



BETWEEN THEORY AND CHAOS YOUTH EXPLOITED BY ORGANISED CRIME

*Integrating Structured Risk Assessment, Contextual
Understanding, and Developmental Transition*



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A Question to start

WHEN A CHILD WHO HAS OR MAY CAUSE SERIOUS HARM THROUGH ASPECTS OF THEIR BEHAVIOUR ENIERS YOUR SERVICE ...



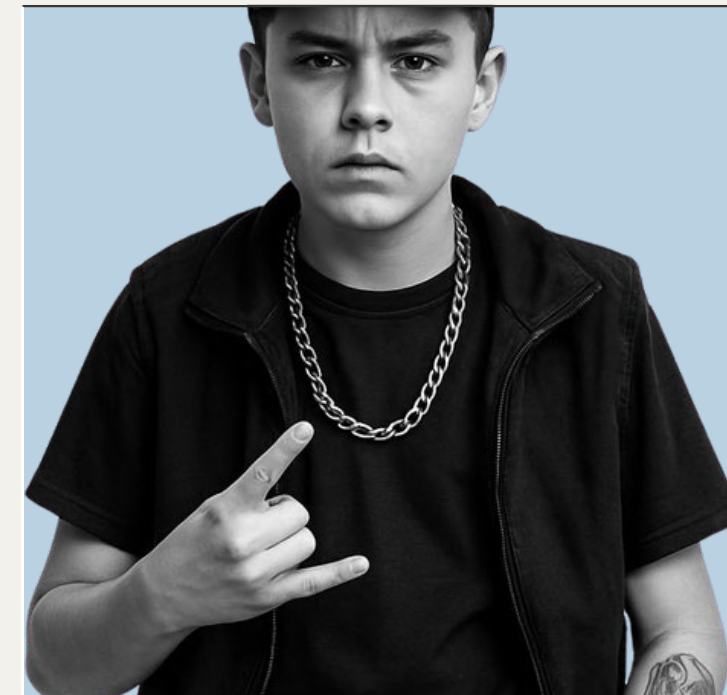
What is the first word used to describe them?



High risk child or young person



Offender



Gang member



VICTIM OF EXPLOITATION

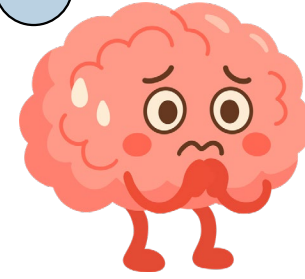
HELLO
MY NAME IS

TOM



BEHAVIOURS WE WORRY ABOUT

- violent offences
- MISSING EPISODES
- DRUG SUPPLY INVOLVEMENT
- KNIFE CARRYING
- ASSAULT OVER DEBT



- TRAUMA HISTORY
- EXCLUSION
- NEURODEVELOPMENTAL VULNERABILITIES
- TRANSGENERATIONAL ADVERSITY



WHAT MAKES TOM VULNERABLE

DUAL REALITY



MANY CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE ARE
BOTH:

