

# Portsmouth Youth Justice Service (PYJS)



## Introduction to Principles and Approaches Underpinning Youth Justice Practice

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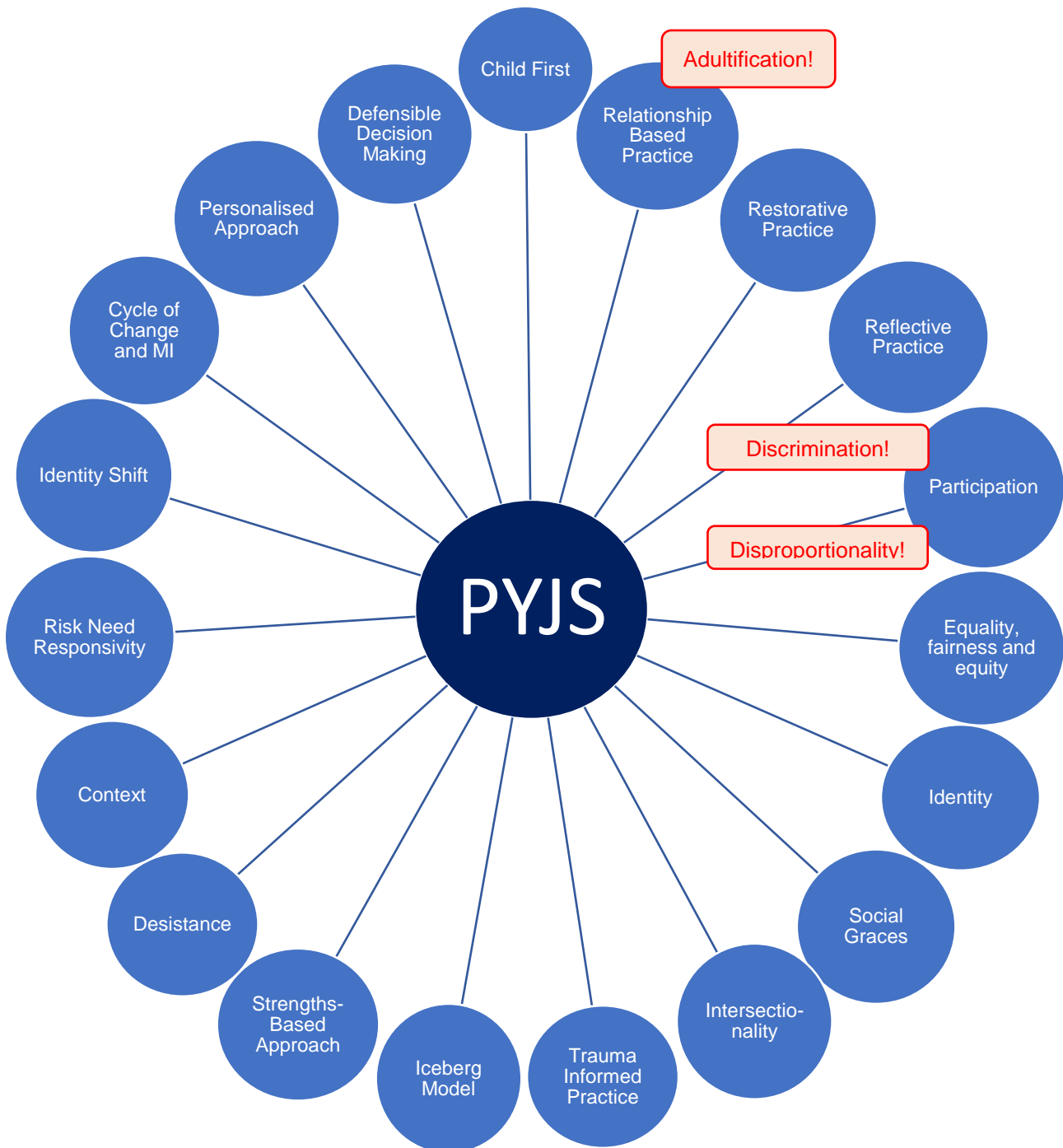
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## PYJS Underpinning Practice Principles

### 1. Introduction

This document set out the principles and approaches which underpin PYJS practice. It should be read in conjunction with PYJS Policy and Procedures on specific areas of practice, providing a basis for all approaches to our work.

The approaches and principles are:



## 2. Child First Principles:

The Youth Justice Board (YJB) have adopted what they refer to as a 'child first' approach based on four principles as follows:

- **Prioritise the best interests of children and recognising their particular needs, capacities, rights and potential.**

All work is child-focused, developmentally informed, acknowledges structural barriers and meets responsibilities towards children.

- **Promote children's individual strengths and capacities to develop their pro-social identity for sustainable desistance, leading to safer communities and fewer victims.**

All work is constructive and future-focused, built on supportive relationships that empower children to fulfil their potential and make positive contributions to society.

- **Encourage children's active participation, engagement and wider social inclusion.**

All work is a meaningful collaboration with children and their carers.

- **Promote a childhood removed from the justice system, using pre-emptive prevention, diversion and minimal intervention.**

All work minimises criminogenic stigma from contact with the system

In doing so, the YJB strive to support a youth justice system that sees children as children, treats them fairly and helps them to build on their strengths so they can make a constructive contribution to society to prevent offending, and create safer communities with fewer victims.

As such, youth justice practitioners and managers must ensure their work is delivered in keeping with those principles. This does not mean that we will discount, dismiss or negate risks assessed, but that we will keep the child at the centre of everything we do.

Where possible, we will prevent or divert children from entering the youth justice system. Where that is not successful, we work with them to minimise their contact with the youth justice system and prevent - as far as possible- them returning to it.

### **At all times, we will see and treat children as *children*.**

This will also help us guard against '**adultification**'- a form of bias where children are treated as being more mature than they actually are; expected to take on responsibilities which are not age/maturity-appropriate and/or seen to have intentions or insights through an 'adult' lens.

It is often projected on minority, typically black, children but is also applicable to any child who has offended due to the perceptions and judgements which may be given to their presenting behaviours. It can result in unfair judgements, unrealistic expectations and/or harsher penalties.

