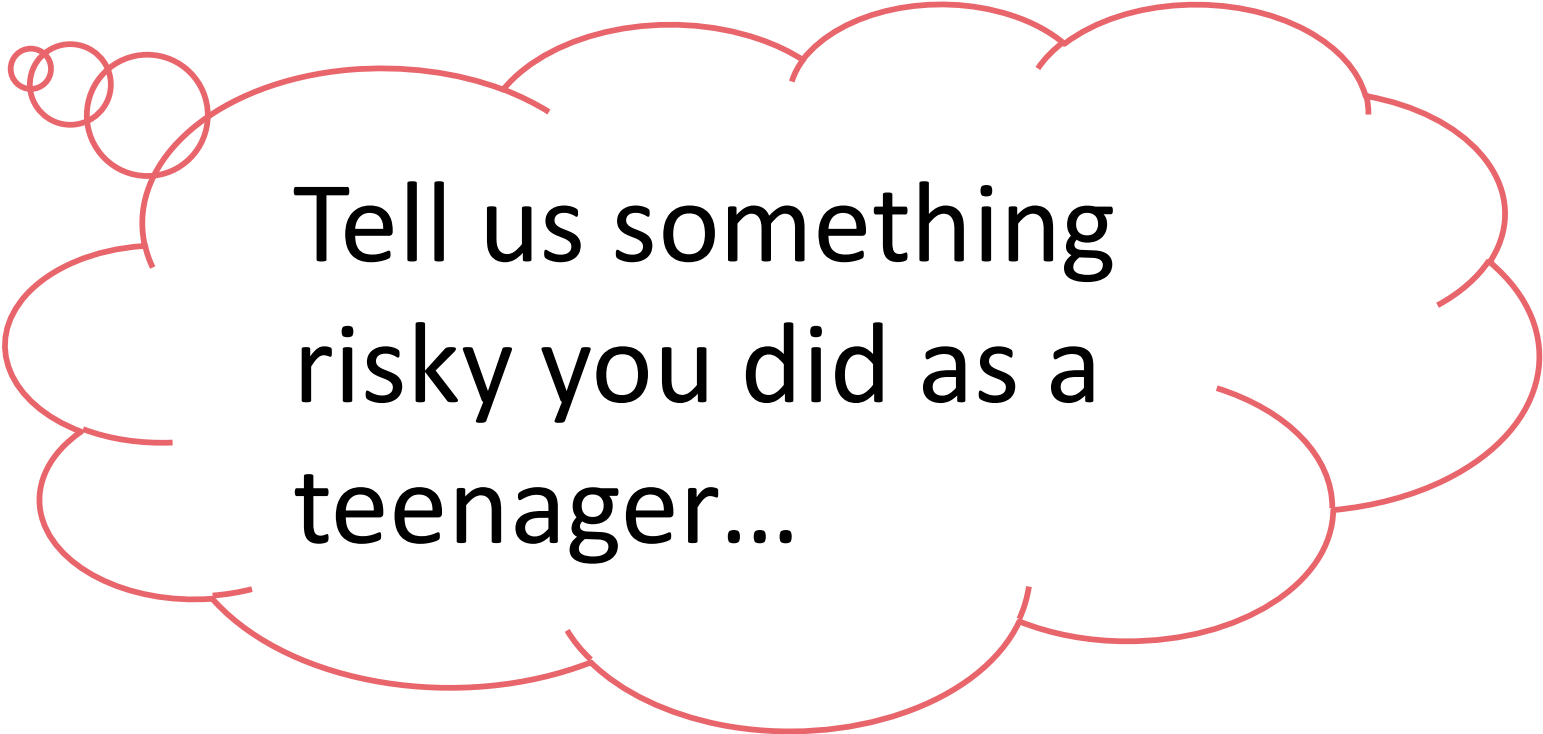
Agenda

Timings	Focus
11.00-11.15	Settling in, Icebreaker
11.15 – 12.30	Risk, Resilience and Relationships: reimagining our work with young people
12.30 – 1.00	Reflective exercise
1.00 – 1.45	Lunch break
1.45 – 2.25	Tackling Exploitation: principles for every part of the system
2.25– 2.45	Putting the principles into practice
2.45 – 3.00	Check out, commitments and close

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Tell us something risky you did as a teenager...

NB –
You have the right not to share your personal story!
You have the responsibility to consider the impact on others of doing so

Risk, rights, relationships and resilience

› To focus on risk without considering a young person's rights is to undermine their citizenship. Welfare is one aspect of wider wellbeing, and the right to safety must be considered in balance with other rights, such as privacy and freedom (and seen in context of adolescent development).

› To focus on risk without considering young people's relational identities, may dislocate them from protective actors in their lives. Human beings do not exist in a vacuum; our families, our peers influence our safety and wellbeing. Relationships can be seen as both a source of harm and trauma for some young people, and are an important vehicle for repair and recovery within a trauma-informed practice paradigm.

› To focus on risk without seeking to promote a young person's resilience is to undermine their emerging sense of agency and autonomy, and – at worst – can mirror the coercive dynamics of abuse and exploitation.

It's about relationships

> *To develop normally, a child* requires progressively more complex joint activity with one or more adults who have an irrational emotional relationship with the child.*
>
> *Somebody's got to be crazy about the kid.*
>
> *That's number one.*
>
> *First, last, and always.*

*person!

