

Safeguarding scenario - Question: What is contextual safeguarding?

In one sentence, how would you explain contextual safeguarding to a new member of staff?

Scenario

Two Year 8 boys attend different schools.

 Child A lives in a small rural village. He spends most evenings gaming online and often travels long distances alone to meet friends.

 Child B lives in a busy town. He regularly meets large friendship groups in local parks and shopping centres after school.

Both boys are 13 years old.

Discussion questions

-  How might the safeguarding risks differ for each child?
-  What contextual factors outside the family home could increase their vulnerability?
-  How might their school identify these risks?
-  Would your safeguarding response be the same, or would it need to take account of each child's environment?

Key learning

Contextual safeguarding recognises that children and young people can experience significant harm outside their family home, including within their peer groups, schools, neighbourhoods and online environments.

There is no single safeguarding profile for children living in rural or urban communities, but different environments can present different opportunities and risks.

Examples to consider:

A child living in a rural area may experience:

- Online grooming or exploitation
- Isolation and limited access to support services
- Lack of anonymity within the community
- Risk-taking in isolated locations
- Harmful attitudes or behaviours becoming normalised within small communities

A child living in an urban area may experience:

- Child criminal exploitation
- Peer group violence
- Serious violence or gang affiliation
- Radicalisation
- Greater exposure to unsafe public spaces or community violence

 Equally, children in either environment could experience any of these risks. Safeguarding professionals should avoid making assumptions based solely on where a child lives.

Discussion point

As safeguarding professionals, our role is to look beyond the child and consider the environments in which they spend their time.

Ask yourself:

- Where does this child spend time?
- Who influences them?
- What places do they feel safe, or unsafe?
- What online communities are they part of?
- Understanding a child's context often provides the missing piece of the safeguarding picture.

Remember: Safeguarding isn't just about what happens at home, it's about recognising and responding to the risks children face wherever they live, learn, socialise and spend time online.