



Transitional Safeguarding

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1. Purpose

This guidance reflects a shared commitment across partners to respond to risk, vulnerability and exploitation for adolescents and young adults

Transitional Safeguarding is not about creating new systems, but about using existing responsibilities in more flexible and coordinated ways.

Practitioners often work with young adults whose lives do not fit neatly within service boundaries or statutory thresholds. This document supports a more confident, curious and collaborative approach to safeguarding during this critical life stage.

Not all risks, vulnerabilities or challenges experienced during this stage of life will require a safeguarding response. Practitioners should follow their own organisational policies, procedures and pathways, applying a proportionate and coordinated response to identified needs and risks.

[Pan Berkshire Safeguarding Adults - Pan Berkshire Multi-Agency Safeguarding Adults Policies, Procedures & Guidance](#)

2. Introduction

The purpose of this guidance is to provide a high-level, multi-agency framework. It supports the identification, assessment and response to safeguarding concerns involving young adults, particularly where there are risks of exploitation, coercion or harm beyond traditional safeguarding boundaries.

Transitional Safeguarding recognises that the journey from adolescence into adulthood is a critical period, during which vulnerability to harm may persist, evolve, or increase. Some young adults might require help to be safe and healthy, even if they don't have formally defined care and support needs. This guidance supports coordinated and proportionate responses to these risks.

This document supports practitioners and managers across all partner organisations. It does not replace existing statutory duties, local policies or procedures. Agencies must continue to follow their own organisational safeguarding arrangements and local referral pathways.

3. Scope

This guidance applies to all agencies working with:

- Adolescents and young adults, typically aged between 16 and 25

- Individuals transitioning between children's and adult services
- Individuals experiencing, or at risk of, exploitation, coercion, abuse or neglect

It is particularly relevant where:

- Risks extend beyond the family environment (e.g. peer groups, community, online)
- Traditional safeguarding thresholds or frameworks do not fully capture risk
- Individuals may not meet statutory duties but remain vulnerable

This guidance supports a shared approach across children's and adult safeguarding systems, recognising that safeguarding responsibilities are collective.

Definition of Transitional Safeguarding

Transitional Safeguarding is an approach to safeguarding adolescents and young adults that:

- Recognises that transition to adulthood is a developmental process, not a single event
- Focuses on needs, experiences and risks, rather than age or service boundaries
- Requires fluid, joined-up working across children's and adult services
- Considers the ongoing impact of abuse, trauma and exploitation beyond age 18

It is not limited to transition planning between services. Instead, it promotes a more flexible, contextual and person-centered response to safeguarding risks during this life stage.

It is not intended to serve as a catch-all term for adult safeguarding activity involving individuals aged 18–25 where statutory duties are already met.

4. Principles of Practice

Effective Transitional Safeguarding practice should be underpinned by the following principles:

Person-centred, developmentally informed, contextual, trauma-informed, relationship-based, multi-agency and preventative.

5. Legal and Statutory Framework

Transitional Safeguarding sits alongside established legal frameworks, particularly:

Care Act (2014)

- Section 1 (Wellbeing): Applies broadly, including where individuals may not have formal care and support needs
- Section 2 (Prevention): Emphasises preventing or delaying the development of needs
- Section 9 (Assessment): Requires assessment where a person may have needs for care and support
- Section 11 (Refusal of assessment): Allows assessment in certain circumstances without consent
- Section 42 (Safeguarding enquiries): Applies where an adult: has care and support needs, is experiencing or at risk of abuse or neglect, and is unable to protect themselves as a result

Care and Support Statutory Guidance

Section 14.44: Local authorities may undertake safeguarding enquiries where there is not a statutory duty, where this is proportionate and promotes wellbeing and a preventative approach (non-statutory enquiry powers)

Mental Capacity Act 2005 (applies from 16 years old)

- Provides the framework for assessing capacity and making best interests decisions
- Requires a decision-specific and time-specific approach
- Promotes least restrictive practice

6. Understanding Risk and Vulnerability

Types of abuse

Young adults may be exposed to a range of abuse, including:

- Criminal exploitation
- Sexual exploitation
- Coercion and control
- Cuckooing
- Financial abuse
- Missing episodes linked to abuse
- Online exploitation

7. Contextual risk

Risks may arise from peer relationships, community environments, education settings and online spaces.