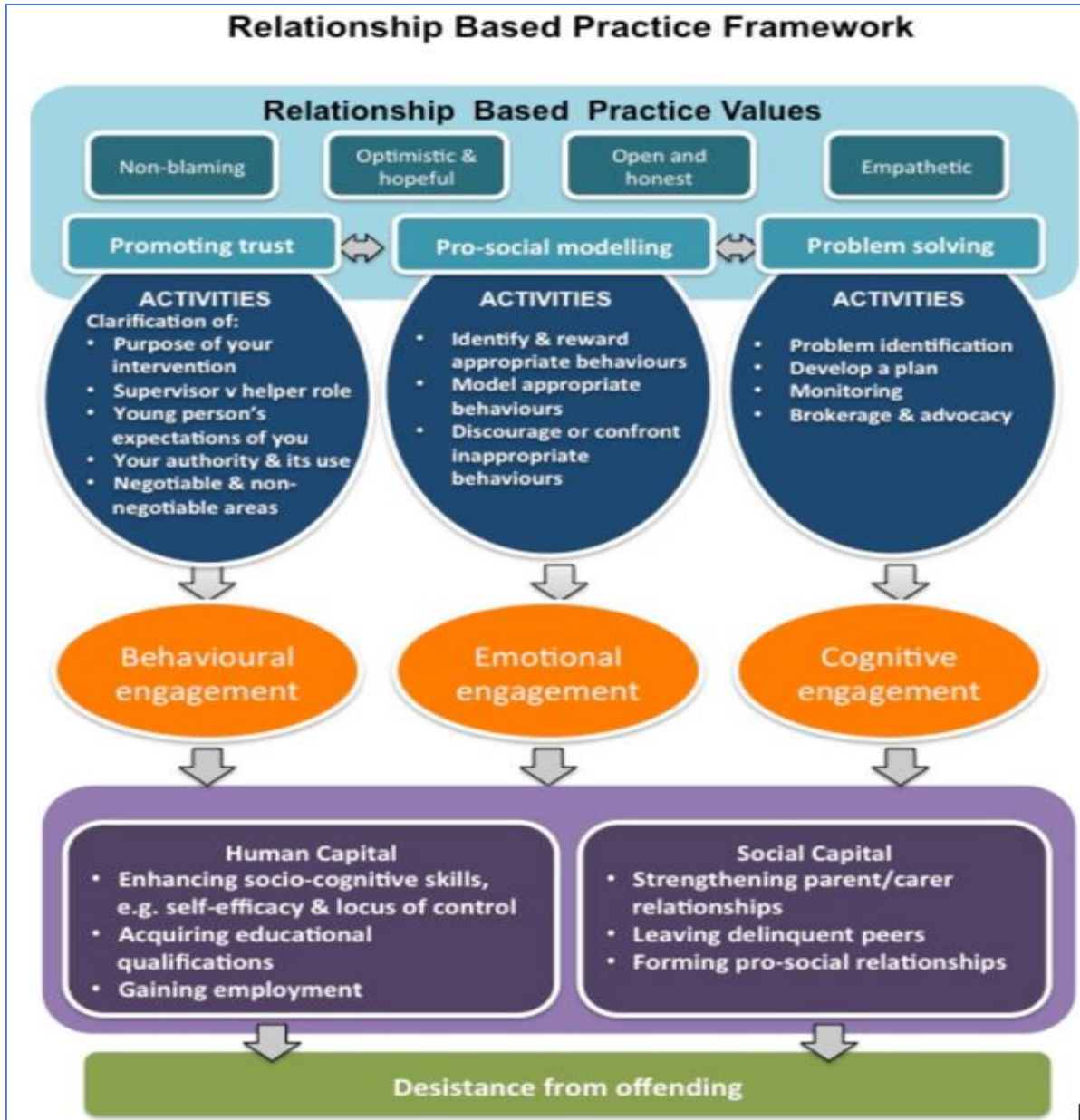
Youth Justice practitioners and managers must therefore ensure the 'child first' approach is adopted to guard against discrimination, disproportionality and adultification.

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### 3. Relationship Based Practice

Youth Justice practitioners should get to know the children they work with and build trusting, meaningful and mutually respectful working relationships with them to support existing strengths and required change.

The Youth Justice Board have developed a Relationship Based Practice Framework as follows:

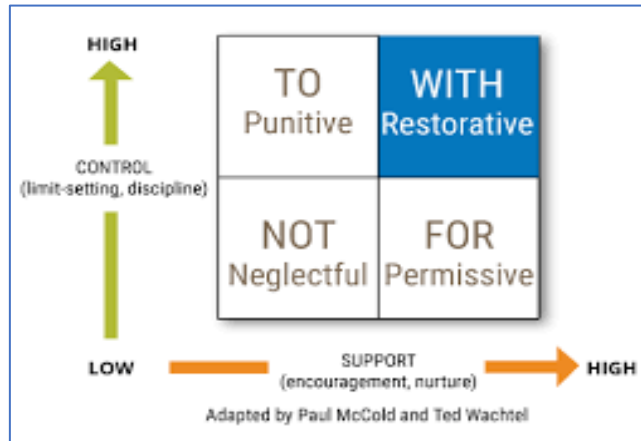


Youth Justice practitioners must therefore be non-blaming, optimistic, hopeful, open, honest and empathetic in their approach to developing positive relationships with children. They must support engagement when carrying out their activities to promote trust; demonstrate pro-social modelling through appropriate support and challenge; and encourage a problem-solving approach through effective identification, resolution, advocacy and monitoring.

#### 4. Restorative Practice

Youth Justice practitioners must also work with children and families in a way which encourages them to play an active part in the supervision process, resolve differences when they occur and be able to make decisions or changes for themselves in the future.

Restorative practice is a way of 'being' that builds relationships, strengthens communities, resolves conflict and can repair harm. It is applicable in all settings and is a key approach for all services working with children and families in Portsmouth. It is based on a model called the 'Social Discipline Window' which incorporates both challenge/control *and* support.



Wherever possible, Youth Justice practitioners should seek to provide a high level of support and challenge to work *with* rather than *not do*, *do to* or *for*.

**Challenge** can include: setting boundaries, defining expectations, explaining concerns, reflecting back observations or contradictions where these are noted.

**Support** can include: building self-belief, self-value and confidence; making time to listen, asking reflective questions, exploring worries to agree solutions.

In relation to the four quadrants of the model:

**Not Doing - Low Challenge/Low Support-** can be a form of professional neglect; it may lead a person to feel under-valued and is unlikely to build positive relationships or pro-social change.

**Doing For- Low Challenge/High Support-** can recognise risk or need but may lead to dependency, over-reliance or limit development of skills or knowledge.

**Doing To- High Challenge/Low Support-** can again recognise risk or need, but in a way which may seem punitive, unjust and/or create an imbalance of power.

**Doing With- High Challenge/High Support-** can promote inclusive and trusting working relationships

More information on restorative justice is available here: [Restorative practice - Portsmouth Safeguarding Children Board \(portsmouthscp.org.uk\)](https://portsmouthscp.org.uk)

Restorative *justice* is also undertaken in PYJS, and is a specific approach offered to repair the harm caused after an offence has been committed. More information on restorative justice is available in the PYJS Restorative Justice (Working with Victims) Policy and Procedures.

## 5. Reflective Practice

In its simplest form, Reflective Practice means thinking about what you have done, what you have learnt from it, and how that can inform what you do in the future.

It is more purposeful than simply 'thinking things through'. It can be worked through in stages as follows:

- What happened?
- How did you feel and think about it at the time?
- How do you feel and think about it now?
- What was good? What was not good?
- What does this tell you?
- With that understanding, what would you do in future?

This can also be outlined by Gibbs' cycle of reflection (1988)



Source: [Learning from mistakes: reflective learning in social work | The Knowledge Exchange Blog](#)

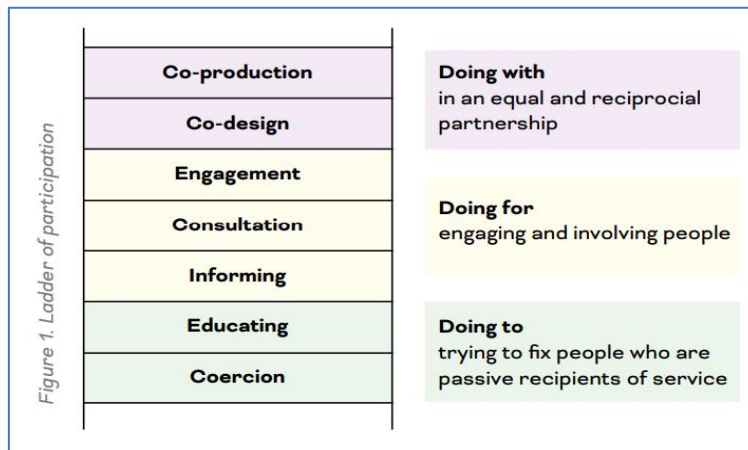
Reflective practice is often a helpful approach when things haven't gone to plan or worked out well. It supports the person or people involved to evaluate what happened, and learn from it to try to avoid it happening again. It can also be useful to think through situations that have gone well or had positive outcomes, to ensure we learn from those too.

Reflective practice can take place in many forums- ad hoc conversations, peer discussion, formal supervision- and is a vital tool to support continuing professional (and service) development.

## 6. Participation

Through 'child-first' relational and restorative practice, children's participation can be supported to ensure they are engaged fully and meaningfully in youth justice interventions. Where engagement is challenging, reflective practice can be used to explore that. Where engagement is achieved, the same can apply.

