

North Somerset Context Weighting Guidance 2025

Introduction

When you start to incorporate contexts into assessments you then need to think about how to prioritise contextual interventions. One way to achieve this is thinking about which contextual factors and contexts themselves have the greatest influence over the problem you are trying to address. In other words, what context needs to change first for things to start to get better for that child, family, peer group, etc. Working through this challenge is what we call 'Context Weighting'.

Consider a group of young people who have been found with knives at school. When assessing this peer group, a practitioner will need to consider whether this peer group would be carrying weapons regardless of their school environment or if there is something about this school environment that influences their decision to arm themselves.

Context Weighting scenario examples

Scenario 1

A practitioner may conclude, from the evidence gathered, that this peer group has normalised weapon carrying and use violence in a range of community and school contexts. Furthermore, two young men in this group seem to be influencing the behaviour of others, and it is this peer group dynamic that is influencing the group's behaviour. The parents of many young men in the group have been overwhelmed by the influence of their sons' peers and feel like they are losing control of their children despite their best efforts to be protective. In this scenario the peer group itself appears the 'weightiest' and therefore would be the primary focus of intervention.

Scenario 2

A practitioner may conclude, from the evidence gathered, that young people in this peer group feel unsafe when they are at school. They have been threatened by young people a few years older than them and have started to carry weapons for protection following a threat in the toilets. Furthermore, other young people (who are not part of this group) have also been found with knives. In this scenario violence has been normalised at

school and the threats of peer-abuse have not been addressed. The culture and practices within the school more generally, therefore, appears the 'weightiest' and therefore would be the primary focus of intervention.

Scenario 3

A practitioner may conclude, from the evidence gathered, that young people in this peer group feel unsafe on their journey to school: many have had mobiles phones stolen. Furthermore, one young person in the group has started to travel to school with a younger brother who he also wants to protect. When they can the young people in this group hide weapons under cars and in bushes near the school but they have recently been approached at the gates of the school when leaving and on the walk to the bus stop, and so they think they need weapons closer to hand. In this scenario young people perceive a significant risk to their safety in the community, despite feeling safe at school. These community experiences are informing their decisions to carry weapons. The culture and experiences of violence in the community, therefore, appears the 'weightiest' and therefore would be the primary focus of intervention.

Scenario 4

A practitioner may conclude, from the evidence gathered, that this peer group has normalised weapon carrying and use violence in a range of community and school contexts. Furthermore, two young men in this group seem to be influencing the behaviour of others, and these young men are living with chronic and escalating exposure to domestic abuse. One of these young men also has an older brother who is being criminally exploited and trafficking drugs out of the local authority in which they live. The family circumstances of these two young men has informed their attitudes to violence and relationships – and through their leadership positions amongst their peers it has also influenced their peers. This has been exacerbated by their exposure to criminal exploitation and their fear of violence in this regard. As a result, the weightiest contexts for this group are two associated families. An assessment of and intervention/support with these families would be priority for informing this peer group.

Conclusion

Multiple contexts featured in the scenarios above. It is likely that multiple contexts will require attention. However, context weighting helps professionals to prioritise their attention/interventions and articulate the direction of influence (and where power/vulnerability lies) when assessing extra-familial risks.

Context Weighting

When you start to incorporate contexts into assessments you then need to think about how to prioritise contextual interventions. One way to achieve this is thinking about the relationship between contexts and directions or weight of influence. In other words, what context needs to change first for things to start to get better for that child, family, peer group, etc. We call this 'Context Weighting'. There are five steps to this process:

- Step 1: Context Assessment. What are the strengths, risks and vulnerabilities identified for each context in question?
- Step 2: Association Strength. Which of these contexts is most strongly associated to the behaviours/incident in question?
- Step 3: Behaviour Context Interplay. Which contexts most inform the behaviour of the young people in question? Does this change by day/night time?
- Step 4: Analysis. Combine the findings of steps 1 to 3. What is the nature of the most influential contexts?

Step 5: Weight and Prioritise. Based on steps 1 to 4, which context is likely to enable/hinder the most change? Prioritise your planning