Vulnerability factors

Vulnerability may be influenced by:

- Adverse childhood experiences
- Neurodiversity
- Care experience
- Trauma and abuse
- Immigration / Refugee status
- Substance misuse
- Homelessness or housing instability
- Mental health needs
- Learning disabilities or cognitive impairment
- Social isolation and dependency on others

Capacity, Consent and Coercion

Apparent consent may be influenced by coercion, fear, dependency or trauma.

Capacity assessments must:

- Be decision-specific and time-specific
- Consider the impact of coercion, trauma, lived experience and social context
- Avoid being used as a mechanism to disengage services
- Consider communication / language barriers.

Safeguarding responsibilities may continue regardless of a finding of capacity, particularly where exploitation or abuse is suspected.

8. Applying the Framework in Practice

While the statutory criteria under Section 42 of the Care Act 2014 provide a clear threshold for adult safeguarding enquiries, practitioners should recognise that risk, vulnerability and exploitation do not always present in ways that neatly align with criteria.

Transitional Safeguarding requires practitioners to apply professional curiosity, critical thinking and a preventative approach, particularly where young adults may not appear to meet the threshold for statutory intervention but remain at significant risk of harm.

Examples of where a safeguarding response may be appropriate:

- A young adult aged 18–21 experiencing ongoing criminal exploitation
- A care experienced young adult who disengages from services where there is a concern about financial exploitation.
- A young adult with substance misuse issues whose property has been “cuckooed”
- A young adult known to children’s services for sexual exploitation reaching 18.

9. Key practice message

A finding that an individual has capacity, does not meet Care Act eligibility, or does not engage with services should not, in isolation, result in the withdrawal of safeguarding consideration.

10. Roles and Responsibilities

All partner organisations should:

- Identify and respond to risks
- Share relevant information
- Contribute to joint assessment and planning
- Maintain professional curiosity

Agencies may include Children’s Social Care, Adult Social Care, Police, Health, Housing, Education and the voluntary sector.

11. Assessment and Intervention

Practitioners should recognise exploitation and contextual risk, use holistic multi-agency assessment beyond eligibility thresholds, and coordinate plans that disrupt harm while maintaining engagement.

12. Multi-Agency Coordination

Local areas have arrangements to support coordinated responses, information sharing and joint planning. Professionals should follow local pathways.

13. Advocacy

Pan Berkshire Safeguarding Adults - Safeguarding and Advocacy

Pan Berkshire Multi Agency Safeguarding Adults Policy and Procedures subgroup

14. References and Further Resources

Statutory and Government Guidance

Care Act 2014 [Care Act 2014](#)

Care & Support Statutory Guidance [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK](#)

Mental Capacity Act 2005 [Mental Capacity Act 2005](#)

Working Together to Safeguard Children [Working together to safeguard children - GOV.UK](#)

Research and Practice Resources

Holmes, D. & Smale, E. (2018) Transitional Safeguarding: Adolescence to Adulthood
[Transitional safeguarding | adolescence to adulthood | Research in Practice](#)

DHSC (2021) Bridging the Gap

[Bridging the gap: Transitional Safeguarding and the role of social work with adults](#)

Firmin, C. et al. (2019) Safeguarding during adolescence

[safeguarding-during-adolescence-briefing_jan19_v3.pdf](#)

Holmes, D. & Smith, L. (2022) Academic Insight

[Transitional safeguarding – HM Inspectorate of Probation](#)

Practice Learning and SARs

Preston-Shoot, M. et al. (2022) Learning from Safeguarding Adult Reviews

[Second national analysis of safeguarding adult reviews Final report; Stage 3](#)