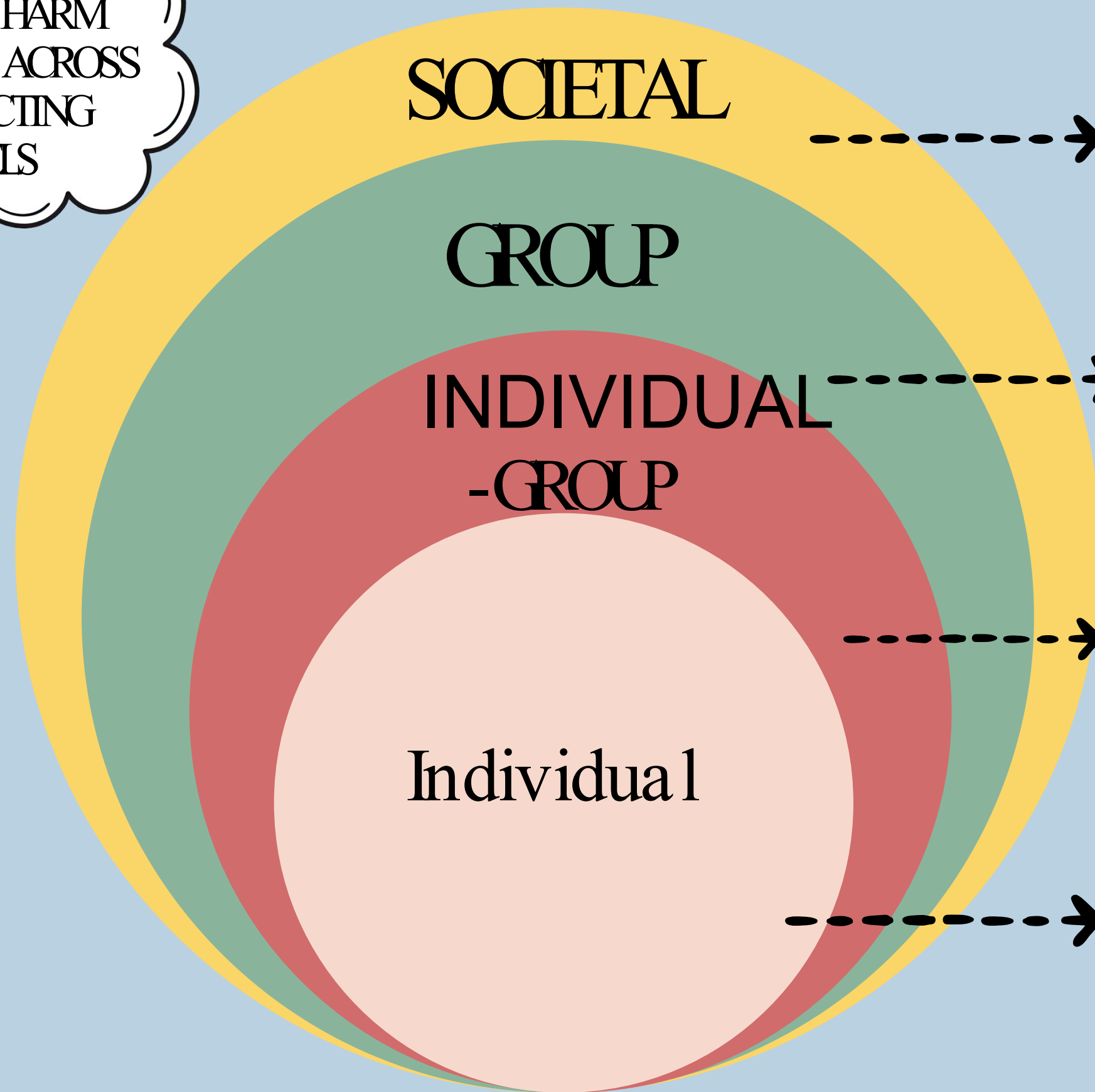
VULNERABLE TO
EXPLOITATION



PARTS OF THEIR BEHAVIOUR
CAUSES HARM TO OTHERS



RISK OF HARM
OPERATES ACROSS
INTERACTING
LEVELS



- CRIMINAL ECONOMIES
- COMMUNITY VIOLENCE
- STRUCTURAL DISADVANTAGE


- GROUP NORMS
- LOYALTY
- CONFLICT ESCALATION

- PEER INFLUENCE
- BELONGING
- STATUS

- TRAUMA HISTORY
- DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS
- COPING STRATEGIES
- SOCIAL COMPETENCE

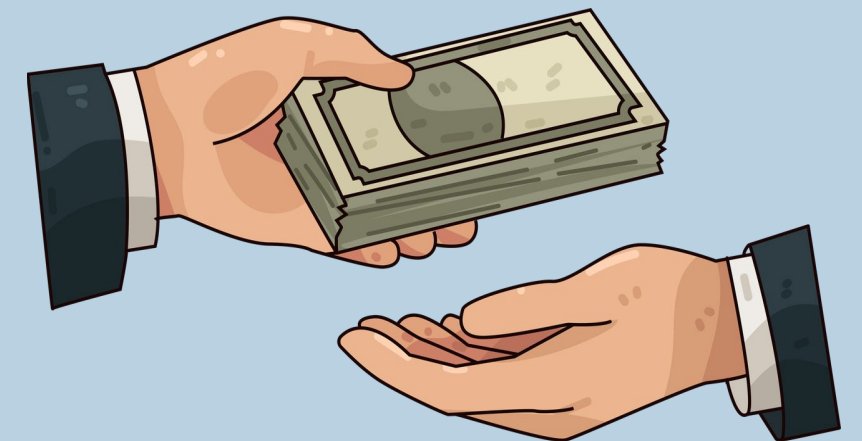
MULTI-LEVEL GUIDELINES (COOK, HART & KROPP, 2015)