One of the most well-known models of participation for children is developed from Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation later adapted by Hart (1992). The ladder shows increasingly inclusive approaches, ranging from coercion on the lowest rung of the ladder, to co-design and co-production at the top- where the child initiates decisions and shares decisions with adults:



SOURCE (above and below) : [4. co-creation and participation full report.pdf \(yiresourcehub.uk\)](#)

This builds on the social discipline window outlined in Section 4 by mapping approaches from coercion to co-production against doing to, for or with.

Definitions of levels of participation are also outlined as follows

Term:	Definition:
Co-production	Children and practitioners work together from the beginning to plan and deliver the services that affect them.
Co-creation	Children are only involved at certain stages of the planning and delivery of the services that affect them.
Engagement	Children are given opportunities to express their views and might be able to influence some decisions about the services that affect them.
Consultation	Children are asked to give their opinion e.g. through surveys but do not have the opportunity to influence decisions about the services that affect them.
Informing	Children are simply told about the decision and its effect on the services that affect them.

As a minimum, youth justice practitioners should seek to reach a level of *engagement* in their interactions with children under supervision and their families. Wherever possible though, *co-creation* and *co-production* should be sought.



## 7. Equality, Fairness and Equity

Participation should be sought through, and supportive by, equality and fairness.

**Discrimination** can occur when this does not take place and can be defined as unjust or prejudicial treatment of people on the grounds of certain characteristics.

The Equality Act 2010 identifies a number of 'protected characteristics' (aspects of a person's identity that makes them who they are) to provide legal protection from discrimination.



SOURCE: **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**

Youth Justice practitioners should therefore ensure they do not discriminate against (ie offer a lesser service to) children or their families due to any of the above protected characteristics as it may be unlawful.

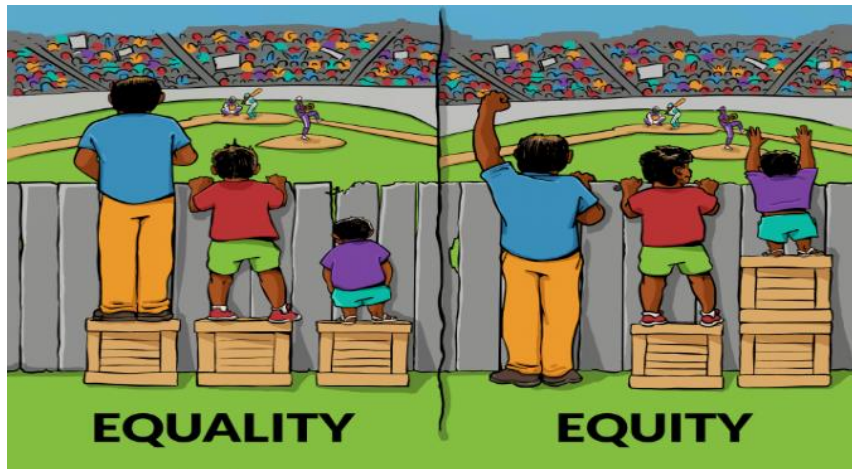
However, whilst the Equalities Act identifies protected characteristics enshrined in law, Youth Justice practitioners must also take into account factors such as maturity, resilience, communication needs and transitions (home, school, age, relationships) to avoid other forms of discrimination or bias such as adultification (as outlined in Section 2).

Linked to this, Youth Justice practitioners also need to guard against **disproportionality** which is when the number of people with a particular characteristic accessing a service is over or under the number of people with that particular characteristic in the general population.

In the Youth Justice system, evidence suggests the following groups are among those who may be over-represented in the youth justice system:

- Children of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic heritage- See: [A thematic inspection of the experiences of black and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](#)
- Children who are Looked After- See: [Experiences and pathways of children in care in the youth justice system \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](#)
- Children who have speech, language and communications needs- See [A joint inspection of education, training and employment services in youth offending teams in England and Wales \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](#)

Youth justice practitioners should therefore also understand the structural and systemic barriers experienced by children to ensure we do not contribute to or compound them in our day to day work. Treating people *fairly* or *equally* might not give everyone the same chances:



Source: [Illustrating Equality VS Equity - Interaction Institute for Social Change](#) : [Interaction Institute for Social Change](#)

Therefore, while equality and fairness are important, they may not be enough to promote effective, meaningful and equitable participation.

Youth justice practitioners will therefore need to offer different approaches or opportunities to each child and family they are working with, to ensure all have an *equitable* chance of accessing youth justice interventions.

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## 8. Identity

Protected characteristics are one way in which identity can be defined. However, identity is much broader than this and is a key factor in relational and restorative practice as well as participation.

*"Identity can mean different things to different people. It might be about who you hang out with, what music you listen to, where you live or what ethnicity you are. Simply put – your identity is 'who you are'."*

[Identity | The Children's Society \(childrenssociety.org.uk\)](https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk)

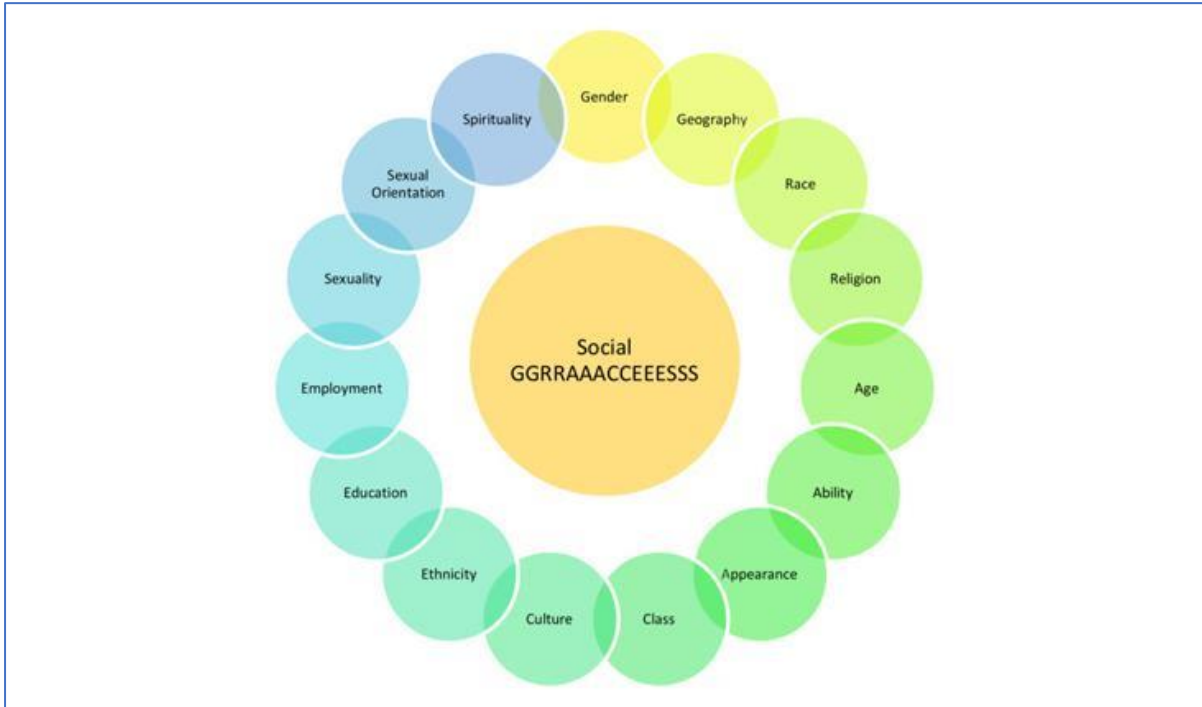
Getting to know the child, their likes and dislikes, what they are interested in or good at and how or where they spend their time can support effective relationship building and positive self-worth. This understanding should be informed by, but not limited to, the AssetPlus self-assessment and must incorporate aspects of the child's life that are not linked to their offence(s).

Youth justice practitioners will need to sensitively explore a child's identity to understand their views and experiences and how these may impact on their thinking, attitudes and behaviours to support AssetPlus assessment, desistance and compliance. This will also link to concepts and models outlined later in this document.

