

North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership conducts a series of multi-agency learning-themed audits throughout the year. Each audit explores a different safeguarding theme and the multi-agency responses to it. The partnership business unit collates and shares the audit findings. These include highlighting good practice, areas for development, actions, next steps, and further resources.

To find out more about Audits visit the One Minute Guide [here](#)

Introduction

This practitioner briefing shares learning from a multi-agency audit that explored how safeguarding responses operate for children at risk of exploitation, particularly where risk develops over time, fluctuates, or continues as children approach adulthood.

The audit reviewed four complex cases discussed through multi-agency forums, drawing together perspectives from across the partnership. It explored how early indicators were recognised, how assessment and planning adapted over time, how interventions and disruption were applied, and how transitions influenced outcomes. The audit also considered how professional language and system thresholds can shape responses as children move closer to adulthood.

Context

National and local learning consistently shows that child exploitation is rarely a single incident but a complex and evolving process shaped by relationships, environments, trauma and developmental stage. Adolescence is a period of increased independence, identity formation and risk-taking, and these factors can heighten vulnerability to exploitation. Transitions (including school changes), service changes and the transition to adulthood, are recognised as critical safeguarding moments, where continuity of support and shared understanding of risk are essential.

Areas of Good Practice

- **Early recognition** coming together over time, with improved awareness of contextual exploitation indicators across agencies.
- **Strong multi-agency information sharing**, particularly where risk escalated, enabling richer understanding of children's lived experience.
- **Growing confidence in contextual safeguarding**, including consideration of peer groups, locations and online environments.
- **Persistence in engagement**, even where children were resistant, disengaged or risk fluctuated.
- **Improving disruption practice**, including use of intelligence, civil powers and cross-border working.
- **Proactive transition planning in some cases**, where trusted relationships and safeguarding oversight continued beyond age thresholds.

Areas for Development

- **Early indicators not always acted on:** Antisocial behaviour and school disruption were sometimes managed as behavioural issues rather than safeguarding signals.
- **Bereavement and loss insufficiently revisited:** Loss and family change were identified but not always re-explored as risk evolved.
- **Assumptions during periods of calm:** Reduced incidents or engagement were sometimes interpreted as reduced risk without sufficient evidence.
- **Missing episodes analysed inconsistently:** Short or non-traditional missing episodes were not always explored as part of wider exploitation patterns.
- **Fragmented planning:** Multiple parallel plans (CP, exploitation, YJS, education, transition) were not always clearly aligned.
- **Transitions** remain high-risk points, particularly at age 18, where safeguarding responses sometimes reduced sharply.
- **Language at transition:** Shifts from "victim" to "perpetrator" narratives risk obscuring ongoing vulnerability.

Recommendations

- **Strengthen early intervention where antisocial behaviour emerges** as a potential indicator of exploitation.
- **Embed bereavement and relational loss as dynamic safeguarding factors** to be revisited over time.
- **Evidence risk reduction during periods of calm**, rather than assuming improvement.
- **Improve analysis of missing episodes** to identify patterns, not just incidents.
- **Strengthen coordinated disruption**, including online exploitation.
- **Support children through one clear, shared multi-agency plan.**
- **Embed multi-agency peer supervision** for complex or “stuck” cases.
- **Improve safeguarding across all transitions**, particularly into adulthood.
- **Use consistent, non-victim-blaming language** across the partnership.

Actions and recommendations will be reviewed as part of the NYSCP Practice & Learning Subgroup meetings

Questions for Reflection

- **How do we recognise exploitation risk before escalation?**
- **Are bereavement, loss and family change seen as signs of vulnerability and are issues being revisited, not just recorded?**
- **How confident are we in explaining why risk has reduced?**
- **Does our language support safeguarding curiosity or close it down?**
- **Am I assuming reduced risk, or can I evidence why risk has changed?**
- **Are missing episodes being understood as part of a wider pattern?**
- **What will happen to safeguarding support at the next transition point?**

What to do now

- Consider the questions for reflection in your team meetings and think about how the learning can be embedded into practice.
- Familiarise yourself with the additional resources and information. and promote across your teams.
- Share your learning and the key messages with your colleagues.

Further partnership Audits and Safeguarding Reviews can be accessed [here](#).

[Pre- recorded learning events can be assessed on the NYSCP YouTube Channel.](#)

Resources & Further Information

[All NYSCP practice guidance can be accessed here.](#)

- [Voice of the Child Practice Guidance & Toolkit](#)
- [Be Aware: Child Exploitation Knowledge Hub](#)
- [Be Aware: Let's talk about language.](#)
- [From exploited to exploiter - Alliance for Youth Justice](#)
- [Safeguarding during adolescence - Research in Practice](#)