(Bronfenbrenner)

That Difficult Age
(Hanson & Homes, 2014)

› Adolescent agency in relation to risks makes adolescents 'imperfect victims' and makes addressing those risks (and their impact) a complex business. (Rees and Stein, 1999)

› Working within a child protection and care system that is designed primarily to meet the needs of younger children maltreated within the family. (Bilston, 2006; Firmin, 2020)

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› Adolescents may have **distinct** safeguarding needs - often (not always and not exclusively) extra-familial harm, and often underpinned by complex social and biological drivers

› **Harm and its effects** do not end at 18; **the brain** may continue developing until mid-20s…(Sawyer *et al*, 2018; Prior *et al*, 2011)

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

› No neat boxes! Different types of harm; vulnerability / resilience are **situational and dynamic**; duality ('at risk' / 'a risk')

› "Rescue +/ Reform" → promoting **resilience** and dynamic **developmental** needs ("resources and recognition")

› Binary thinking gets in the way of effective system design – 'both/and not either/or'
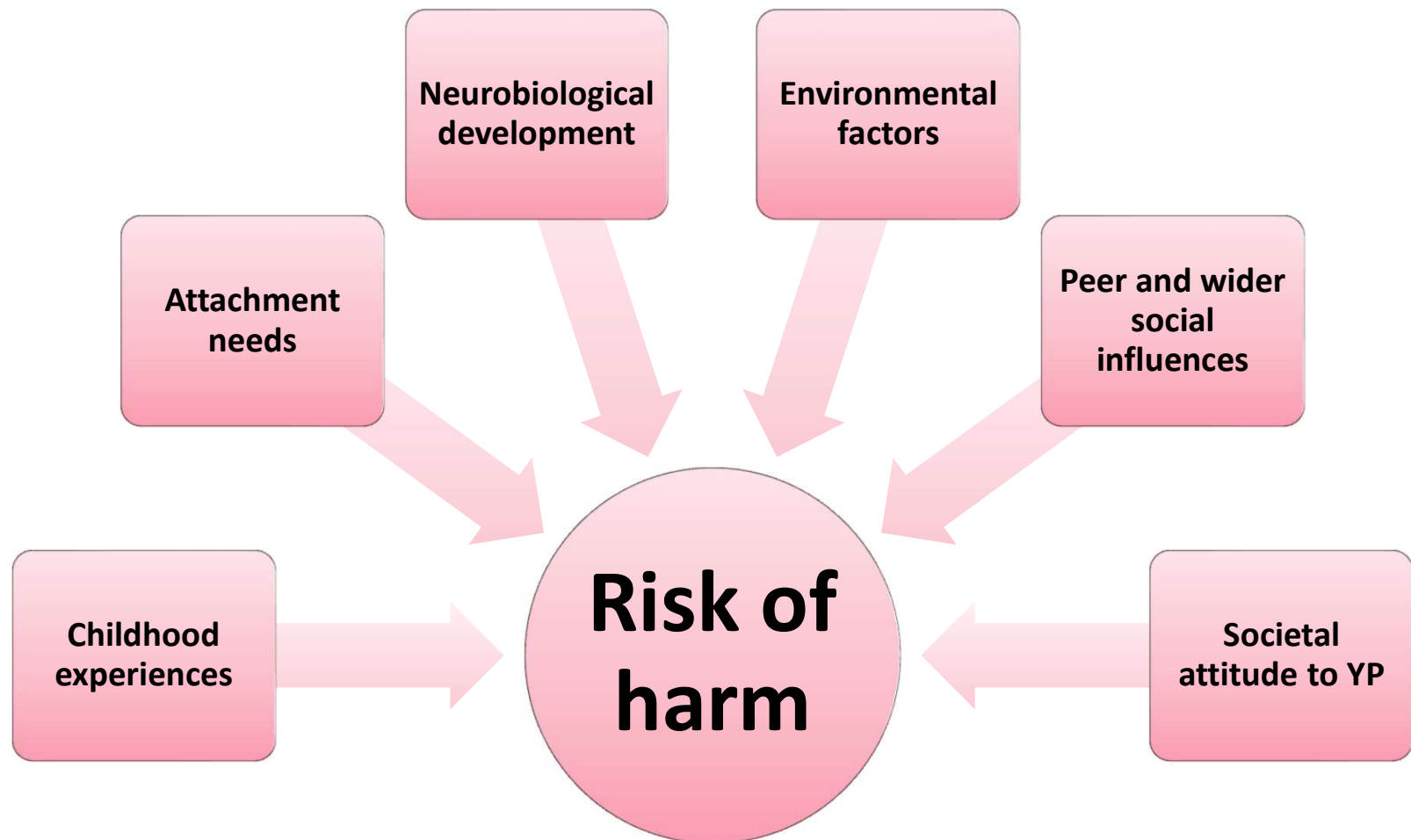
Professional perception of adolescents

Young people aged 11-17 are often seen by professionals as:

› more competent to deal with maltreatment

› less likely to be at risk of long-term negative outcomes

› more resilient

› more likely to be contributing to / exacerbating situations (and blamed)

› more likely to be putting themselves at risk of harm.

