

Tailored support recognising adolescents are not a homogenous groups



"I know what support is on offer which suits me and my needs, and I accept that my worker cannot change **who I am.**"

"I like it when you give me a **genuine response** rather than a tickbox response. How do you expect me to tell you everything about me when I know nothing about you?"



To consider for your practice

- Talk to the young person about how **they understand their identity** and what it means for them and their needs. **Involve them in deciding** how to respond to their identity in the support they receive
- Think about how a young person's identity might expose them to particular trauma or structural disadvantage (e.g. hate crime or discrimination)
- Consider who is the best person to build a relationship with the young person that acknowledges **their cultural and identity needs**. Think about gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, disability
- **Seek out expertise of others** when you need it. This might be professional expertise, or from community groups and resources



To watch out for

- **Don't make assumptions about the "match"** between practitioners and young people solely based on their perceived characteristics. Identities, and young people's experience of them, are complex.
- **Check your own biases** about young people's situation and aspirations. Seek out opportunities to reflect with peers and in supervision to review your assumptions.
- **Look for strengths and assets** as well as complexities related to their identity.
- **Recognise the limits of your ability to tailor your approach** within statutory responsibilities (e.g. court orders) and available resources. Be honest with the young person about what support you can and can't provide and **don't make promises you can't keep**.



How you know it is making a difference

- **Talk with your team** about the characteristics of young people you work with. What do you know about the difference in outcomes and experience for young people with any of these characteristics?
- **Consider the feedback you receive (and don't receive)** as a team - what does that tell you about difference in experience and engagement with support?



Where this is currently working well

- Fantasy Wings in Trafford: commissioning advice and support from the voluntary sector and providing opportunities for marginalised groups eg Aviation for Black Girls
- Various GM Authorities: Embedding a speech and language therapist in edge of care and youth justice to support adolescents with SEND

Strengths-based approach where young leaders also develop peer-to-peer actions



"My worker knows what I enjoy and what I am good at and helps me to achieve my goals. For example I want to be an inventor so my social worker helped me contact people to talk to about this."

"You've helped me get through **the little things in life**, and helped me make an impression on people"



To consider for your practice

- **Reflect on the language** you and others use about the young person, avoiding adultification and victim-blaming
- Take a 'child-first' approach. Remind young people that **they are not defined by their problems** and help them to identify their strengths and progress. These can be small improvements in their safety and stability
- **Encourage young people to think about their future self**, to articulate their dreams, and signpost activities that progress their goals.
- **Explore what assets exist in their lives** and think about how you can build upon positive family and peer relationships
- **Look for opportunities for young people** to participate in designing and evaluating services and consider what support they might need to do so.



How you know it is making a difference

- **Give young people opportunities** to review and reflect on progress against their own goals. Review this as a team
- **Track take-up and attendance** at / engagement with positive activities
- Ask young people about their levels of **confidence and self-perception**



To watch out for

- Recognise that a strengths-based approach **doesn't mean ignoring risks** the young person might be facing in other areas of their life
- Responding to a crisis or immediate risk of harm can mean that hopes and aspirations take a back seat. Look for opportunities to reflect on strengths **as part of the post-crisis response** (e.g. return home interviews)
- When building on relationships around the adolescents or suggesting peer-to-peer support, **be wary about not replicating exploitation** and retraumatizing adolescents by putting them in contact with the wrong people
- Some young people aren't used to being asked about their hopes and future. You might need to **build a trusting relationship first**
- Think about how the young person's emotional stability might impact their engagement



Where this is currently working well

- Skill Mill in Rochdale: skills development opportunities supported by Youth Justice Practitioners, and building a supportive group of peers
- STEER in Salford, Bolton and Wigan: 1-to-1 mentoring for young people experiencing CCE, including programme of positive activities
- Peer-to-peer support for substance misuse in Stockport

Practice which is non-judgmental, trauma-informed and restorative



*"My worker is nice and polite to me. I am never treated like a little sh*t. My worker never gets offended or upset when I have done something I shouldn't have. My worker listens and makes me laugh"*

"There is mutual respect, and no judgement..."

"Being spoken to kindly makes it easier to share things."

"I'm proud that I have learnt to control my anger...You've given me sound advice and I'm getting on with my life now."