## 9. Social Graces (GRRRAACCEESSS)

'Social Graces' is a term referring to aspects of social and personal identity that have an effect on an individual's privilege and power.

Social Graces can be defined as:



SOURCE: [basw.co.uk](http://basw.co.uk)

They are important to recognise as they can impact on engagement and contribute to practitioner bias.

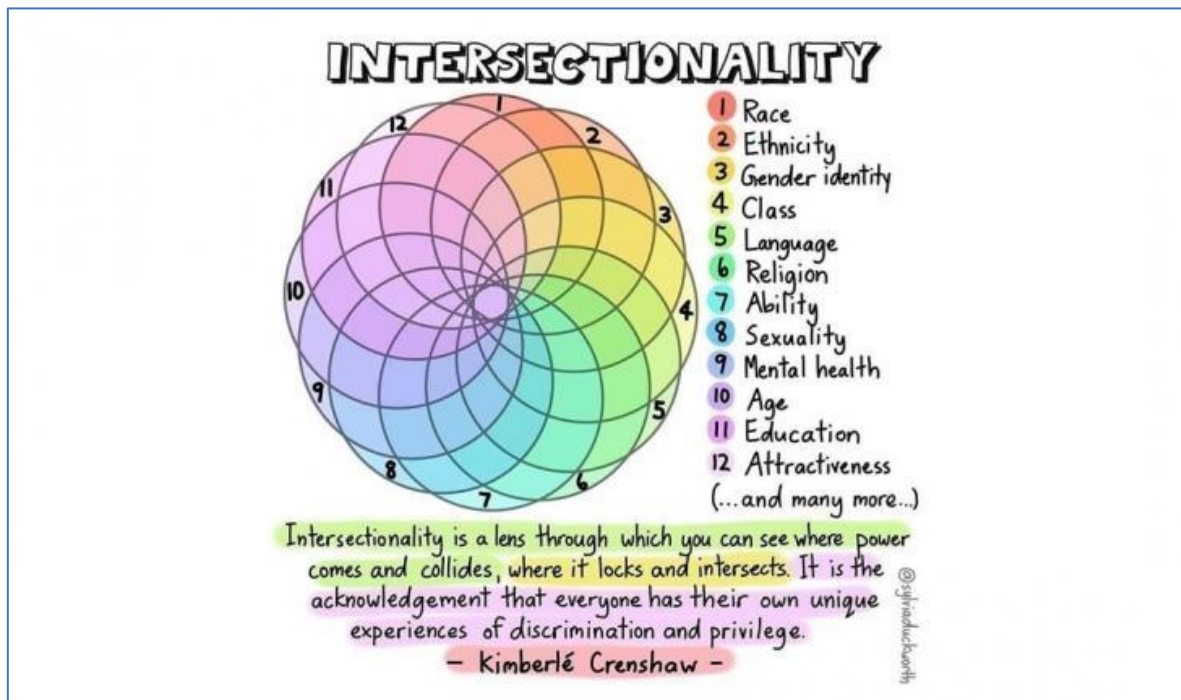
When working with children and their families, Youth Justice practitioners must consider how social graces inform or influence their own views, and those of the children and families they are working with. to guard against negative impact.

In order to do this, youth justice practitioners will need to explore these aspects with children and their families, asking them questions around their social and personal identities and reflecting on how these might shape their views of the world. Similarly, perceptions of the worker(s) should also be explored to identify any perceived power imbalances or assumptions being made.

Recognising and minimising power imbalance is crucial to relationship building and engagement. Done well, it can also support compliance and (where necessary) facilitate enforcement. By outlining expectations and the potential consequences of not meeting them from the outset, clear boundaries will be set. Then, if warning processes have to be enacted, this can be understood in the context of compliance and 'rules' rather than discriminatory or disproportionate decision making. Conversely, discretion may be offered (with management oversight) when it is appropriate and can take other factors or characteristics into account to create an equitable balance. Through active participation, privilege and power can be shared.

## 10. Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a way of understanding how aspects of a person's social and personal identity can overlap and/or combine to further shape their views of the world and other people in it.



[SWU Blog: Intersectionality is a valuable tool for Social Work Practice | www.basw.co.uk](http://www.basw.co.uk)

For example, gender identity may influence the way in which an individual sees or is seen in the world. However, intersected with their religion or ethnicity, gender identity may be experienced differently by different people according to their religious outlook or cultural norms. This can mean that some people have more positive experiences, but others less so.

Intersectionality therefore identifies multiple factors which can create advantage and disadvantage; linking to privilege, power and participation in relationships.

Whilst some of those factors may be protected in law (e.g. protected characteristics) others may be broader or more personalised.

All need to be considered.

When completing assessments, agreeing plans and delivering or reviewing interventions, Youth Justice practitioners should consider how identity factors (real or perceived) may intersect to create unfair or inequitable advantage or disadvantage in the way they are working. This might be in relation to structural and systemic barriers (access to services) or individual experience (power or privilege within relationships).

By understanding identity not just in terms of who we are, but what that means and how it shapes us, we can develop more meaningful and respectful relationships, produce more in-depth assessments, and establish more effective plans.

## 11. Trauma Informed Practice

Identity (and behaviour) can be shaped by life experience as well as characteristics, interests and attitudes.

Everyone is likely to face challenging situations in their life. However, some children grow up in environments or have experiences which are traumatic and may have long-lasting impacts on their learning, development, health and behaviour.

Those events and experiences can be described as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and include:



Source: [ym-addressing-adversity-book-web-2.pdf \(youngminds.org.uk\)](https://www.youngminds.org.uk/youth-justice/youth-justice-addressing-adversity-book-web-2.pdf)

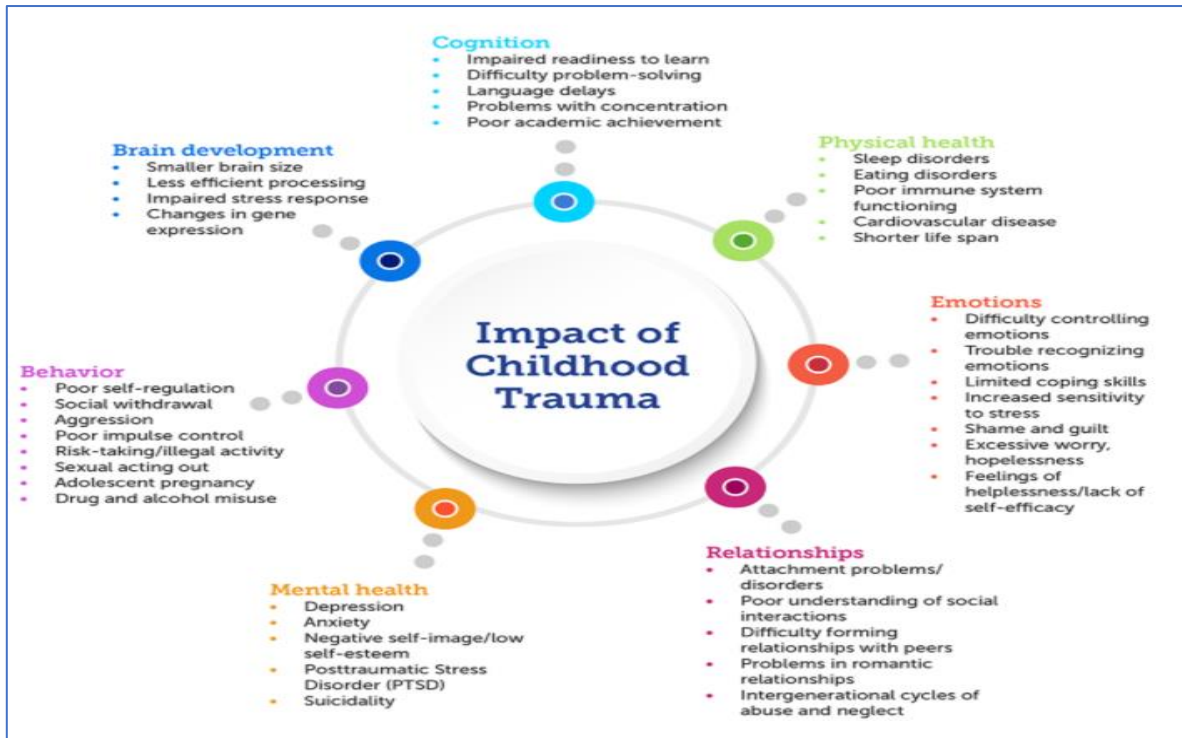
An overview of ACEs can also be found here: [Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\) - YouTube](#) (Click on link to watch a short film)

Children known to the Youth Justice system are likely to have experienced one or more ACEs in their lifetime which can impact their future life chances and outcomes.

