



Transition to Adulthood (October 2020)

For many young people, moving into young adulthood is an exciting experience, full of opportunities and new experiences and a time of experimentation; a time which, on the whole, is supported by their parents, carers, communities and universal services such as schools and colleges.

Early adulthood often brings with it vast changes, for instance a change of education, for example, going away to university, and living independently, starting employment, managing finances, meeting new people and making new friends.

The majority of young people move to adulthood successfully. However, for some young people, further support is required to prepare them for adulthood- a period of time often referred to as 'transition'.

This might include, for instance, moving from children to adult's services*, or from young people being looked after by the local authority to becoming an independent member of society. This might also include helping adolescents to effectively managing behaviours that might be perceived as harmful.

The period of transition from childhood to adulthood is among many transitions that individuals will make throughout their lives. However, this transition period has been suggested to be the one with the most far-reaching consequences (Heslop, et al. 2002)

Not all young people who received support from children's social care and health services will require the support of adult social care and health services. However, it is important to recognise that for those that do, there are robust and effective transition arrangements in place.

In 2018, The Children's Society's 'Crumbling Futures' report revealed the extent to which 16 and 17 year olds face multiple disadvantages across different areas of their lives. These multiple issues put their health, safety and long-term outcomes at risk. The research highlighted that many vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds need more support as they move into adulthood" (Page 4, Transitions to Adulthood, The Children's Society, 2019).

Young people who face a number of complex challenges and barriers in their lives as they approach adulthood and they may 'fall between the cracks' while transitioning from children's to adult services, when support often drops off upon young people reaching their 18th birthday (Children's Society, 2019).

'Falling between the cracks' might occur for a number of reasons, for instance, young people do not meet eligibility criteria for adult social care and/or adult safeguarding, young people losing contact with services because they are no longer flexible or responsive to their needs, or because transitional planning is ineffective. For example, the experience of transfer from CAHMS to adult mental health services has been explored and found to be 'poorly planned, poorly executed and poorly experienced' (Department of Health, 2014).

This can exacerbate harm in adulthood, potentially leading to poorer outcomes across the lifespan and heightening the need for costly interventions in later life. (Research in Practice, 2018).

Young people might experience issues and risks which might be interconnected, such as social isolation, criminal exploitation, substance misuse, emotional abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, domestic abuse, physical abuse, youth offending, homelessness, low skills, Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), poverty and poor mental health and self-harm.

These multiple disadvantages often make it harder for young people to make the transition into independent adulthood (Children's Society 2019, Research in Practice, 2018).

In order to help to address the numerous difficulties that many young people might face when they are approaching adulthood, it has been suggested that a cross government task force is created. This would provide a coordinated, holistic national response to transition planning for older teenagers focussing on the areas that require crucial support.

This would recognise this age group's specific needs to ensure that local services come together to provide the most appropriate information, advice and early support possible at the right time, thus promoting successful, improved and positive long term outcomes, as vulnerable adolescents become adults (Children's Society, 2019).

As part of this coordinated work, consideration should be given as to how childhood adversity and trauma have negative impacts and the part these play in impacting on transition to adulthood.

It has been suggested by some academics that childhood adversity and trauma can result in some adolescents being particularly at risk of negative adult outcomes (Dixon et al, 2016; Hanson and Holmes, 2014).

In order to help to reduce the burden in terms of human and financial costs of employing later interventions, the notion of 'transitional safeguarding' is emerging as a concept which might help in meeting the needs of adolescents and young adults (Rees et al.,2017).

However, it has been recognised that the fields of child safeguarding and adult safeguarding broadly operate separately, and this undoubtedly poses challenges, especially in an era of austerity (Research in Practice, 2018).

[Research in Practice \(2018\) has published a useful briefing](#) which provides resources and information, case studies and reflective questions which practitioners can use in their work around transitional safeguarding.

[Reflective questions have been published by Research in Practice](#), which multi-agency practitioners can ask themselves when working with vulnerable young adults. A number of these questions are reproduced, some in a slightly adapted form, below and include:

- What support could potentially have helped the young person earlier in their life - from professional services and from her personal networks?
- What exists locally for young people who have experienced adversity in their childhood? How effective are these initiatives/services and what would strengthen them?
- How can the concerns of professionals be communicated to the young person in a way that is fair, humane and recognises their previous experiences?
- What constraints, vulnerabilities and needs does the young person now have? How might these manifest as he enters adulthood?
- What would help the young person and their family as they try to plan a future for the young person?
- What support is available locally to young adults becoming involved in criminal behaviour? How effectively does this support respond to the person's underlying needs? How could this be strengthened?
- What is the young adult gaining from his/her behaviour and 'choices'? Is there a different way to meet these needs?
- What would help a young person make sense of their transition into adulthood?
- How can the young person feel in control of their life?
- What are the young person's needs right now, physically/practically and emotionally – and how might these change over the next five years?
- What structures and leadership behaviours need to be in place for practitioners to operate creatively and tenaciously when a young adult is at risk?
- How could your local community play a role in identifying and addressing harm to young adults? What is in place to support communities and how could it be strengthened?
- Where do you think there might be different opinions between professionals? How would these different perspectives play out in your local area?
- What is available locally to provide an early help offer for young adults?
- In cases of exploitation, consider what the service offer would have been if the young person was exploited again. What would the cost be to have another crisis response rather than a proactive preventative response?

* Subject to assessment criteria

References and useful links

[Department of Health \(2014\) Closing the Gap: Priorities for essential change in mental health. London: HM Government](#)

[Dixon J, Lee J, Ellison S and Hicks L \(2015\) Supporting adolescents on the edge of care. The role of short-term stays in residential care. An Evidence Scope. London: Action for Children and NSPCC.](#)

[Hanson E and Holmes D \(2014\) That Difficult Age: Developing a more effective response to risks in adolescence. Dartington:](#)

[Heslop P, Mallett R, Simons K and Ward L \(2002\) Bridging the Divide at Transition. What Happens for Young People with Learning Difficulties and their Families? Kidderminster: British Institute of Learning Disabilities.](#)

[Rees A, Luke N, Sebba J and McNeish D \(2017\) Adolescent service change and the edge of care. Children's Social Care Innovation Programme. Thematic Report 2. Oxford: The Rees Centre.](#)

[Research Into Practice \(2020\) Transitional safeguarding from adolescence to adulthood](#)

[Research in Practice \(August 2018\). Research in practice for Adults. Strategic Briefing. Mind the Gap: Transitional Safeguarding- adolescents to adulthood. Dartington.](#)

[Research in Practice \(August 2018\). Research in practice for Adults.: Transitional Safeguarding- adolescents to adulthood. Appendix 2: Case Studies. Dartington.](#)

[Research in Practice \(August 2018\). Research in practice for Adults. Mind the Gap: Transitional Safeguarding- adolescents to adulthood. Appendix 1. Figures 1-3 Dartington.](#)

[SCIE: Preparing for Adulthood:](#)

[The Children's Society \(2019\). Transitions to Adulthood: the case for a cross-departmental taskforce.](#)

[The Children's Society \(2018\) Crumbling Futures](#)

[Wigan Council: Transition from Child to Adulthood](#)