



Transitional safeguarding

1. Transitional safeguarding; a system not a service

Transitional safeguarding is about recognising that the needs of young people do not change or stop when they reach 18, although the laws and services supporting them often do. It is about making sure they have the help they need to keep themselves safe and as independent as possible.

It is an approach to safeguarding that moves through developmental stages, rather than just focusing on chronological age, building on best practice and learning from both adult and children's services.

“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

2. Does this mean a Safeguarding Adults (S42) enquiry?

Transitional safeguarding is about safety in the more general sense, not just formal safeguarding investigations.

The Care Act 2014 definition for safeguarding adults can apply to young people of age 18 and above, just as the children's legislation can apply to those under 18.

If a young adult (18 or over) meets the Care Act definition, formal safeguarding duties will apply.

If they are still receiving children's services, they are considered to have needs for care and support, even if these are not eligible needs under the Care Act – safeguarding adult duties apply.

3. How Transitional safeguarding differs from safeguarding children

- Transitional safeguarding uses aspects from both adult and child approaches in organisations, to offer more tailored support as a young person moves into adulthood.
- It does not expect that all young adults experiencing risk will have this removed or lessened by formal services in the same way that safeguarding children focuses on explicit protection from harm.

4. How Transitional safeguarding links with safeguarding adults

- The Making Safeguarding Personal approach (set out in the Care Act) means recognising an adult's rights, freedom of action, choice and control; and the right to make decisions that may seem unwise where mental capacity is not in question.
- It is about understanding that adulthood gives degrees of personal responsibility, and respecting people's preferred outcomes.
- It is about risk enablement taking account of an individual's preferences, history and circumstances to achieve a proportionate tolerance of accepted risk.
- From 16yrs+ mental capacity assessments are a valuable tool for consideration when supporting a young person's ability to make best interest decisions.
- Many young people who received a service through children's services, will not meet the criteria for Adult Social Services intervention.

5. Why transitional safeguarding is important

- Abuse and exploitation do not stop at 18!
- The wider child safeguarding system does not always work well for adolescents, often designed to meet the needs of younger children.



- Adolescents are thought to need distinct services and professional approaches in line with their developmental needs, recognising that harm and its effects do not stop at age 18.
- Many of the environmental and structural factors that increase a child's vulnerability continue into adulthood, resulting in unmet needs and costly later interventions.
- The children's and adults' safeguarding systems have developed from different theories, come under different laws, and have different processes as a result.
- This can make the transition to adulthood harder for young people facing ongoing risk and mean that young people entering adulthood experience a 'cliff-edge' in terms of support.

6. What transitional safeguarding might mean for adolescents entering adulthood

- An adolescent engaged in 'county lines' or other gang-associated harm, may find they receive a criminal justice response rather than being recognised as a victim of criminal exploitation.
- A young adult experiencing sexual exploitation may not be eligible for a safeguarding response unless they have needs for care support, such as a formal mental health diagnosis or a diagnosed learning disability.
- A young person who is subject to a child protection plan may find that support stops abruptly as they turn 18, despite their experiences of maltreatment leaving them just as vulnerable as a child leaving care who would be entitled to ongoing support.
- A young adult experiencing domestic abuse and poor mental health may be offered little or no support for their own safety unless the circumstances become critical. Upon becoming a parent, they may find that children's services consider their child to be at risk.

7. How transitional safeguarding can help services

Transitional safeguarding approaches better align services for child and adults and encourage partnership cultures to respond better to the changing needs of adolescents and young adults.



7 Minute Briefing

These might include, for example, improved responses to young people at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) at the point of transition. They may involve drug or alcohol support services, life skills training, healthy relationships and preparing for adulthood services.

Transitional safeguarding is an emerging area of interest, and area for service development.

For further information see

[Transitional safeguarding and the role of adult social work](#)

[Transitional safeguarding - adolescence to adulthood](#)

*This resource has been adapted from Northumberland Children and Adults Safeguarding Partnership 7-minute briefing – **with thanks***

Issue date: September 2023

Review date: September 2024