It is therefore important that Youth Justice Services acknowledge this and adopt a trauma-informed approach.

On an individual basis, it is also vital that we identify experiences of trauma to provide context for the child's offences and inform assessments of risks and needs; it is also relevant to effective intervention planning and understanding of ability and readiness to engage.

The impact of ACEs and/or childhood trauma can be profound and long lasting. The below provides an overview of potential impact:



Source: [How to Implement Trauma-informed Care to Build Resilience to Childhood Trauma - Child Trends](#)

To reduce the impact of trauma, and support recovery from it, our approaches should be in line with principles of trauma informed care:



SOURCE: [Peer Support: Principles of Trauma Informed Care – TheSeedSowerz](#)

Applying those principles to delivery of youth justice services, practitioners should promote:

<b>Safety</b>	Offering contact in way which promotes physical and emotional safety (space, place, people).
<b>Trust</b>	Establishing open and honest expectations; doing what you say will do, when you say will do it. (Linked to Relationship Based Practice)
<b>Choice</b>	Offering choices where ever possible and exploring pros and cons. (Linked to Restorative Practice)
<b>Empowerment</b>	Being strengths-based (see next section). Adopting a positive, forward looking focus. (Linked to both Relationship Based and Restorative Practice)
<b>Collaboration</b>	Using all opportunities to share planning and decision making. (Linked to Participation)
<b>Respect</b>	Giving recognition, minimising power imbalance, and treating others how you would like them to treat you. (Linked to Identity, Social GRACES and Intersectionality)

## 12. Iceberg Model

Building on an understanding of trauma, Youth Justice practitioners should seek to understand behaviour in the context of what is 'underneath' it. Though this can be linked to identity and trauma, it could also be linked to other internal and external factors which may or may not be known. What we see or hear from children can be described as the 'tip of iceberg':



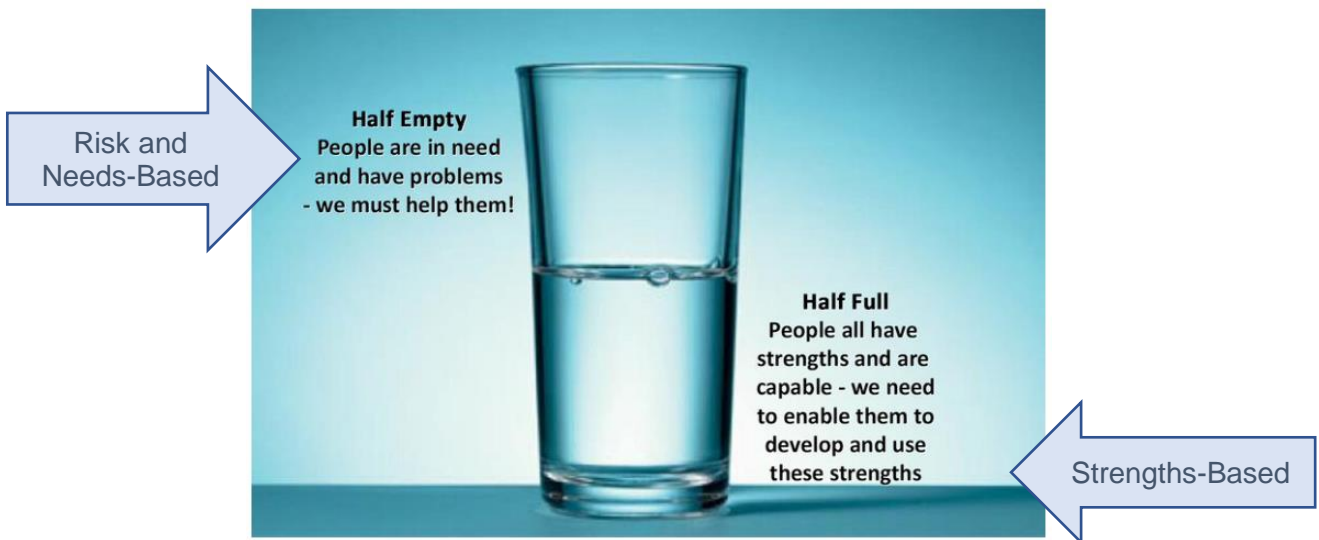
SOURCE: [Juliet Young on Twitter: "An adaption of another iceberg drawing. This one reminding us to remain curious about behaviour that challenges us... https://t.co/9HuJHFJOcx" / Twitter](https://t.co/9HuJHFJOcx)

Youth justice practitioners should work to understand what is 'underneath the iceberg' not just in terms of offending (to support assessment of risk and need) but also in relation to engagement and enforcement (to support effective delivery).

This does not mean that risks should not be managed or enforcement (when required) should not take place. It simply seeks to place assessment, planning, and decision making in a wider contextual knowledge of the child, and the drivers for their behaviours so that we can 'look past' the behaviours in order to 'see' the child.

### 13. Strengths Based Approaches and the Good Lives Model

In keeping with the principles of trauma-informed care, taking a 'strengths-based' (rather than a 'risk and needs-based') approach, can help to empower individuals- and support their participation- by focussing on their assets and capabilities, rather than their problems or deficits. This can also support positive identity, skills and interests and emotions 'underneath the iceberg' and/or how an individual can cope with challenges in the future.



Source: [Strength-Based Approaches in Social Crofting — Darach Social Croft \(darachcroft.com\)](https://www.darachcroft.com)

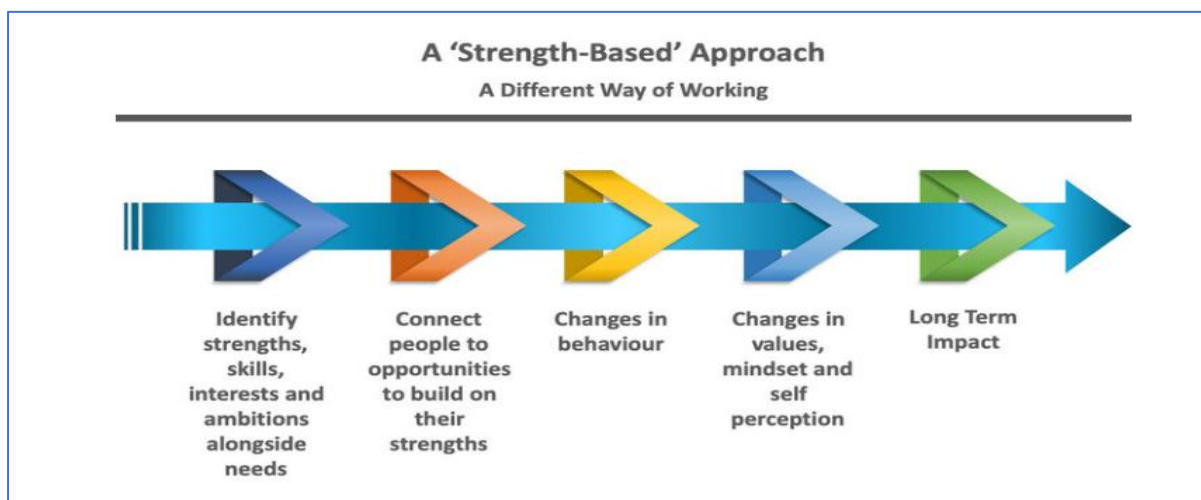
**Under a risk and needs-based approach**, assessment identifies what is 'wrong' and resulting plans seek to put this 'right'. The presenting issue may be addressed or resolved, but the underlying drivers or motivations may still exist. As such, longer term positive outcomes can be harder to sustain, or new problems arise as a result of the underlying cause.