ORGANISED NETWORKS USING CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION OFTEN OPERATE THROUGH



ORGANISED CRIME
AS COERCIVE
CONTROL

- Belonging
- Identity
- Protection
- Debt bondage
- Loyalty



Using MLG to FOCUS ON EXPLOITERS



Individual

•Experiences- Vulnerabilities- behaviour



Peer / Network

•Coercion- debt- loyalty- status

Environment



•Criminal markets-locations- opportunity

From Structured Assessment to Live Risk

Contained Forensic contexts

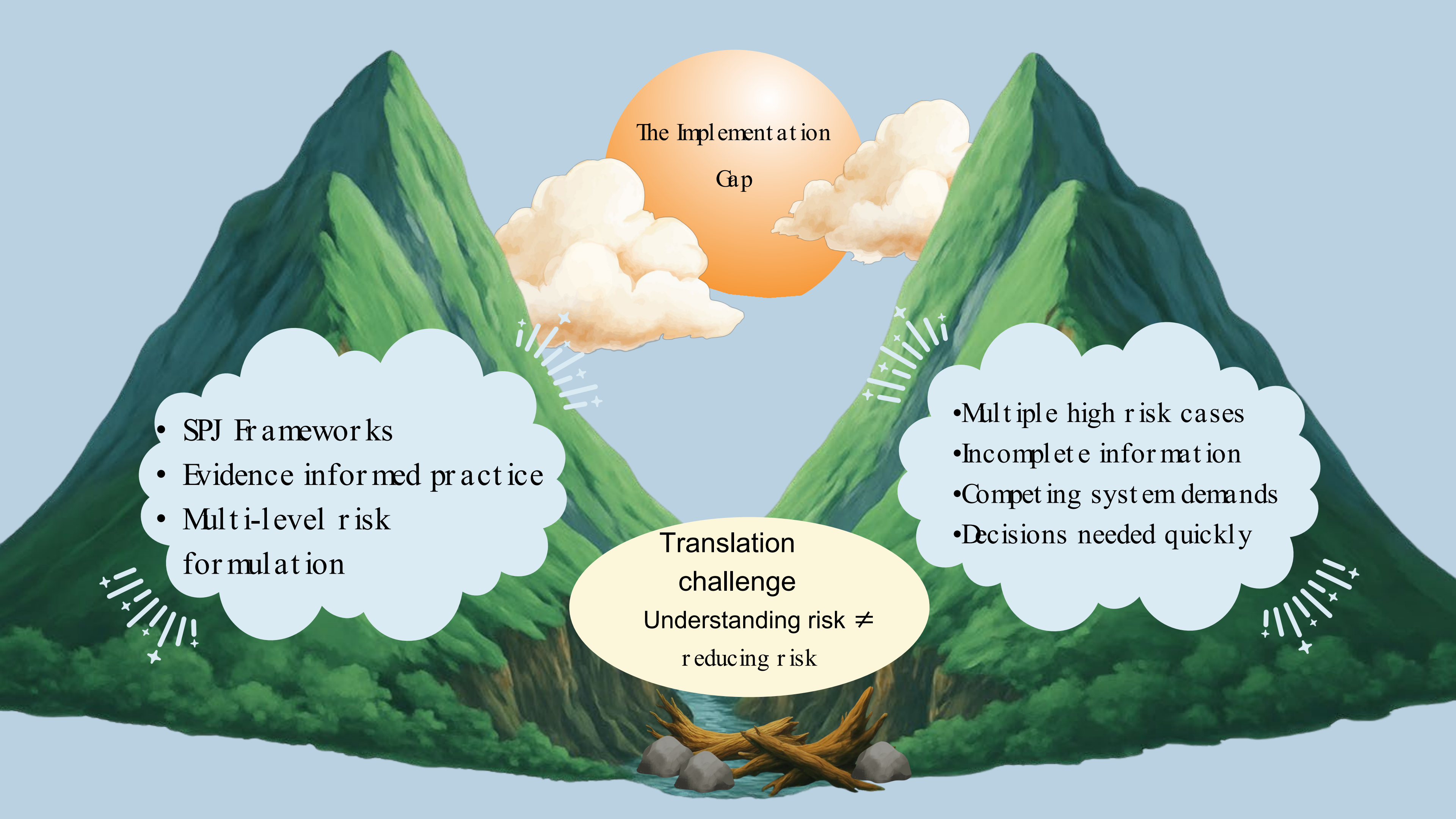
- Structured Professional Judgement (SPJ)
- Systematic formulation
- Environmental containment
- Behaviour observed over time