To consider for your practice

- **Take a Child-first approach**, thinking about the child's needs and capacity to change, rather than the risks they face, or the risks they pose to others.
- **Ask young people about adverse childhood experiences** and history as well as current concerns as part of your assessment
- You may need to wait until you have established a trusting relationship with them. **Be patient and work with the young person's timescale** for them to build trust and feel safe. Give young people agency over this process
- **Help young people to understand** why they might be behaving a certain way and what are their triggers, rather than focusing on behaviour alone
- **Consider how to help parents to understand** the impact of trauma on young people and their own parenting



How you know it is making a difference

- **Review your recording as a team** - consider whether records reflect the young person's story in language they would understand, and identifies the role of trauma in their behaviour
- **Gather feedback from parents and young people** about how they feel about where they receive support and if it is a safe environment for them



To watch out for

- **Label the behaviour** of the young person, not the young person themselves. This will reflect an understanding that their behaviour is not their fault, and opens up a conversation about strengths and assets
- **Notice your own emotional responses** to young people's trauma and seek out opportunities to reflect and receive emotional support if you need it
- **Reflect on your own preconceptions and judgements** about young people, and take up opportunities to reflect with peers
- **Having to get to know a new practitioner can be re-traumatising for young people.** Identify who else is supporting the young person, and who might provide continuity of relationship for the young person if you aren't at work



Where this is currently working well

- Embedded CAMHS worker in the youth justice team in Trafford
- Multi-agency community of practice to explore trauma informed practice in Wigan
- Complex Safeguarding worker provides advice on trauma-informed practice at the Front Door in Stockport

Key workers will be relational, persistent and consistent for adolescents



"You stick by me and advocate for me. You make me make a good impression on others. I like the routine of meeting with you"

"My social worker completes the direct work exercises with me, so I get to know her better, and see how things could be different".



To consider for your practice

- **See the whole young person** - their trauma and their strengths - and help the young person to see their own story differently
- **Give young people a say** in what support, where and when and how you communicate. Be flexible and creative
- **Think about what information you are willing to share** with young people about your own life (respecting your professional boundaries) in order to build trust
- **Be reliable.** Follow through on plans and commitments made to the young person, or explain why you can't
- **Stick with the young person, even when they reject you.** Remember to reflect on the reasons behind the resistance and what it tells you about how to approach them next time. Seek expert support in managing trauma if necessary.



How you know it is making a difference

- **Consulting with young people** to understand their experience as part of the relationship, asking for feedback routinely.
- Keeping an eye on staff turnover rates to **anticipate transitions**
- Looking at training take-up rates in relational training, e.g. ACT training



To watch out for

- **Transitions!** Manage anxieties about support ending and working to smooth transitions between services and workers when the relationship ends
- **Be wary** about too many workers trying to build that trusting relationship - it will overwhelm the young person
- **Think about who will pick up your trusted relationship** with a young person if you go sick or leave your job
- If your role doesn't let you be the key relationship with a young person, consider who else can play this role for them. It might be another team, agency or community organisation.



Where this is currently working well

- Transitional safeguarding worker holds the relationship for young people turning 18 in Salford
- Volunteer mentors provide a non-professional, lasting relationship in Rochdale

Adolescents have agency and decision-making power on the support they would like and when



"You can't control me or change me. I am the one who needs to make decisions and changes. Your influence is based on our mutual respect"

"I liked the fact that she was there for me and didn't discuss things with my mum"



To consider for your practice

- **Consider how you can involve young people in planning** the support that they receive, including where and when you meet and how you communicate with them. Be honest with young people about how much choice they have
- **Work with parents** to support them to respect the young person's agency and choices, where appropriate. Consider the young person's views on the extent of parental involvement in the plan
- **Talk to young people about their own goals.** Give time to reflecting with each young person on progress towards those goals. Think about how strengths-based approaches and positive activities might help them achieve those goals
- **Invite feedback from young people** about your relationship with them and the support that they receive.
- **Consider how to improve the context** around the young person to give them more choice (EET, housing, stable relationships)



How you know it is making a difference

- **Involving young people in case audits** for them to share their perspective
- Monitoring outcomes **chosen by a young person**
- Auditing Young People voice in assessment and plans



To watch out for

- **It can be difficult to balance** giving young people agency with taking steps to reduce the risk of external harm. Seek advice and support if necessary
- **Some agencies have statutory duties that limit their ability** to offer young people choices. Think about the space you do have to give young people some control over their experience and who else can help
- **Respecting a young person's agency doesn't mean accepting their first answer.** Working through the key relationship can help a young person to understand their journey differently. Offer the young person chances to revisit their choices



Where this is currently working well

- Pathway planning with care leavers in partnership with youth workers to support young people in decision-making in Oldham
- Dedicated Children's Rights and Participation service in Bury

The role of parents and carers is valued and they are supported to improve young people's wellbeing



"I liked that my family also got helped with practical stuff"

During times when I have struggled my worker has always said she will check her phone at the weekend and if I need her to text her and she will contact me as soon as she can."