**Under a strengths-based approach**, assessment identifies what is 'wrong' as well as what is going well, and resulting plans build on the strengths of the individual to tackle (or draw them away) from the problem areas. They build on relational and restorative approaches to support changes in relationships, situations and behaviours and in doing so seek to support more sustainable and long-term change through a shift in thinking, values and perception.

Therefore, youth justice interventions are more likely to be effective if they adopt a strengths-based approach as this more likely to support longer-term sustainable change. They will need to be tailored to the strengths and achievements of each individual child, in each individual plan and support them to develop the assets and connections they each need to thrive.



In summary:



Source: [Strength-Based Approaches in Social Crofting — Darach Social Croft \(darachcroft.com\)](https://darachcroft.com)

Whilst risk and need must be assessed within Youth Justice work, the AssetPlus framework deliberately identifies factors for and against *desistance* (rather than *offending*) to support a strengths-based approach.

It also links to the Good Lives Model, which identifies a range of 'primary human goods' which individuals may be seeking to achieve through their behaviour:

**Life** - including healthy living and functioning

**Knowledge** - how well informed someone feels about things that are important to them

**Excellence in play** - hobbies and recreational pursuits

**Excellence in work** - including mastery experiences

**Excellence in agency** - autonomy, power and self-directedness

**Inner peace** - freedom from emotional turmoil and stress

**Relatedness** - including intimate, romantic and familial relationships

**Community** - connection to wider social groups

**Spirituality** - in the broad sense of finding meaning and purpose in life

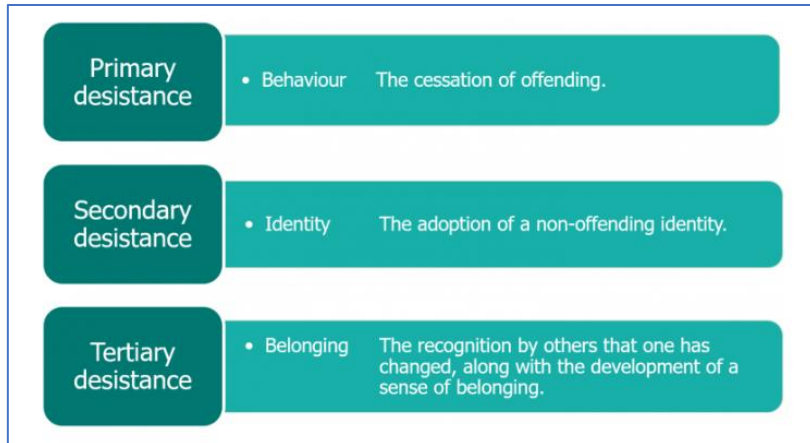
**Pleasure** - feeling good in the here and now

**Creativity** - expressing oneself through alternative forms

By understanding what 'goods' are achieved through offending (or other harmful behaviour), Youth Justice practitioners can explore and support the child to identify alternative ways of them being met within a strength-based approach (doing things well, rather than not doing things 'wrong'). This in turn can support development of 'desistance' as outlined in the next section.

## 14. Desistance

Desistance from offending is an ongoing and often lengthy process. It is not usually quick or easy and might involve 'slips' or 'problems along the way'. Desistance has also been described as having [three stages](#):



Youth justice practitioners must therefore understand and adopt desistance theory in their work, working towards tertiary desistance as the ultimate goal.

For each child we work with, there will be [factors for desistance](#)- factors that can prevent or help them avoid offending- and [factors against desistance](#)- factors that will make it more difficult or could pull them in. These are assessed in AssetPlus (the assessment tool used by YOTs and validated by the Youth Justice Board) and should form the basis of our intervention plans.

There is also a clear overlap between the strengths-based approach, and what HMIP have identify the key principles for supporting desistance as follows:



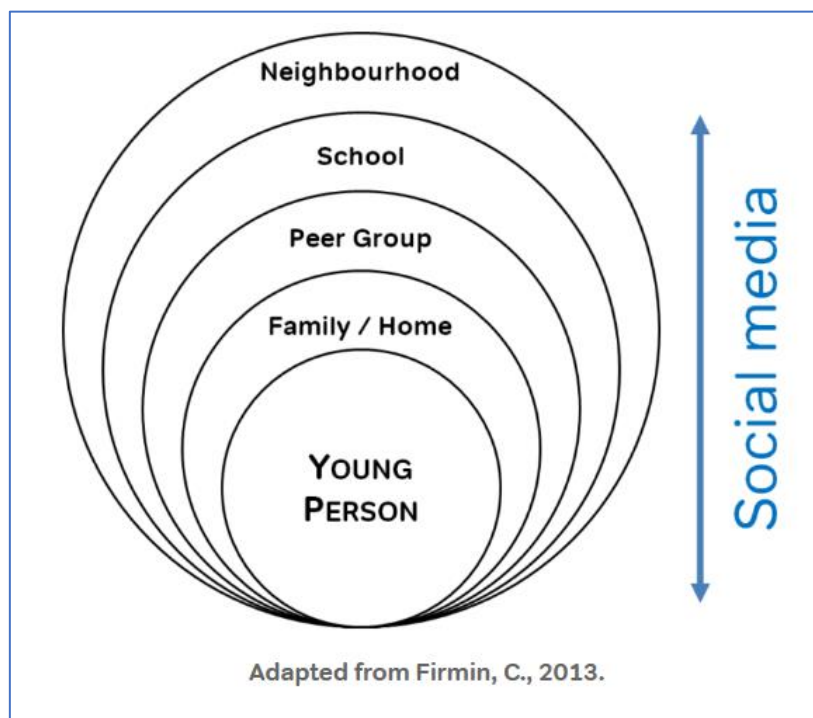
SOURCE: [Desistance – general practice principles \(justiceinspectors.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk)

## 15. Contextual Assessment and Planning

Approaches and models outlined so far focus on how we should work with individuals to build positive relationships and support sustainable change.

However, contextual theories identify that no young person can be seen in isolation from the environment around them, as their relationships and experiences with other people, and in other settings, will shape and influence their thoughts, feelings and behaviour.

In order to be effective then, Youth Justice practitioners need to understand the contexts in which a child is living or spending time and how these might impact on their risks and opportunities in order to fully understand their individual circumstances and support them to achieve desistance. Those contexts can include:



**SOURCE:** Contextual Safeguarding – Safeguarding Network

In one setting, a child may be able to draw on their own strengths, and the relationships they have with others, to successfully desist from offending (and/or be safer from harm). In another, those strengths and relationships may be weakened- or absent- and/or the influences so powerful, that desistance (and sometimes safety) is compromised.

Whilst this is considered more in relation to Contextual Safeguarding, it should also apply to assessment and planning for desistance. Youth Justice workers should identify through their assessments with children, where they spend their time, who with, how often and why in order to understand the contextual factors for and against desistance as well as those specific to the child which may occur in any setting. Different responses or interventions may be needed in different contexts, taking into account the different people present who may harm or help.

## 16. Risk, Need and Responsivity (RNR)

The primary aim of the youth justice system is to prevent (or divert or reduce) youth offending. This must therefore be the primary purpose of the work done by Youth Justice practitioners; and desistance the outcome we strive to achieve.

The concepts outlined so far will support assessment and relationship building to support desistance. However, they will not necessarily produce the results we need to achieve on their own. We also need to adopt concepts and models which will help us achieve our primary purpose more specifically, in addition to the broader approaches already described which will support the way we work.