Live Community risk

- Emergent risk
- Non-linear escalation
- Fluid peer systems
- Limited environmental control





The Implementation
Gap

- SPJ Frameworks
- Evidence informed practice
- Multi-level risk formulation

- Multiple high risk cases
- Incomplete information
- Competing system demands
- Decisions needed quickly

Translation
challenge
Understanding risk \neq
reducing risk

Structured Professional Judgement Frameworks

Strengths

- Structured and transparent
- Defensible and evidence-informed
- Multi-level and formulation-driven
- Enhances consistency and professional reasoning

Methodological demands

- Time for information gathering and formulation
- Collation of multi-source information
- Appropriately trained SPJ practitioners
- Multiagency input to triangulate evidence

Developed and validated largely within contained forensic environments

● ● ● Dynamic Risk Formulation in live contexts

Five key questions

1. What is happening right now?
2. What is driving the behaviour?
3. What contextual pressures exist?
4. What can the system influence?
5. What actions are needed next?

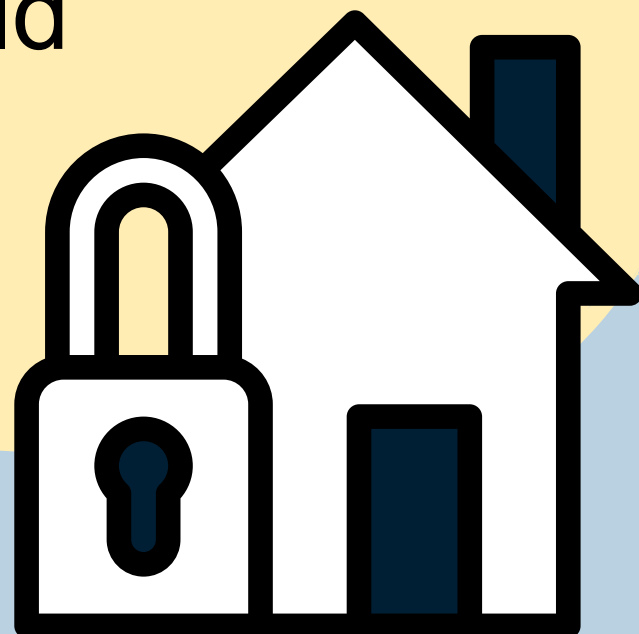


Environmental Conditions Shape

Risk

Secure Estate:

- Environmental containment
- Contextual Stability
- Observation time
- Change of context stabilises child



Community:

- Limited systemic leverage
- Escalation in real time
- Context remains— child must resist it



Safety vs Risk Management vs Intervention

Community risk management requires clarity about three distinct processes

Safety planning – immediate harm prevention

Risk management planning Monitoring dynamic
destabilisation

Intervention planning – change over time



Different time scales.
Different responses.

Quick Reflection

1. When you first hear Tom's story...
2. What is your first professional thought?
 - A. Safeguarding response
 - B. Public protection response
 - C. Both simultaneously
 - D. Unsure



The Power of Labels in Risk Practice

LABELS ARE NOT NEUTRAL.

They shape:

- How professionals interpret behaviour
- How systems respond
- How children understand themselves
- Whether change feels possible

Two common system labels

Offender

- Control
- Risk management
- Punitive responses



Victim

- Protection
- Support
- Care responses



But exploited children are often both.

