

# National youth work curriculum: Transitional Safeguarding

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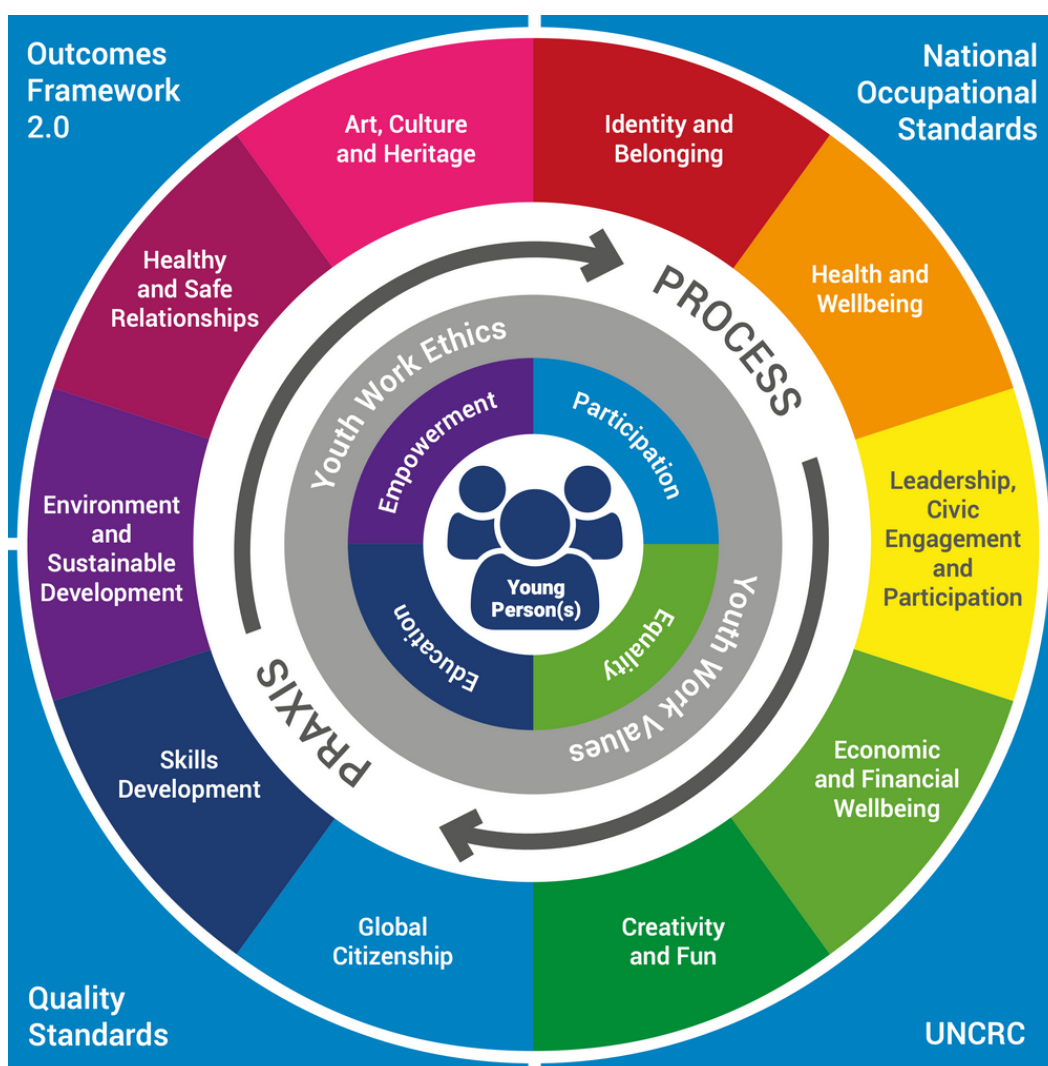
# The national youth work curriculum

The first of its kind for 30 years, the national youth work curriculum is a resource for senior leaders, service commissioners, practitioners and policy professionals focused on safeguarding adults, children and young people who are making the transition to adulthood.