The Risk, Need and Responsivity (RNR) Model has been linked to reductions in reoffending, particularly with adults in community settings, and can be summarised as follows:

<b>Risk</b>	Matching interventions to levels of risk (the higher the risk, the more intensive the intervention should be)
<b>Need</b>	Ensuring interventions focus on the factors which will most effectively support desistance
<b>Responsivity</b>	Tailoring those interventions to the individual receiving them (and the context they are operating in).

**PYJS Risk Assessment and Management Policy and Procedures** outline our use of the AssetPlus model (by the Youth Justice Board) to assess levels of risk. They also outline levels of contact required which are mapped to the risk levels assessed and are therefore in keeping with the '**Risk**' aspect of RNR. For the '**Need**' principle to be applied, Youth Justice practitioners must ensure resulting intervention plans focus in on factors for and against desistance identified through AssetPlus.

- Some of those factors may be external to the child- access to services, care, relationships, education etc, or risks posed by exploitation for example. Contextual approaches should therefore be taken to support the child to achieve desistance and be safe from harm. This may require 'external controls' or 'disruption' options until factors for desistance can be sufficiently strengthened.
- Other factors may be internal- linked to attitudes, behaviours and beliefs. Though these can be shaped by the child's environment, which must always be considered, they may require more direct intervention with the child to explore and support a shift in their thinking and behaviour. Ideally, this will be supported by a positive (or similarly shifting) environment. Where this is not the case, resilience and coping strategies may be required instead or at first, until the environment can be changed.

In developing those plans with the individual child, and taking account of their wider context, Youth Justice Practitioners will also be working towards the '**Responsivity**' principle in tailoring interventions to the individual child receiving them. However, this also needs to include effective sequencing of interventions (prioritising what will have the biggest impact on desistance) and supporting compliance as outlined in the **PYJS Engagement, Enabling Compliance and Enforcement Policy and Procedures**.

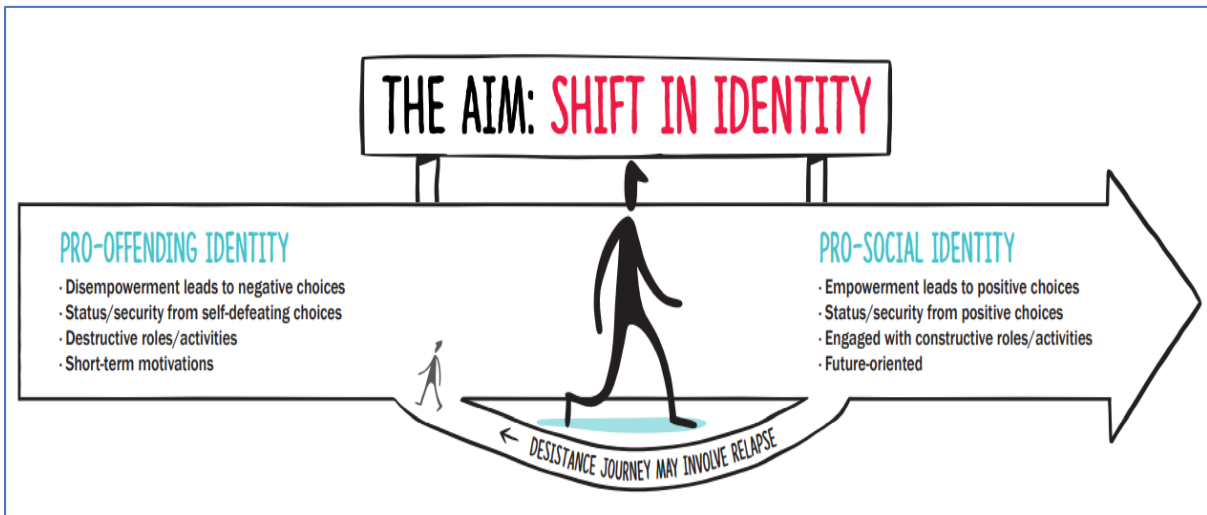
## 17. Identity Shift

In relation to intervention planning, the RNR model suggests there are 8 central risk/need factors which may impact on desistance. These are: criminal history, pro-criminal attitudes, pro-criminal associates, anti-social personality patterns, family relationships, school or work, substance misuse, leisure/recreation. Whilst this is predominantly from research with adults, similar factors are commonly identified for children.

All but the first of those factors are 'amenable to change'. Offending behaviour can change but criminal history cannot be altered. Other factors are more flexible and fluid. Note that they also relate to the contexts identified within Contextual frameworks.

Youth Justice interventions should therefore seek to maintain or strengthen factors *for* desistance and seek to remove or reduce those *against* to support positive outcomes.

The 'identity shift' model is a useful framework for considering how a young person's identity, experiences, interactions and environment might link with their offending behaviour. This does not place all of the responsibility on the child but seeks to support them in developing a more pro-social identity to live a life less likely to involve crime.



Not all children known to youth justice services will have a 'pro-offending' identity. Not all of those who do will understand or recognise it as such.

However, where identity, experience, thoughts, feelings, behaviours and context are contributing to offending (factors against desistance) Youth Justice practitioners can encourage a change or 'shift' towards more 'pro-social' outlooks and environments as part of their work with the child (and their family).

More information about 'identity shift' is outlined in [PYJS Custody and Resettlement Policy and Procedures](#) and here: [Now-all-I-care-about-is-my-future-Supporting-the-shift-a-summary.pdf \(beyondyouthcustody.net\)](#)

The concepts outlined throughout this document can support (or reinforce) a pro-social identity when applied effectively. However, other models and approaches can also support this where insight or motivation is lacking, or more focussed support is required.

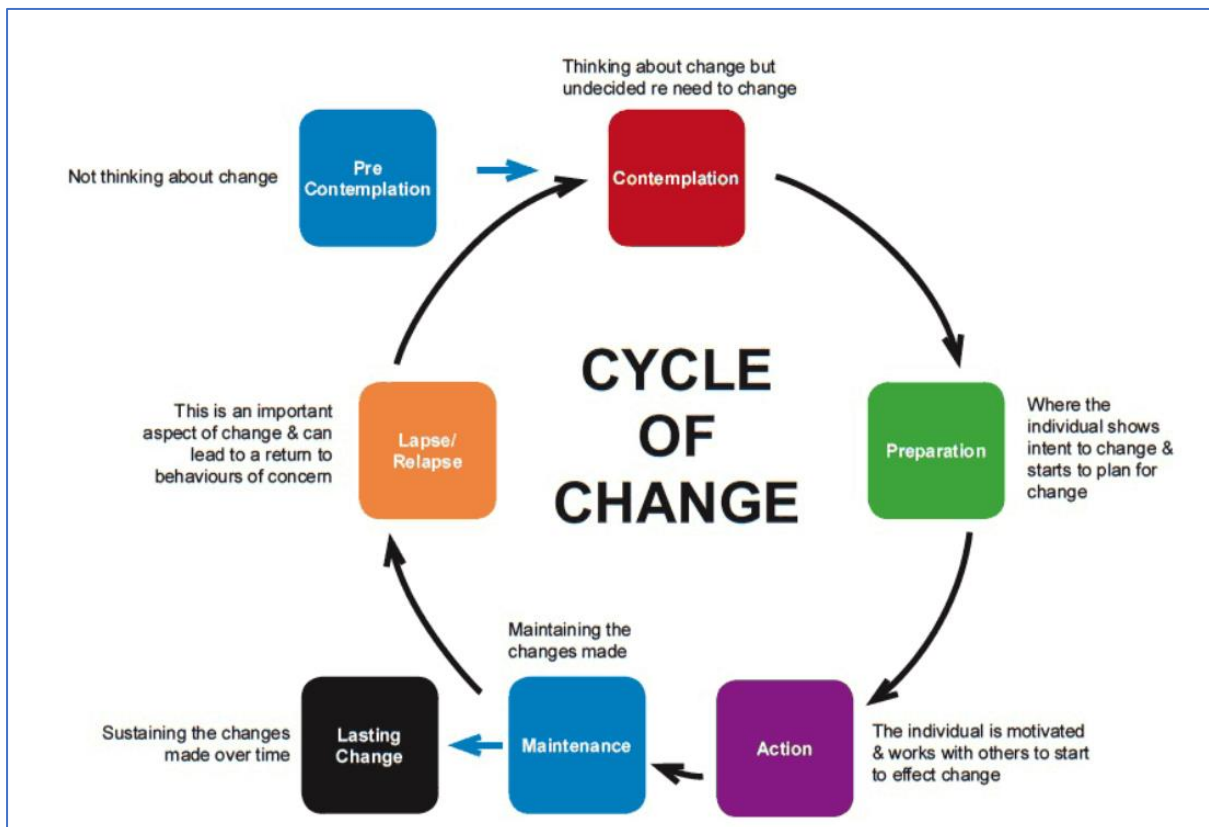
## 18. Cycle of Change

The Cycle of Change model can be applied to the process when 'pro-offending' identity is assessed and/or suggests behaviour change is needed to reach pro-social outcomes- i.e. achieve desistance.

