

HSCP Briefing for Multi-Agency Practitioners



September 2023

Adolescence is a transitional period of physical and psychological development between childhood and adulthood, the cultural purpose of which involves preparation to assume adult roles. The complexities of this transition can, for some children, lead to risk of abuse and exploitation.

The nature of risks faced by adolescents and the way they experience these risks can differ to those in earlier childhood. This can include risks posed outside of the family home associated with peers and adults unconnected to their families.

HSCP Thematic Audit: Safeguarding Adolescents

Multiple sources of research illustrate that children between the ages of 11 to 15 and 15 to 17 years are the second and third highest risk groups of significant harm. This is highlighted in previous [biennial and triennial reviews of Serious Case Reviews \(SCRs\)](#) and the national [Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's annual report](#).

Thematic audits are an important part of the assurance work of the HSCP. They offer a window to frontline practice and we thank the practitioners who supported us with this audit. As part of this thematic audit a tabletop analysis of previous work was undertaken by the HSCP and the Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) relating to adolescents, a multi-agency practitioner survey and practitioner conversations. A case file audit was also undertaken, which found evidence of effective practice alongside some areas for development which are considered below.

The HSCP have launched a [Safeguarding Adolescents Toolkit](#) for professionals and recently published a similar toolkit, [Supporting your Adolescent](#), for parents and carers.

Key findings

Results of the practitioner survey and practitioner conversations demonstrated some good awareness and use of the professionals toolkit, with over 77% of respondents believing the toolkit to be extremely or very useful. This was reflected across all areas of the toolkit.

The parents and carers toolkit was less well known and work will continue to promote this.

There are three themes that cross all the research/auditing work undertaken as part of this thematic review. They are:

- **Neurodivergence.** This is an umbrella term that is used to explain the differences in the way people's brains work. Examples of conditions include attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism, dyspraxia, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia and Tourette's syndrome. These conditions can have a varying impact on children's lives. Research highlights that children who are neurodivergent may be at greater risk of suicide and are over represented in the criminal justice system. Children with disabilities are also more likely to be abused than non-disabled children.

Some children who are neurodivergent may also experience trauma and it is important that professionals are able to identify where this may be a factor to ensure an appropriate response, particularly trauma arising from abuse, including neglect.

Of the 40 cases reviewed in this report, 58% of children had a confirmed or were being assessed for a possible diagnosis of a neurodivergent condition. This is significantly over representative of the UK general population where approximately 15% of people are neurodivergent. This theme has been shared with Public Health colleagues and services working with children who are neurodivergent.

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- **Attendance and engagement with school.** In Hampshire, as part of the work of the Scrutiny Group, data is reviewed on a bi-monthly basis including school attendance. The school attendance figures (at the time of this thematic audit - spring 2022) show an absence rate for primary and secondary schools of 6% and 9% respectively. The number of cases collectively reviewed as part of this work is small (40 cases), however, in 60% of this cohort reduced school attendance was a feature. Children not regularly attending school can be at significant risk of harm including abuse or exploitation or involvement in criminal or gang related activity. This information will be used as part of the next HSCP thematic audit considering vulnerable children and disrupted attendance.

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- **Parental Issues.** Parental issues had a significant impact on children in the cases considered as part of this review. There were examples of adolescents being unrecognised young carers and of [adolescent neglect](#). These present in different ways to that of younger children, with the longer term impact (cumulative) of these issues presenting as poor school attendance and risky behaviour in adolescents.

Information on adolescent neglect, including [educational neglect](#), is contained within the [Neglect Toolkit](#). This includes practical resources such as the [Neglect Thresholds Chart](#) and [Day in my Life](#) tools.

The Department for Education have developed a presentation on the impact of cumulative harm that can support professionals understanding of the issues facing children as a result: [Understanding cumulative harm Assessment, Analysis and Planning](#).

If you do one thing:

THINK YOUNG CARER: The Carers Trust and The Children's Society define a young carer as: "A person under 18 who provides or intends to provide care for another person. They often take on practical and/or emotional caring responsibilities that would normally be expected of an adult." Does anyone you are working with fit this definition? For more information access the Hampshire County Council guide, [Young carers](#).

Key messages

QR CODE: Use this QR Code to access the parents and carers toolkit, [Supporting your Adolescent](#), and share with the parents and carers of older children and adolescents you are working with.



KNOW THE CHILD: Tools such as [Day in the Life](#), from the Hampshire and Isle of Wight (IOW) Neglect Toolkit, are useful for understanding a child's daily lived experience/routine. There is a day in the life tool for older children and adolescents.

CONSIDER AND INVOLVE: Is support needed for engagement in education and attending school? What about dental decay or other health issues? Are the right professionals involved in supporting the child and family?

TAKE SOME TIME: Read and explore the [Safeguarding Adolescents Toolkit](#) to support your practice.

KNOW ABOUT ADOLESCENT NEGLECT: Read the HSCP & IOW [Strategy Guide](#) on Adolescent Neglect for more information.

CHECK IT OUT: A [Child Exploitation Toolkit](#) for professionals has been launched across Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton (HIPS).



Resources to support practice

Thresholds

[Hampshire and Isle of Wight Thresholds Chart](#)

[Hampshire and IOW Neglect Thresholds Chart](#)

Training

The [HSCP Virtual Offer](#) provides a range of multi-agency training on some of the themes arising from this review. These include:

- Safeguarding adolescents
- Neglect
- Identifying and supporting young carers
- Missing, exploitation and trafficking
- Harmful sexual behaviour
- Serious Violence Duty
- Prevent
- Gaming and gambling in under 18s
- Keeping children safe online
- Domestic abuse
- Harmful practices

Toolkits

For professionals

[Safeguarding Adolescents Toolkit](#)

[Neglect Toolkit](#)

[Child Exploitation Toolkit](#)

[Serious Violence Toolkit](#)

[Harmful Practices Toolkit](#)

[Managing Self-Harm Toolkit](#)

[Prevent Toolkit](#)

[Child on Child Abuse Toolkit](#)

For parents & carers

[Supporting your Adolescent Toolkit](#)

[Child Exploitation Toolkit \(support for parents and carers\)](#)

[Radicalisation Toolkit \(support for parents and carers\)](#)