(Rees *et al*, 2010)

The characteristics of transitions include:

› An eager anticipation of the future

› A sense of loss or regret for the stage that has been lost

› A sense of anxiety about what is unknown

› A major psychological readjustment

› A degree of ambiguity of status during the transition

Key areas of development:

› Physical development (puberty, brain development)

› The role of the family

› Identity

› Peer relationships (risks and opportunities)

› Health (and mental health)

(Coleman, 2014; Coleman & Hagell, 2022)

› Children who have experienced abuse/neglect *may* experience 'disorganised attachment' (though beware pathologising)

› DA in infancy can lead to dissociative symptoms in adolescence and early adulthood, likely to do things to make adults reject them.

Research shows that attachment security in adolescence exerts precisely the same effect on development as it does in early childhood: a secure base fosters exploration and the development of cognitive, social and emotional competence.

(Moretti & Peled, 2004)

Young peoples' relationships

(Coleman, 2014)

> YP remain hugely influenced by parents' attitudes and behaviour.

> Friends provide:

>> companionship

>> a reliable alliance (someone to be on your side)

>> help (in times of need)

>> intimacy (someone to share things with)

>> self-validation (to show you are accepted by others).

> Open to the negative influences if have low self-esteem and low levels of support from home (Cotterell, 2007)

> Influence of social media – threats and opportunities.

Considering adolescent brain development

"maturation involves physical, intellectual, social and emotional development (Prior et al, 2011); many 'higher executive functions' (inc verbal memory and impulse control) continue to develop into our 20s (Johnson et al 2009). Three factors appear to influence the psychosocial maturity with which young people judge situations and make decisions: responsibility, temperance and perspective (Cauffman and Steinberg 2000). These abilities appear to develop differently according to individual circumstances, including whether a young person has experienced risk factors."

(Holmes, 2022)
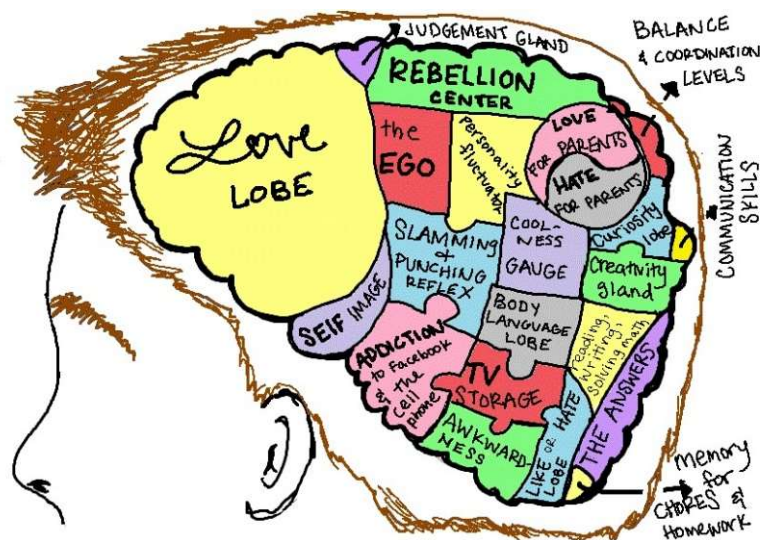
If used <u>cautiously</u>, neuroscience plays a useful part in helping us to potentially understand what might be underpinning a YP's behaviour, so practitioners can advocate for a YP's needs and vulnerabilities when their behaviour can obscure these.

12

Adolescent 'choices' and 'risk-taking' behaviours

› Young people's 'risk-taking' - underpinned by *interacting* biological, social, environmental and neurobiological changes. (Calkins, 2010)

› Risk can be positive. (Coleman, 2014)

› Ego-syntonic risks.

› Adaptation and maladaptation – though 'foundations are not fate'

› Unmet needs - seek to meet via risky routes.

› Misinterpreted as rational informed adult 'lifestyle choices' → Victims being denied appropriate support / permission to give up.

› Conversely, professionals can minimise adolescent choice and agency.

Participation as protective

(Warrington, 2016)

Consequences of CSE	Benefits of participation
YP don't recognise exploitative situation	Critical thinking/better understanding (AYPH, 2014)
Lack of power/control	Agency and decision-making power
Isolation/sense of 'difference' (Reid and Jones, 2011)	Sense of belonging (Hagel, 2013)
Stigma	Approval/acknowledgement (Batsleer, 2011)
Low self worth/lack of purpose	Helping others (Batsleer, 2011, Levy, 2012, AYPH, 2014)

When we deny young people self-efficacy...

> *I was basically a puppet. When they* [the police] *wanted me, I had to do it. When they didn't want me, I heard nothing.*

(Beckett and Warrington, 2015)

> *Workers expect you to tell them everything about your lives but then they tell you nothing about theirs . ... That's how the men work too – they find out everything about you then don't even tell you their real name.*