Separating Behaviour from Identity

Instead of “they are involved in a gang or criminality”

Try: “this child is being criminally exploited, likely by an organised group”

Instead of: “the young person is running drugs”

Try: “the child has been targeted by abusers and is being groomed or made to distribute drugs”

Instead of: “high-risk youth”

Try: “a young person involved in behaviours that create risk of harm to others”

Instead of: “non-compliant or engaging”

Try: “due to the trauma they have experienced because of their exploitation or abuse, the child finds it difficult to trust adults or people in positions of power”

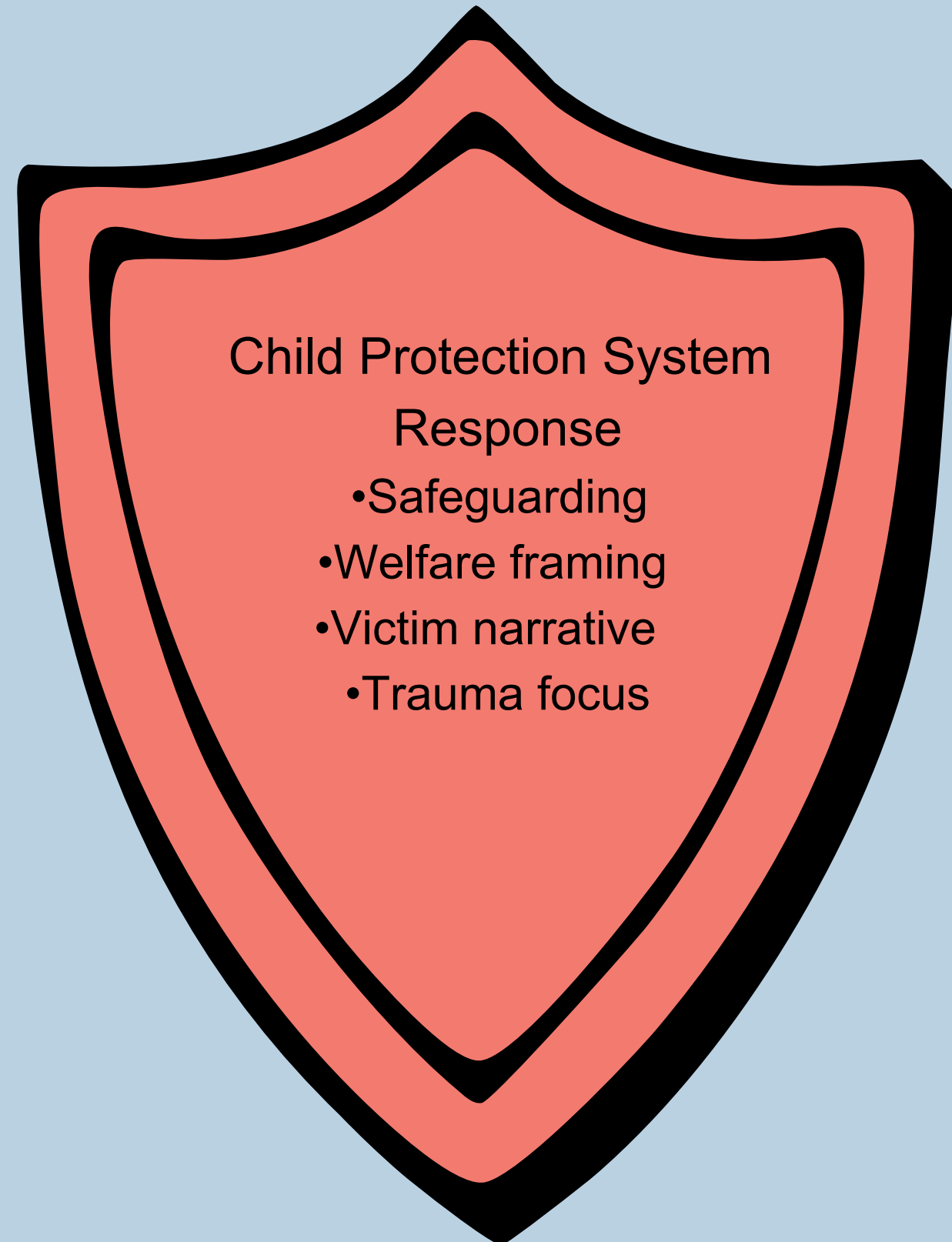
Instead of: “They need to take responsibility for their behaviour”

Try: “The child needs support to understand what exploitation is, and how they have been groomed”



Why Systems Split When Children Are Both Exploited and Cause Harm

When children are harmed by others and pose risk of harm to others systems experience tension.