It was developed by Prochaska and DeClemente and proposes two key principles:

- 1) There are several stages someone must go through before they successfully action and maintain long-lasting change.
- 2) Change is cyclical and can involve several attempts before 'success' is achieved.

There are 6 stages of change: Pre-contemplation, Contemplation, Preparation, Action, Maintenance or Lapse/Relapse. These are linked to readiness and motivation to change.



SOURCE: [THE CYCLE OF CHANGE - National Risk Framework to Support the Assessment of Children and Young People - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/documents/2016/06/16062016_The_Cycle_of_Change.pdf)

Knowing what stage someone is at on the Cycle of Change can help inform what type of interventions should be delivered and how to approach them.

- **In pre-contemplation**, the child will not be thinking about change or see it as necessary. They might have some awareness of the problems this can cause to them or others, but the reasons for carrying on 'as is' will far outweigh the reasons not to OR they simply won't have thought about it at all. At this stage, Youth Justice practitioners should seek to help the child recognise the problem areas (factors against desistance), what the gains and losses are and what positive impact change might bring. Care should be taken when the concerns relate to context though, as increasing awareness of the risks may reduce safety and wellbeing unless this is carefully managed (e.g. through Safety Planning).

- **In Contemplation**, the child will be thinking about making a change but not sure whether they can or want to. This might be because they are unsure of the need, worried they may fail, or fearful of the consequences. At this stage, Youth Justice practitioners should support the child to explore what the gains and losses are, and risks and benefits, in short and long-term timeframes to support a move to the next stage.

**In Preparation**, the child will be making plans for change. If not supported in a timely way with this, the child might fall quickly back to contemplation or pre-contemplation so should be encouraged to take the next step. This can include agreeing (not telling!) what they are going to do, how/when they are going to do it and who can help them both at the time, and if they start to struggle.

This should also include recognition that there may be relapses along the way, exploring what to do when that happens to avoid a full relapse and get them back on the Cycle as quickly as possible. A careful balance needs to be struck in making it okay to make mistakes without suggesting it is inevitable that things will go wrong.

Safety planning, coping skills or support networks may need to be enhanced; contact levels could be increased, and contingency planning will also need to be considered. This should be done to give the child a sense of confidence that change can be achieved and support their resilience (under a strengths-based approach)- at all times ensure they are appropriately safeguarded.

- **In Action**, the child will have committed to change and be actively experiencing it. During this time, the child will have to 'unlearn' previous responses and develop new skills and/or patterns of behaviours. Those around them may struggle to adapt or accept this. Risks might reduce but could lead to over-confidence or regression. Conversely, they risk might increase and plans need to be in place to address that.

Youth Justice practitioners should support change by offering praise when attempts or achievements are observed and celebrating positive impact when it takes place. They may also need to undertake skills-based interventions with the child to develop those skills or solutions where they are unable to do so themselves. Additionally, positive reinforcement should be made at every opportunity- linking them back to reasons why the change was pursued in the first place, and supporting the motivation to do carry on.

- **Maintenance** is achieved when the 'old' behaviours or responses are replaced with 'new' ones in a way which doesn't feel 'new' at all but is simply a 'new normal'. Youth Justice practitioners should support and reinforce this through reflection on progress and the benefits achieved but also help the child to re-assess situations where they may be vulnerable to lapse so that they can be avoided, minimised or managed.
- **Lapse** might happen if the child had developed new behaviours or responses but could not maintain them. The situation and drivers need to be understood quickly to avoid a full relapse. Youth Justice practitioners should offer reassurance that this is often a normal part of change, reframe the failure of regression as success due to reflection, and work with the child to get them back on track. This may include returning to the factors identified during contemplation (if linked to motivation), to preparation (if situations were not foreseen, or solutions did not work), to action (if new skills or responses are needed) or maintenance (if awareness and commitment was momentarily absent). Those stages can often be worked through quickly if the child is still committed to the change process.
- **Relapse** happens when the change is not maintained, previous behaviours or responses are returned to and they are seen as more preferable or manageable than the change that was attempted. It is likely that if this stage is reached, the full cycle will need to be repeated. This should not be seen as failure but framed as part of the change process.

While the stages of Change can inform the type of responses required as each stage, **Motivational Interviewing (MI)** techniques can support the child moving from one stage to the next. MI was developed by Miller and Rollnick in the 1980s, but is still regarded as an effective approach to support behaviour change. Both models were originally established in a health setting (substance misuse and or mental health) but can be applied to any type of change required, including the shift from offending to pro-social identities and behaviours. Training is available to support Youth Justice practitioners in delivering MI techniques.

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### 19. Personalised Approach:

This extract from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation suggest how you can start to bring this all together under what they call a "personalised approach".



From this, Youth Justice practitioners will need to consider the following for each individual child they are working with:

- **What** needs to be done
- **Why** do we need to do it
- **Where** should it take place
- **When** is it going to happen (day, time but also sequencing)
- **How** should it be done (telephone, online, face to face- also, consider learning style)
- **How often and how long for**
- **Who** is going to do it (and who else can help)
- **What does success look like?**

This will require consideration not just of the child and their context, but also victim safety and public protection, bringing together all of the principles and approaches outlined, and drawing on the skills of the service as a whole.

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## **20. Defensible Decision Making**

Youth Justice practitioners should strive to adopt all of the principles and approaches outlined within this document to build effective relationships and support desistance. They must also ensure they meet their responsibilities for keeping children, their victims, and the wider public safe. To do so, their actions and decision making must strike the necessary balance between supporting a child to comply with their youth justice disposal, protecting the public and offering appropriate reassurance to our partners.

Policies and procedures are available to support us in this work as follow:

- Further information on how we assess and manage risk is outlined in the PYJS Risk Assessment and Management Policy and Procedures.
- Further information outlining our work with victims is outlined in the PYJS Restorative Justice (Working with Victims) Policy and Procedures.
- Further information on this is set out in PYJS Engagement, Enabling Compliance and Enforcement Policy and Procedures.

However, we also need accept that our services will be delivered, and associated decisions made, in conditions of uncertainty, and that harm can never be totally prevented under an absolute guarantee. Therefore, any decisions made in relation to our work need to weigh up their impact and outcomes through a process of defensible decision making to ensure all reasonable steps are taken to manage and reduce risk.

A defensible decision is based on:

- a thorough process of information-gathering and evaluation being undertaken from a range of sources
- reliable assessment methods being applied
- available research and effective practice approaches being taken into account
- organisational procedures in place and adhered to

Additionally, defensible decision making will be able to demonstrate:

- clear links between evidence available and conclusion drawn within the case record
- clear rationale for decisions made and actions taken, based on the above, and accurately recorded
- all reasonable steps have been taken

Youth justice practitioners and managers therefore need to ensure they adopt these principles in their day to day work, and evidence it in their recording. Further information relating to this is set out in the [PYJS Information Sharing, Recording and Retention Schedule](#).

Additional Policies and Procedures are also in place to support specific areas of work and can be accessed via the PYJS Policy Register.

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