Knowledge of development and developmental transitions in children and young people, and relevance to self-harm and suicide

All young people face the developmental task of moving from childhood to adolescence, and from adolescence to adulthood, a trajectory that is difficult to predict by age. Assuming adult roles and responsibilities will inevitably involve successes and failures, with implications for a young person’s wellbeing, mental health and vulnerability to self-harm and suicide.

Although there is no specific set of associations that link self-harm and suicide to development and developmental transitions, it is helpful to hold in mind the developmental ‘pathways’ that a child or young person who has self-harmed or is suicidal has experienced in the past and is managing currently.

Knowledge of child and adolescent development

An ability to draw on knowledge of the needs of children and young people in relation to their physical, social, cognitive and emotional development (e.g. the need for attachment relationships, education, appropriate patterns of diet, sleep and exercise)

An ability to draw on knowledge of normal child and adolescent development and its impact on behaviour, for example:

- knowledge of theories of child and adolescent development including:
  - physical development; sensory and psychomotor development
  - cognitive development (intelligence, language and symbolisation, the Piagetian model, mentalisation, awareness of self and others)
  - social and emotional development (emotional intelligence, interpersonal competence, identity and moral development at adolescence, compassion and self-management, the impact of the social context)

- knowledge of age-appropriate and problematic behaviours

- knowledge of developmental stages, including physical, affective and interpersonal, cognitive, language and social milestones

- knowledge of the interaction between different aspects of a child’s or young person’s development and between individual and contextual factors (such as people and life circumstances)

An ability to draw on knowledge of neurodevelopmental conditions and their impact on cognitive development

An ability to draw on knowledge of brain development in adolescence and its impact on impulse control and risk taking
### Knowledge of the care environment and its interaction with child and adolescent development

#### Attachment

An ability to draw on knowledge of the importance of the bond that children develop with their parents or carers in early life, and the impact of a problematic relationship on:

- child and adolescent development
- the development of parent-child, sibling and peer relationships
- the development of emotional wellbeing, self-regulation, mental health and mental health problems
- the development of resilience (i.e. the ability to cope with stressful and adverse experiences, including difficult interpersonal experiences)

#### Influence of parents or carers

An ability to draw on knowledge of the impact of the prenatal and perinatal environment on infant and child development

An ability to draw on knowledge of parenting styles

An ability to draw on knowledge that a parent’s or carer’s communication, interaction and stimulation of their child influences the child’s development, attainment and mental health

An ability to draw on knowledge that effective forms of parent/carer engagement change as children and young people develop

An ability to draw on knowledge that the balance of influence from parents, peers, authority figures and others alters as children and young people develop

An ability to draw on knowledge of factors that make it harder for parents and carers to offer consistent or positive parenting (e.g. emotional and cognitive immaturity, mental health problems, particularly substance misuse, neurodevelopmental conditions, loss, abuse, social adversity or negative experience of parenting in their own lives)

An ability to draw on knowledge of the positive effects of parent or carer support on:

- attachment relationships
- child and adolescent development

#### Family development

An ability to draw on knowledge that a child or young person and their parents or carers need to be viewed in a number of different contexts including:

- their family and other significant relationships
- their social and community setting
- the professional network(s) involved with them
- their cultural setting
- the socio-political environment

An ability to draw on knowledge of different family structures and compositions

An ability to draw on knowledge of the family lifecycle and the ways this varies across social contexts and cultures, so as to understand the developmental tasks encountered by specific families

An ability to draw on knowledge of the potential impact on families of social adversity (loss, abuse, social change, socio-economic disadvantage, health inequality)
Developmental transitions

An ability to draw on knowledge that children and young people will inevitably experience a number of significant developmental transitions (from childhood to adolescence), such as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>brain development and cognitive maturation</td>
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<tr>
<td>pubertal maturation</td>
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<tr>
<td>changes in their perceptions of themselves and their sense of identity</td>
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<tr>
<td>changes in the salience of peer relationships as the young person attempts to separate and individuate from parents or carers</td>
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<tr>
<td>the development of gender identity and sexuality</td>
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<td>the development of sexual relationships</td>
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<td>changes in educational environments (such as changing schools or entering college)</td>
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<tr>
<td>changes in family structure (e.g. births, deaths, marital separation leading to the formation of new parental relationships)</td>
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An ability to draw on knowledge that children and young people may find some transitions particularly challenging to negotiate, depending on their prior experiences and their psychological and physical development.