The curriculum sets out what youth work is and what it does. If you are a safeguarding lead (whether for children or adults), a Safeguarding Adults Board member or chair, service commissioner, manager or director, policy maker or practitioner, the curriculum will be an important point of reference for you. It will enable you to determine how youth work might help you meet your statutory child and adult safeguarding responsibilities whilst safeguarding adolescents and young adults across multiple developmental stages.

As the diagram below shows, the curriculum provides a learning framework based on the practice and process of youth work. It also takes account of national occupational standards, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the youth work outcomes framework, and associated quality standards.

Curriculum overview diagram:



# Shoulder to shoulder: Youth work and Transitional Safeguarding

Everyone has heard the term ‘youth work’ but not everyone knows what it means nor the impact it can have. Yet many of the young people who have experienced youth work have seen first hand what a difference it can make to their lives. For them, the strong, formative, trusting and lasting relationships that sit at the bedrock of youth work are the prerequisite for their physical, mental and emotional well-being. Youth work is an essential component in their discovery of identity and belonging, and the cornerstone of their involvement in the community. The focal point for the curriculum is young people and the youth work practice and relationships that support them, their peers and their communities.

## The purpose of youth work <sup>1</sup>

“ To enable young people to develop holistically, [and to work] with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to [empower] them to develop their voice, [their] influence and place in society, and to reach their full potential. ”

Unlike many of the systems and services that were put in place to protect children and young people, youth work relationships that are forged in adolescence are not designed to change or stop when a statutory period of support, supervision or care expires, or when the young person reaches 18. The autonomous, supportive connections that young people make with trusted youth workers transcend conventional structures, provide safe passage across statutory boundaries, and create channels through which safeguarding concerns can be identified and addressed. These relationships, which promote resilience and often extend beyond the age of 18, are integral to safeguarding. They cannot be fashioned or forced within the confines of a service, nor forgotten about in the transition from one service to another, nor filed away when a case is closed. It is the young people who choose when to open up or to shut down and, metaphorically speaking in the context of multidisciplinary teams or statutory involvement in the youth justice system, when to walk away.

As momentum grows around the concept of Transitional Safeguarding, it is important to shine a light on both the preventative and reparatory potential of youth work relationships to create and maintain safe spaces and places for young people, prevent them from either doing or experiencing harm, and enable them to become the people they want to be.

## Transitional Safeguarding definition <sup>2</sup>

“ An approach to safeguarding adolescents and young adults fluidly across developmental stages which builds on the best available evidence, learns from both children's and adult safeguarding practice and which prepares young people for their adult lives. ”