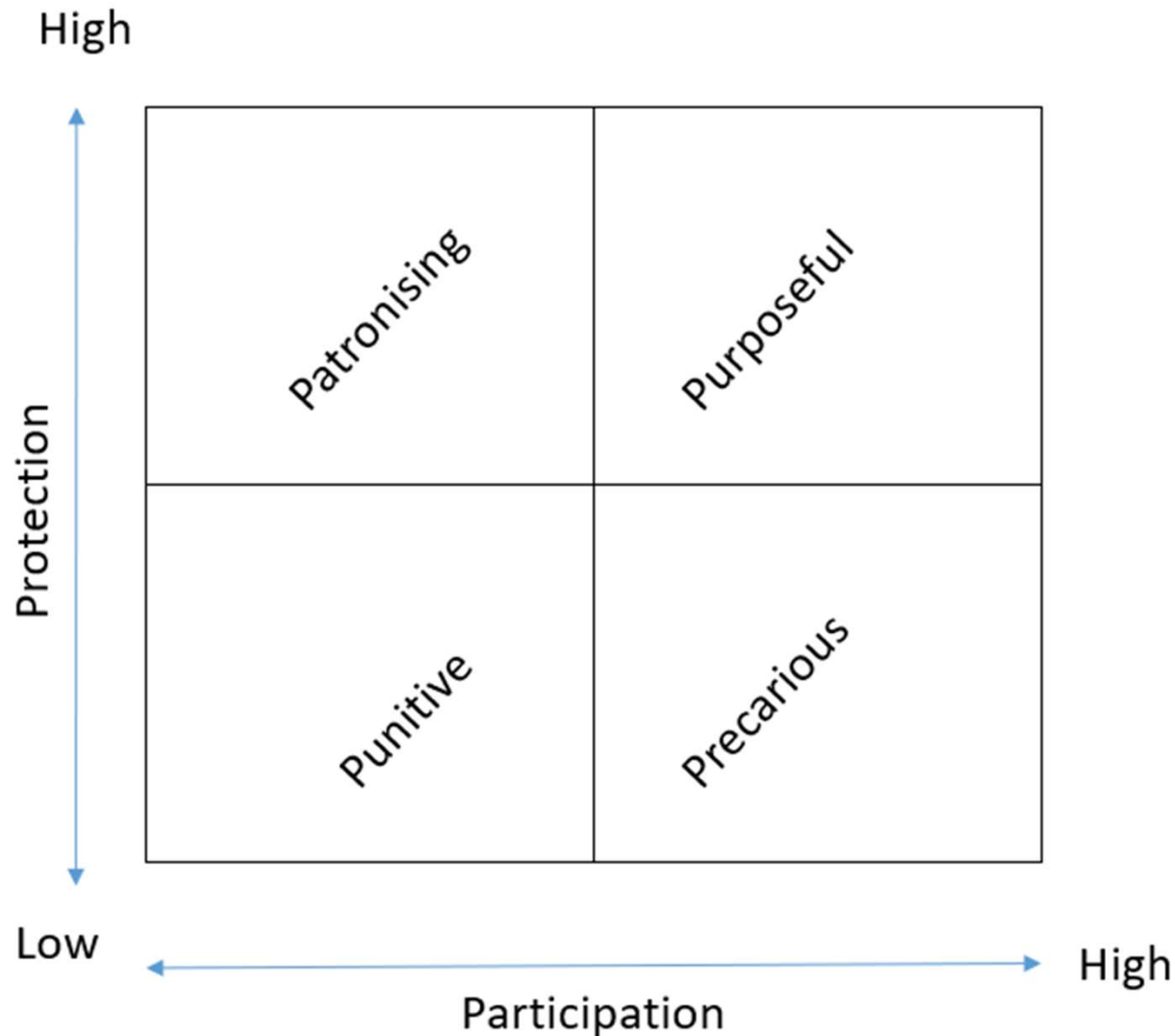(Warrington 2013, in Melrose and Pearce, 2013)

