

Communication – Context - Curiosity

What MAPPA Means in Work with Children

MAPPA is the statutory system used to manage individuals who pose a risk of serious harm to the public. Although often associated with adults, it can and does apply to children. When a young person is involved in MAPPA, agencies must work with a dual lens: protecting the public from potential harm whilst also safeguarding the young person, whose own needs, vulnerabilities and experiences must remain central.

Children who come to MAPPA attention rarely reach that point in isolation. Their behaviour typically emerges from a backdrop of trauma, adversity, exploitation or unmet needs. For practitioners, this means MAPPA should never be seen solely as a public protection mechanism; it is equally a way of ensuring coordinated safeguarding and support around a child whose life has likely been shaped by chaos, fear and instability.

Why Children Who Pose Risk Are So Complex

Young people who harm others often present with overlapping issues — neurodiversity, communication difficulties, trauma histories, exposure to violence, fragmented education, coercion or involvement in exploitation. Their behaviour is frequently a response to what has happened to them.

Because of this complexity, these children often appear across multiple systems at once: Child Protection, Youth Justice, Risk Outside The Home, Radicalisation and Extremism or MAPPA. Each system may produce its own assessment and plan, and without coordination this can quickly lead to fragmented working, duplicated activity or more concerning, gaps in support. These cases only work well when agencies see the whole picture, not just the slice that relates to their service.

How MAPPA Fits In

Young people may be considered under MAPPA if they have committed serious violent or sexual offences, pose a risk that ordinary single agency processes cannot manage, or present escalating behaviour that creates concern for the safety of others. Most children who enter MAPPA sit at Level 1, meaning the primary management remains with a single agency (usually Youth Justice or Children's Social Care), supported by wider multi agency information sharing. Level 1 does not mean the child poses low risk — in fact, some of the highest risk young people are managed this way.

When a child is discussed at MAPPA, agencies must ensure their welfare needs are fully understood, their voice is captured, and any safeguarding plans (CIN, CP, EHCP, Care Plan) are aligned with the risk management plan. MAPPA should not occur separately to safeguarding — it must run alongside and within it.

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What Practitioners Need to Pay Attention To

Because risk in adolescence is fluid, practitioners must be alert to changes in behaviour, peer influence, family context, placement stability and online activity. Small shifts can quickly escalate into serious harm. Early information sharing is one of the strongest protective factors — not only for the public, but for the young person themselves.

It is also important that practitioners explore the *reasons* behind behaviour. A child carrying a knife may be acting from fear, exploitation or threats; fire setting might be connected to trauma; violence may stem from neurodevelopmental difficulties or overwhelming emotional responses. Professional curiosity — asking why, not just what — is crucial in understanding and responding to risk.

Children who pose risk often experience high levels of instability themselves. Effective practice therefore means checking that support is in place around their emotional wellbeing, education, peer relationships and family situation. This includes understanding any underlying diagnoses (such as autism or ADHD) and adapting communication and intervention approaches accordingly.

Where Things Commonly Break Down

The report highlights several recurring challenges that practitioners should be conscious of:

- ☐ Parallel planning: different agencies holding separate plans without alignment.
- ☐ Inconsistent information sharing: key intelligence not reaching all the right people.
- ☐ Unclear thresholds: uncertainty about when MAPPA should be used.
- ☐ Weak transitions: risk increasing when children move toward adulthood and fall between services.
- ☐ Limited MAPPA awareness: some practitioners unaware of roles, responsibilities or Level 1 expectations.
- ☐ Insufficient representation: Children's Social Care and YJS not always present or empowered in MAPPA forums.

These issues can lead to missed opportunities, uncoordinated responses, and situations where risk escalates before agencies realise the full picture.

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What Good Practice Looks Like

Good multi agency work with these children is integrated, curious and responsive. Some indicators include:

- ☐ A clear understanding of the child's life, context and lived experience.
- ☐ A single, coherent plan that blends safeguarding and public protection.
- ☐ Regular, proactive information sharing — not just when things go wrong.
- ☐ Consistent attendance from Children's Social Care and Youth Justice at MAPPA meetings.
- ☐ Recognition of trauma, exploitation and neurodevelopmental needs as core risk drivers.
- ☐ Dynamic risk management, with plans updated as circumstances change.
- ☐ Support for parents and carers who may be managing fear, intimidation or challenging behaviours at home.

Most importantly, good practice keeps the child at the centre. It focuses on both the risk they pose and the risk they face, recognising that those two elements are often intertwined.

Core Practitioner Messages

- ☐ Children who harm others are often among the most vulnerable children in the stem.
- ☐ Safeguarding must sit at the heart of public protection when the subject is a child.
- ☐ MAPPA is most effective when partners share information early and openly.
- ☐ Level 1 MAPPA still requires strong multi agency collaboration and clear accountability.
- ☐ Understanding the child's context, trauma and neurodevelopment is essential for effective planning.
- ☐ Transitions into adulthood are critical points of risk and must be planned for early.
- ☐ One coordinated, multi agency plan is more effective than several separate ones.
- ☐ Practitioners must stay curious, challenge assumptions and look beneath the behaviour.