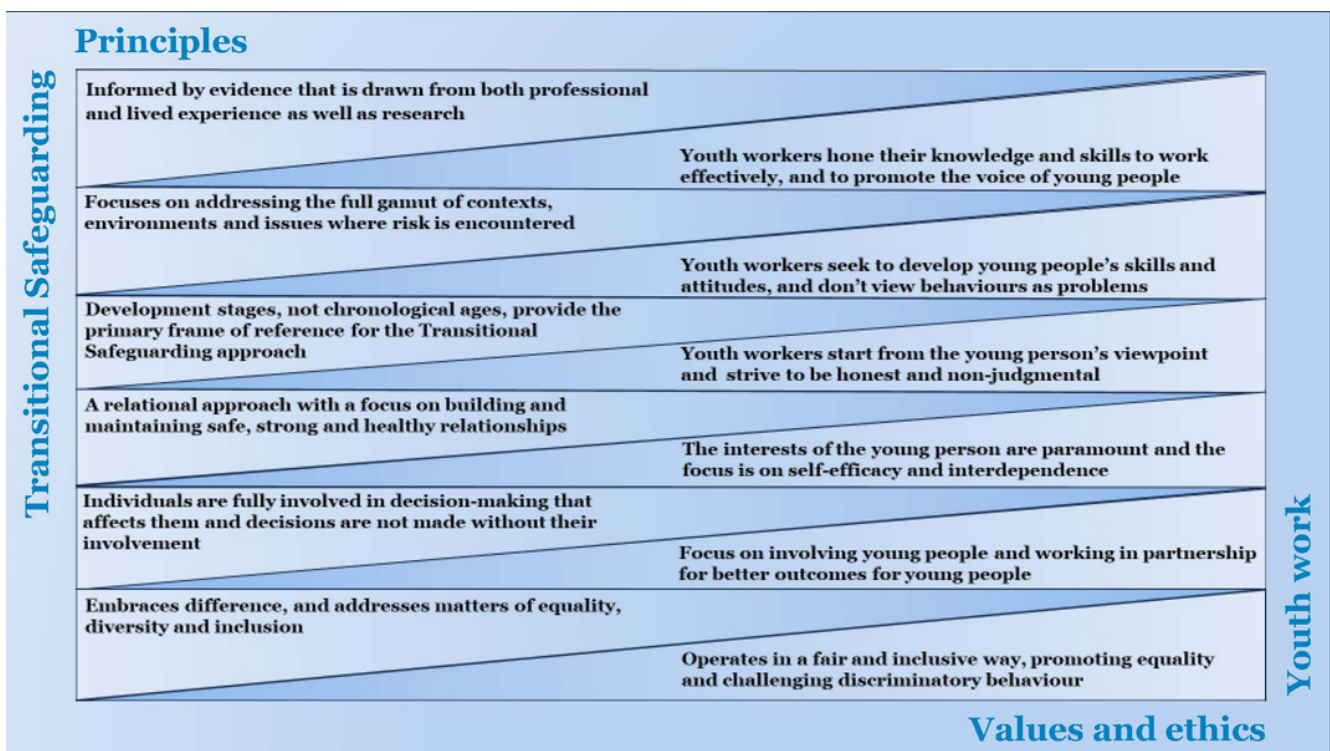
<sup>1</sup> National Youth Agency (NYA) (2023), Youth Work in England: Policy, Practice and the National Occupational Standards: NYA

<sup>2</sup> Holmes, D. and Smale, E. (2018), Mind the Gap: Transitional Safeguarding – Adolescence to Adulthood' Dartington: Research in Practice

The focus of Transitional Safeguarding, as distinct from traditional and prevailing safeguarding structures that have chronological age as the primary frame of reference, is on tailoring local systems of care and support to individuals at different developmental stages. The approach has much in common with the youth work curriculum that offers an informal education process where learning grows through conversation, exploration and enhanced shared experience – the best learning methodology for unlocking young people’s potential.

As the next diagram shows, the six guiding principles<sup>3</sup> of Transitional Safeguarding align well with the key values<sup>4</sup> and ethics<sup>5</sup> of youth work. Both individually and collectively, these principles, values and ethics offer a fitting and intelligent response to the complex, overlapping and multi-causal barriers and challenges many young people face across a broad age span. They reflect the fact that in order to keep older children and younger adults safe, a personalised approach is required. As well as effective stage-appropriate services being available to them, this group of young people also need access to youth work focused environments that are warm, welcoming, resilient, empowering and inherently safe, together with stable and enduring youth work relationships to support them, their peers and their communities.

## Principles, values and ethics aligned



<sup>3</sup> Office of the Chief Social Worker for Adults and Research in Practice (2021) Bridging the Gap: Transitional Safeguarding and the Role of Social Work with Adults – Knowledge Briefing Department of Health and Social Care

<sup>4</sup> Institute for Youth Work (2020), The Youth Work Code of Ethics Institute for Youth Work

<sup>5</sup> ibid

# The benefits of the youth work curriculum in relation to Transitional Safeguarding

The primary beneficiaries of this potential life-changing fusion between youth work and Transitional Safeguarding are the under-supported groups of women and men in the 15-24 age group<sup>6</sup> including adolescents and young adults who have grown up in care, those who experience extra-familial exploitation and harm, are living with a disability, learning difficulties, special educational needs or a mental health condition, or are in contact with the youth justice system. With the right conditions in place in local areas (namely systems-focused leadership, visionary collaboration and effective boundary-spanning working practices), far-reaching, sustainable outcomes can be achieved. For every direct beneficiary, someone else or something else may benefit indirectly too: a relative, a child, a close friend, a would-be victim/perpetrator and a system that is under continual pressure.