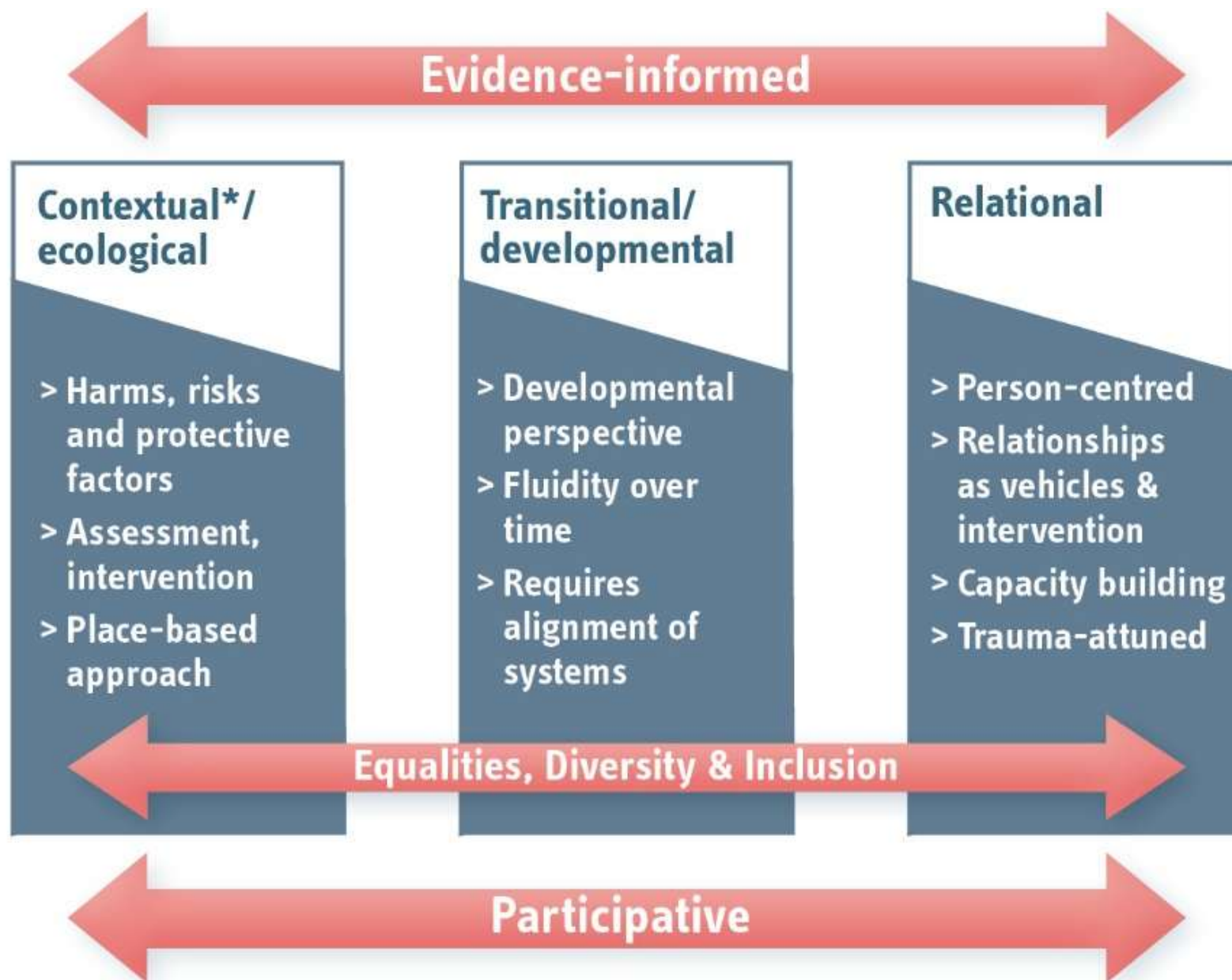# It matters especially in the context of exploitation
(Hickle & Lefevre, 2022)

› The emphasis on choice and control has particular relevance for young people victimised by exploitative relationships. Often, feeling unsafe begins whilst being controlled by perpetrators who make decisions for them in relation to what they did, where they went, and whom they could have contact with.

› Upon receiving help from professionals, feelings of unsafety (and maladaptive efforts to self-regulate) continue when efforts to keep exploited young people safe overemphasise policing their behaviour (Hickle, 2018) via the use of out-of-home placements, curfews, and mandates to avoid contexts where they may experience harm.

› "foundations are not fate" (Fraley & Roisman, 2019)

Balancing protection and participation

(Holmes, in Cocker, Holmes & Cooper, 2024)

High

Protection

Patronising	Purposeful
Punitive	Precarious

Low — Participation — High

17

research in practice

Evidence-informed

Contextual*/ ecological	Transitional/ developmental	Relational
> Harms, risks and protective factors > Assessment, intervention > Place-based approach	> Developmental perspective > Fluidity over time > Requires alignment of systems	> Person-centred > Relationships as vehicles & intervention > Capacity building > Trauma-attuned

Equalities, Diversity & Inclusion

Participative

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

From the top with feeling

› Resilient, safe, healthy, empowered young people… need resilient, safe, healthy, empowered practitioners (and managers!)

› If we want evidence-informed, child-centred, ethical and ambitious practice… we need evidence-informed, child-centred, ethical and ambitious leadership

› Tick-box scrutiny and governance drives tick-box practice

Setting an example is not the main means of influencing another, it is the only means.

Albert Einstein

Resilient safe healthy young people and families need resilient, safe healthy practitioners...

research in practice

› Beckett, H & Warrington, C (2015). Making Justice Work. Experiences of criminal justice for children and young people affected by sexual exploitation as victims and witnesses. University of Bedfordshire

› Cocker, Holmes & Cooper (2024) *Transitional Safeguarding.* Bristol: Policy Press

› Coleman, J. & Hagell, A. (2022) 'Understanding the age of adolescence' in Holmes, D (Ed) Safeguarding young people: Risk, Rights, Resilience and Relationships. London: Jessica Kingsley Publications.

› Hanson, E & Holmes, D. (2014) *That Difficult Age: Developing a more effective response to risks in adolescence.* Research in Practice

› Hickle, K and Hallett, S (2016) Mitigating harm: considering harm reduction principles in work with sexually exploited young people. Children and Society, 30 (4). pp. 302-313

› Holmes, D. (2022) 'Transitional Safeguarding: The Case for Change'. *Practice: Social Work in Action*, 34(1): 7–23

› Holmes, D. (2022) *Safeguarding Young People: Risk, Rights, Relationships and Resilience*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

› Hickle, K and Lefevre, M. (2022) 'Learning to Love and Trust Again: A Relational Approach to Developmental Trauma' (chapter in Holmes 2022)

› Lefevre, M. et al. (2022) 'Towards a Synthesised Directional Map of the Stages of Innovation in Children's Social Care', *The British Journal of Social Work*,

› Lefevre, M., Hickle, K. & Luckock, B. (2018) 'Both/and' not 'either/or': reconciling rights to protection and participation in working with child sexual exploitation, British Journal of Social Work