Integrating Language, Context, and Structured Risk Practice

Rights Based & Strengths Based Practice

Focus on the person beyond the behaviour

- Separate identity from behaviour
- Maintain dignity and respect
- Recognise vulnerability and exploitation
- Sustain belief in the possibility of change

Structured Professional Judgement

Focus on structured Thinking

- Multi -level risk formulation
- Explicit reasoning
- Evidence -informed practice
- Defensible professional judgement

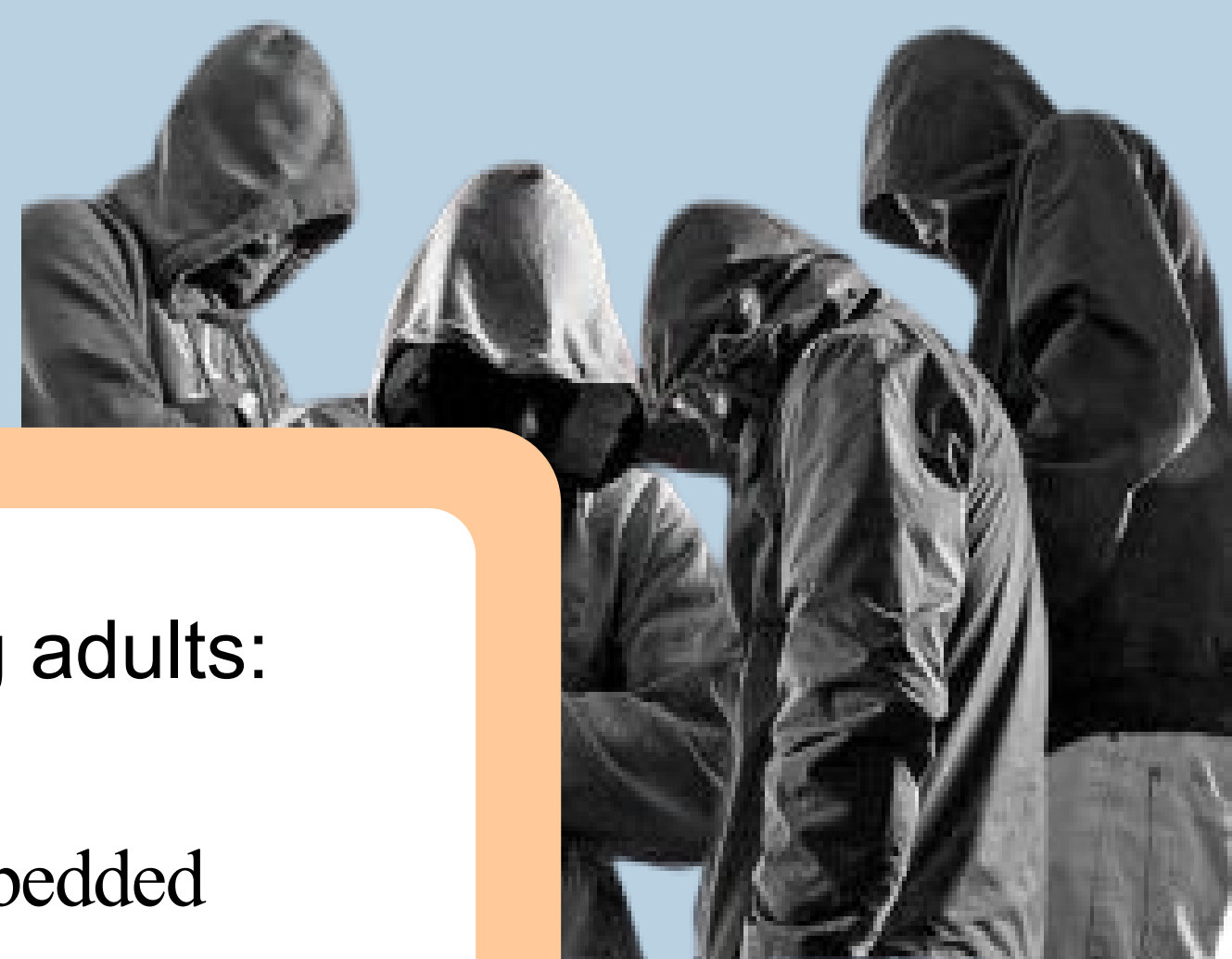
Contextual Understanding

Focus on where behaviour develops

- Peer networks
- Coercion and exploitation
- Family and community environments
- Structural pressures

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE HOLDS ALL THREE

Transitional Safeguarding: Risk of Harm
Does not End at 18



As exploited children become young adults:

- Exploitation networks often continue
- Harmful behaviours may become more embedded
- Protection and safeguarding systems reduce involvement
- Adult systems expect greater responsibility.
- Peer and criminal influences may intensify
- Developmental needs remain

18



Containing the System

Practitioners' experience:

- Exposure to trauma
- Responsibility for harm
- Moral tension
- Limited leverage

When harm occurs:

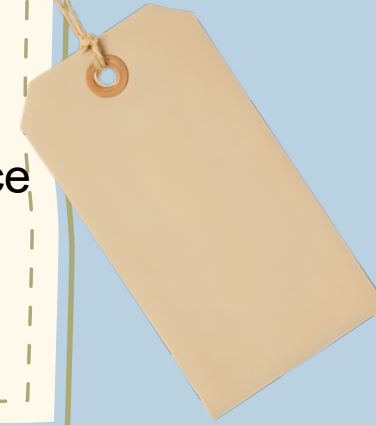
- Case review
- Lack of practitioner review

Risk management includes supporting the workforce





- Professional language and labels
- Victim vs Offender framing
- Protection & Safeguarding vs justice systems
- Looking after our workforce

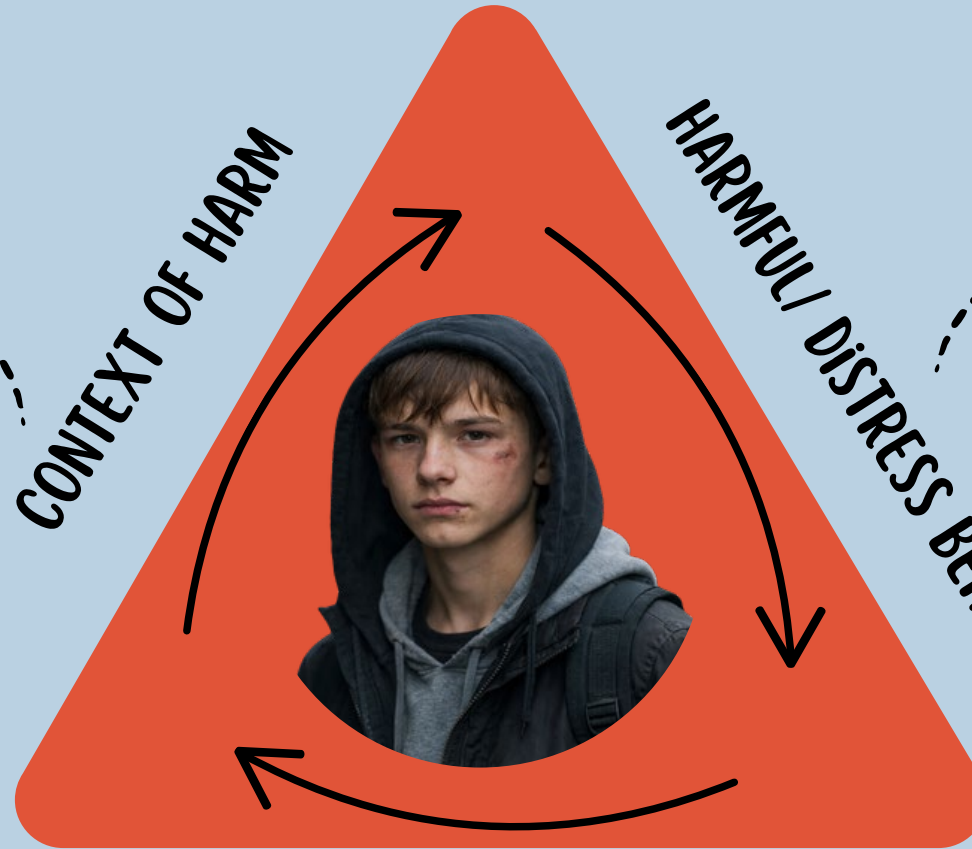


System Response

- Criminal exploitation networks
- Gang dynamics
- Coercion and debt
- Trauma histories
- Family adversity
- Peer networks



CONTEXT OF HARM



HARMFUL/DISTRESS BEHAVIOUR

- Violence
- Weapon carrying
- Drug supply
- Retaliation



SPJ Framework

- Structured risk assessment process
- Multi-level risk formulation
- Dynamic understanding



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