The skilled delivery of youth work and its ability to protect and change the life chances of young people does not of course happen in a vacuum. It is all supported by, and based on, the national curriculum produced by the National Youth Agency (NYA). The curriculum offers a flexible learning framework developed by youth workers for youth workers, as well as for other people and organisations who want to deliver effective youth work. For young people who are facing multiple, complex or overlapping challenges along the journey towards adulthood, the support of a skilled, professional youth worker can provide significant long-term benefits in an otherwise uncertain and scary world. The benefits of youth work extend beyond the young person too. The youth work principles and methodologies running through the youth work curriculum have the power to make a substantial positive difference, enabling key issues such as racial disparity to be addressed and needs in relation to neurodiverse and LGBTQIA+ populations to be better met.

The youth work curriculum could be of special interest to Safeguarding Adults Boards as well as to Safeguarding Children Partnerships as they look to develop, embed and integrate Transitional Safeguarding approaches and innovations in local areas. As the youth work curriculum shows, it is the skills, knowledge and integrity of youth workers, together with the unique local and cultural understanding that derives from lived experience and far-reaching engagement with different communities and cohorts, that enable them to identify young people's needs, work across agency boundaries, and build strong and lasting relationships that are the prerequisite for a fairer, more culturally sensitive and equitable society.

Against the backdrop of the youth work curriculum, youth workers are ideally placed to share learning, knowledge and experience with other professionals and commissioners as well as with local cabinet members and portfolio holders in local areas, including: sharing expertise in respect of relationship-based approaches with young people; promoting approaches that empower and support young people to make choices and decisions that are safe and made in the interest of their own personal well-being and that of others; role-modelling the importance of early and enduring interventions that are strengths-based and personalised; influencing the design and development of local systems by providing insights that involve young people firsthand and look beyond service delivery to peer-led and community-led mechanisms of support; and challenging commissioners to co-design and build flexible commissioning frameworks that reflect the complex, fluid and multi-faceted nature of young people's transition to adulthood.

<sup>6</sup> Definition of 'youth' as contained in the United Nations resolution 36/28, 1981.

# The youth work curriculum: A significant opportunity

You will find the curriculum an invaluable resource that will provide you with the necessary tools and understanding to transform how youth work is perceived and rolled out in relation to Transitional Safeguarding.

The development and roll-out of the curriculum presents a significant opportunity for senior leaders, policy makers, academics and practitioners who make and influence safeguarding policy or have direct safeguarding responsibilities. We believe that the youth work curriculum, which offers the framework within which youth work relationships may be developed consistently and effectively, could be applied to support the following:

- Shared learning linked to practice development
- Systems improvement and cross-boundary working
- Service commissioning and market engagement
- Co-design, delivery and roll-out of innovative projects at a local level

The framework could also help to address key issues, including:

- Child sexual exploitation
- Modern slavery and trafficking
- Substance misuse and county lines
- Young people's involvement in gangs and associated consequences
- Young people with learning difficulties, disabilities and special educational needs
- Those who are in transition within the care system
- Mental health conditions
- Youth and criminal justice

The curriculum allows for young people to be placed at the heart of decision-making and delivery, and for needs to be identified and met in a more participatory way. It offers the opportunity for significant and lasting change through the delivery of more youth action projects that will enable young people to gain a sense of belonging, to grow and flourish, to understand the consequences of their behaviour, and to see beyond the confines of their immediate world.

Find out more about the national youth work curriculum and access some practical examples of how it is being applied in social care [here](#).

## About the NYA

We are the national standards body and the professional statutory regulatory body for youth work in England. Our mission is to raise awareness of what youth work is, why it is important, the benefits it offers, and how to do youth work well and effectively. As part of this, we offer strategic and practical support to youth work organisations, as well as to those that commission, fund and partner with them. We showcase great youth work practice, work on finding new ways of making youth work ever more effective through research and innovation, and set occupational standards for youth work. We also train and support youth workers, and give advice on youth work to organisations in higher education.

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[nya.org.uk](http://nya.org.uk)