› Warrington, C. (2013) Partners in Care. In Melrose, M & Pearce, J (Eds) (2013) Critical Perspectives on Child Sexual Exploitation and Related Trafficking. Palgrave Macmillan

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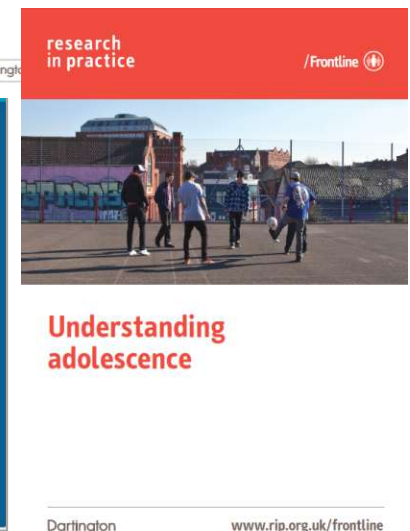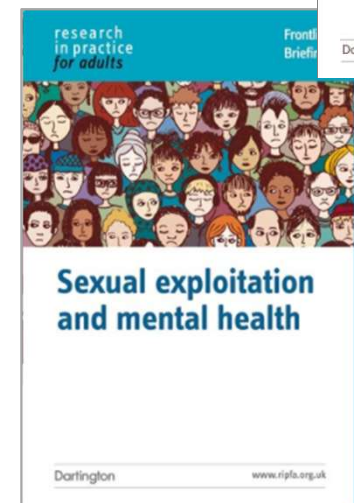
www **www.researchinpractice.org.uk**

✉ **ask@researchinpractice.org.uk**

🐦 **@researchIP**

Thank you

Young person-centred approaches in child sexual exploitation (CSE) – promoting participation and building self-efficacy

Transitional safeguarding – adolescence to adulthood

That Difficult Age: Developing a more effective response to risks in adolescence
Dr Elly Hanson and Dez Holmes

Sexual exploitation and mental health

Understanding adolescence

Questions for reflection

› How can we move from an individualised approach to safeguarding to one that **recognises contexts / systems** for young people?

› How can we ensure foster care and practice is **participative** – as much voice and choice as possible – in the context of safeguarding?

› How can we avoid presuming 'choice' – and inadvertently victim-blaming - whilst still **honouring young people's agency**?

› What support do carers, practitioners and firstline managers need – and from who – to operate in this nuanced and ethical way?

Tackling Exploitation:
principles for every part of the system

Dez Holmes

Director, Research in Practice

@dez_holmes

- TCE Programme: a DfE-funded consortium programme led by Research in Practice with The Children's Society and the Safer Young Lives Centre at the University of Bedfordshire.
- 2019-22, TCE supported over 80 areas across England to improve their strategic responses to child exploitation and extra-familial harm.
- 2022-23, TCE was commissioned to develop a set of Practice Principles to inform local multi-agency responses to child exploitation and extra-familial harm.
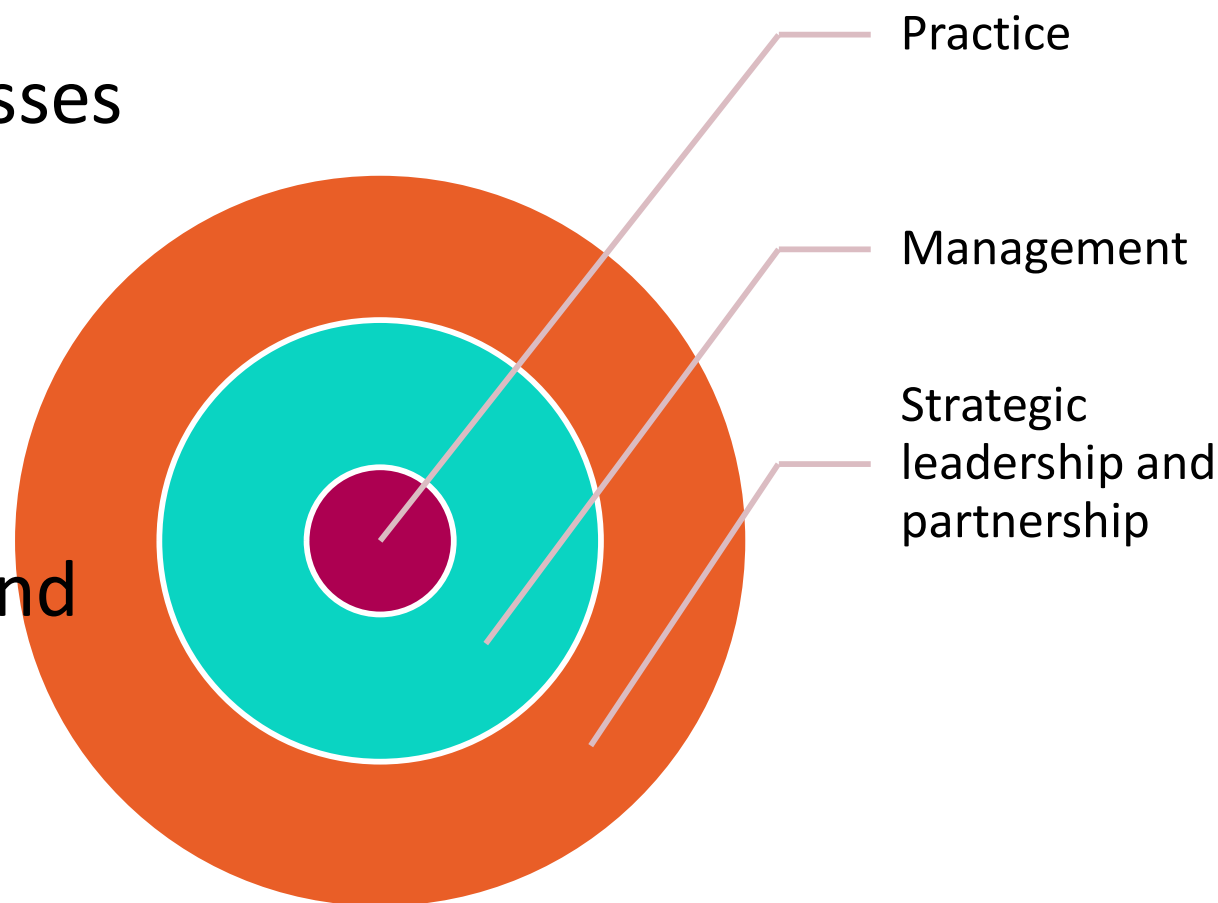
Practice wisdom