To consider for your practice

- **Think about how to involve parents in a young person's plan.** Talk to young people about how they want their parents to be involved
- **Try to identify strengths within the wider family network** who can continue to support the young person now and once services end
- **Find creative ways to support communication** within the family about managing risks and meeting the young person's needs
- **Be transparent** with young people and their parents about what support you will provide and how you will share information and with whom, to build trusted relationships
- **Explore family dynamics** and parental conflict as triggers for young people's behaviour and signpost to support with these issues as part of the young person's plan
- Find opportunities **to connect parents with peer support groups**



How you know it is making a difference

- **Making parent support a part of outcomes** measured for adolescents
- **Seeking feedback from parents** on support received



To watch out for

- **Parents and carers may have their own needs** for practical or emotional support. If you can't do this within your role, think about who else can support parents
- **Recognise that parents and other family members may have their own trauma**, previous negative experiences of public services, and/or strong feelings of shame that make them resistant to working with you. They may need persistent and flexible approaches too
- **Try to balance communication** with parents with the young person's feeling of agency over their lives e.g. if they do not want you to disclose all they share with you to their parents or carers



Where this is currently working well

- Parent courses on understanding the adolescent brain and the impact of trauma in Tameside
- Intensive trauma-informed support for parents whose children are experiencing exploitation in Manchester, Children's Society

Mainstreaming young people participation in your safeguarding practice - provocations



"I think the young person liked doing it [providing feedback]. I expected it to be awkward, but he really appreciated it. It was a nice end to closing the case"

(Social worker reflecting on gathering feedback)



Do you systematically gather feedback from young people using your services?

- **Adolescents with experience of support have really valuable insight** to give. Consider how you can contact young people after the support has been delivered so that they can reflect on what worked for them.
- **Feedback conversations are an opportunity for the young person to tell you what worked well; what could have been better, etc.** They are not about reviewing the young person's personal plan or their progress. Think about how the conversation should feel different for the young person and how it might feel for you as a practitioner.
- **Involve young people in deciding how they can give feedback.** Some are more comfortable giving feedback in writing, when others will prefer having a conversation. Similarly, some will prefer anonymity when other will want to talk to someone they have a trusted relationship with.
- Young people benefit from seeing the impact of their feedback. Identify the **pathways to change your service as a result of what young people tell you.**



Do you gather insights and design your services with young people?

- **Adolescents know their communities and have insight into what type of support they need** - identify key decision points and design processes where young people's insight could be asked for. This might include designing physical spaces or digital communications.
- **Young people with experience of extra-familial harm are some of the most difficult to engage in participation activities.** Think creatively about how you can tailor opportunities for them, building on their relationship with a key worker, or working with a peer group.



Do you empower young people in the community to help keep their peers safer?

- **Young people are more influenced than their peers than by adults, particularly professionals.** Providing opportunities for young people to hear from, and be supported by, other young people is a powerful tool that is currently underused.
- **Empowering and supporting young people who want to make a difference in their communities builds their capacity to lead now, and into the future.** This already happens in GM and can take various forms like peer to peer campaigning (for example, to reduce bullying in school), but also peer to peer support (such as buddying system) or peer to peer research.
- **Young people providing support to peers need to be supported too.** Think about how young leaders are supported with their emotions, safeguarding, skill development and reflection. Consider how to compensate them for their time and expertise.



Do you hear perspectives from all young people?

- **Young people are not a homogeneous group.** A single channel for participation risks some young people missing out.
- **Children in Care councils and Youth Cabinets,** the most common channels through young people participate in decision-making, are not representative of the diversity of lived experiences in the community.
- **Missing from home young people, those living in placements outside of Greater Manchester, those living in custody and UASC and home educated young people** are less likely to be routinely consulted. Specific projects might be needed to hear from these groups.