

01 Background



A number of serious case reviews in Lancashire have found that teenagers are not always sufficiently safeguarded.

The information about all child deaths in Lancashire (and nationally) teaches us that teenagers are vulnerable. It is not always clear why this is, as there are a number of factors, but it is possible that professionals miss the fact that young people are children in need as behaviour which communicates distress has been misread, and young people have been treated as pests rather than children in need.

There has also been a tendency to label young people as 'hard to reach', whereas the issue is often that we lack the skills and systems to engage them.

Why it matters 02



Teenagers are at an age of increased vulnerability due to their developmental tasks. It is easy to overestimate their capacity to safeguard themselves. Or to assume that they have none!

The age is one of great development, and the foundation of the young person's adult self, so having positive experiences builds resilience for the future

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Questions to consider

- Do we accept risk in teens because of their age?
- How do you manage and assess risk in teens?
- Do you involve teens in their own risk assessment (e.g. by asking them to do the assessment form)?
- Do you know the signs of CSE? Of potential self-harm? Of Emotional distress in teenagers?



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What to do

The most important thing is to establish communication. Relationship is key to getting good information from young people, and this takes time. Young people tell us again and again that they want us to listen to them! You also need to plan carefully with young people, and ensure that they are supported in negotiating the system



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Information

Risk taking is necessary for development, but teens do not judge risk well. Their brains are re-configuring, which causes mental instability and increases vulnerability. To appreciate consequences of risky behaviour, one has to have the ability to think through potential outcomes

and understand the consequences. Due to an immature prefrontal cortex, teens are not skilled at doing this. Teens do not take information, organise it, and understand it in the same way that adults do—they have to learn how to do this.

The age is when young people become increasingly self-protecting in order to be completely self-protecting adults, so they need practice at taking more responsibility for themselves. Cumulative exposure to appropriate risk builds resilience and coping skills, whereas cumulative disadvantage leads to increased vulnerability.

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