Evidence-informed

Published research

Lived experience

Over 750 multi-agency professionals across England

- 200 children and young people
- 39 parents and carers

☐ **Interrelated and interdependent**, focusing on the 'how' not the 'what'.

☐ **Offer a compass to help navigate a complex landscape,** rather than a detailed map for every individual situation.

☐ **Are high-level** to support a **coherent** approach across local partnerships and to support multi agency working.

☐ **Focus on behaviours and culture** to help direct work with children, young people, and families, operational management and strategic leadership to align.

☐ **Aim to complement existing and forthcoming guidance** endure over time and fit with diverse local contexts

research in practice

University of Bedfordshire · research in practice · The Children's Society
Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme

- Parallel processes

- Whole system change

- Congruence and coherence

- Modelling

Practice

Management

Strategic leadership and partnership

Put children and young people first

Recognise and challenge inequalities, exclusion and discrimination

Create safer spaces and places for children and young people

Responses to child exploitation and extra-familial harm must...

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

Approach parents and carers as partners, wherever possible

Be curious, evidence-informed and knowledgeable

Recognise and respond to trauma

Be strengths and relationship-based

- **Children cannot be held responsible for harm caused by others**

- **Where children are causing harm – they are still children & responses should reflect that**

- ***All* children and young people deserve to be supported in a way that respects their rights and offers protection**

- **The complexities and presentation of child exploitation and extra-familial harm means that responses sometimes undermine the realisation of these rights**

How it should feel for a child / young person being supported:

"I feel understood, believed and treated like a human being. I feel my worker is interested in me and on my side. I know they don't judge or blame me."

- **Inequalities, exclusion and discrimination faced by children, young people and their parents / carers can be experienced in multiple ways and must be recognised and challenged**

- **Systems issues can affect outcomes for children and young people, e.g. what data are or are not collected**

How it should feel for a child / young person being supported:

"I am seen, respected and accepted for who I am, professionals can relate to me, and they challenge any discrimination I face."

- Children and young people:

  - have the right to have a say about matters that affect them and be heard in decisions made about them

  - should be respected and listened to as experts in their own lives: to develop trusting relationships and increase safety

- Participation is a powerful way to invert the coercion and manipulation of exploitation and extra-familial harm

How it should feel for a child / young person being supported:

"I feel heard, acknowledged, and validated because my views and opinions are sought and included. This matters to me and makes me want to talk to them."

- **Applies to working with children, young people, parents, carers and colleagues**

- **Take a holistic approach: identify strengths, positive factors**

- **Build on strengths, assets; work relationally to support growth and change**

Be strengths-based and relationships based

How it should feel for a child / young person being supported:

"I have someone to go to who genuinely cares about me and my future. They do things to actually help me. I feel safe with them and can trust them."

- **Understand how individuals perceive and respond to threats and support.**
- **Recognise that these responses might underpin perceived 'non-engagement' or 'negative' coping strategies.**

- **Trauma can be experienced at different levels:**

  - **Direct trauma for children and young people - and potentially their parents / carers**

  - **Trauma that can impact wider communities, stemming from shared experiences**

  - **Trauma that can impact those working to support and protect traumatised individuals**

How it should feel for a child / young person being supported:

"People understand how I have been affected by what has happened to me and they show that in the way they help me. I feel like I matter."

- **Responding to the complexity of child exploitation and extra-familial harm requires:**

  - **curiosity, critical thinking, analysis skills**

  - **thoughtful use of evidence**

  - **a commitment to reflection and learning**

- **Balancing pace with purpose**

How it should feel for a child / young person being supported:

"I feel properly seen, because the people who are there to help me put in the effort to understand me and my life. They are knowledgeable, and are always learning about how to help me feel safer."

Approach parents and carers as partners wherever possible

- **Starting point: include parents and carers as partners**

- **Parents and carers can hold invaluable information about their child and the contexts of their lives**

- **Acknowledge and attend to their own potential distress**

- **Recognition that circumstances _will_ differ between families so there is no 'one size fits all' solution.**

How it should feel for a child / young person being supported:

"I am included in decisions about involving my parents and carers. Supporting my parents and / or carers to understand what has happened to me can help improve family relationships and the support I receive."

