

Knowledge of development in children and young people and family development and transitions, 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 suicide and self-harm.

Although there is no specific set of associations that link suicide and self-harm 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 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. need for attachment relationships, education, appropriate patterns of diet, sleep and exercise)

An ability to draw on knowledge of physical and psychological development in children and young people, for example, awareness of:

age-appropriate and problematic behaviours

developmental milestones

the interaction between different aspects of a 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 that the 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 parents need to adapt their parenting style as young people grow and move towards greater independence
An ability to draw on knowledge that the balance of influence from parents, peers, authority figures and others alters as the child or young person develops
An ability to draw on knowledge of factors that make it harder for parents and carers to offer consistent or positive parenting (e.g. mental health problems, particularly substance misuse, neurodevelopmental conditions, social adversity or negative experience of parenting in their own lives)

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
their 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, socioeconomic 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:
brain development and cognitive maturation
pubertal maturation
changes in their perceptions of themselves and their sense of identity
changes in the salience of peer relationships as the young person attempts to separate and individuate from parents or carers
the development of gender identity and sexuality
the development of sexual relationships
changes in educational environments (such as changing schools or entering college)
changes in family structure (e.g. births, deaths, marital separation leading to the formation of new parental relationships)
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