- **Understanding of harms and protective factors in spaces and places where children and young people spend their time (on- and off-line)**

- **Identify harm and intervene accordingly (e.g. disruption) to make the space/place safer**

- **This focus can prevent children and young people feeling blamed**

How it should feel for a child / young person being supported:

"In my community, I have opportunities to do activities and make new friends. The spaces and places where I spend my time feel safe, and give me a sense of belonging."

Six supporting resources to support the application of the Practice Principles:

1. **An evidence summary,** a succinct summary of the research drawn upon in developing the Principles
2. **An individual practice and reflection tool,** a professional development tool to support practitioners to reflect on the Principles, and their application to their own practice
3. **A multi-agency partnership reflective tool,** an interactive, reflective tool for local partnerships to work together to assess their responses to child exploitation and extra-familial harm
4. **An animation** to explain the evidence, ideas and interdependencies that underpin the Principles
5. **Parent and Carers Shifting Mindset**, a resource to support local agencies and partnerships to engage parents and carers as partners at an operational and strategic level
6. **Youth Voice in strategic change**, a resource to help local agency leaders and partnerships incorporate children and young people's views at a strategic level.

Which Principles resonate most with your practice / leadership, at its best?

Which ones offer the greatest challenge to you?

How might you use them to support improvement and development in your local system?
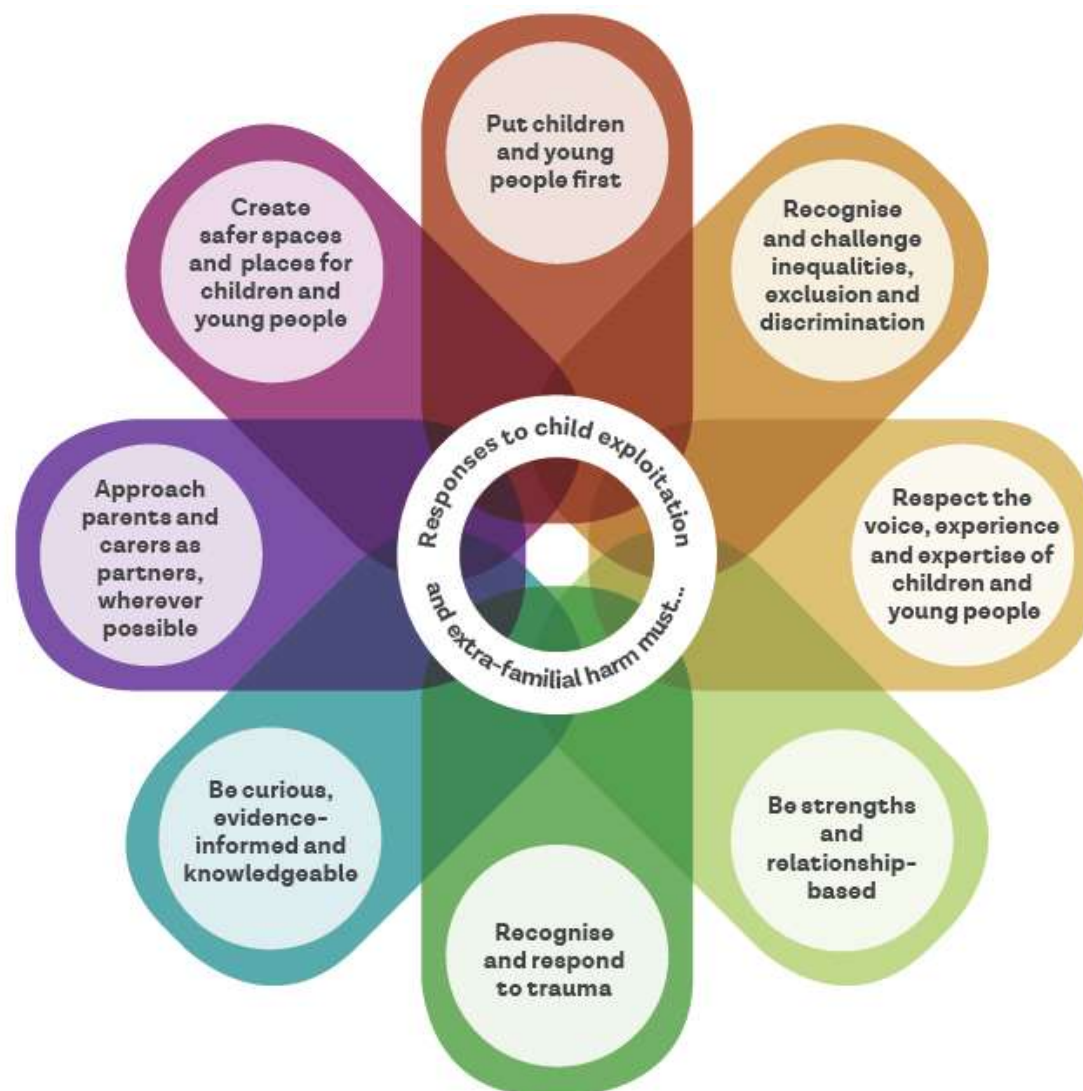
Please share one thing **you can offer**, to support the Principles to become embedded locally...?