

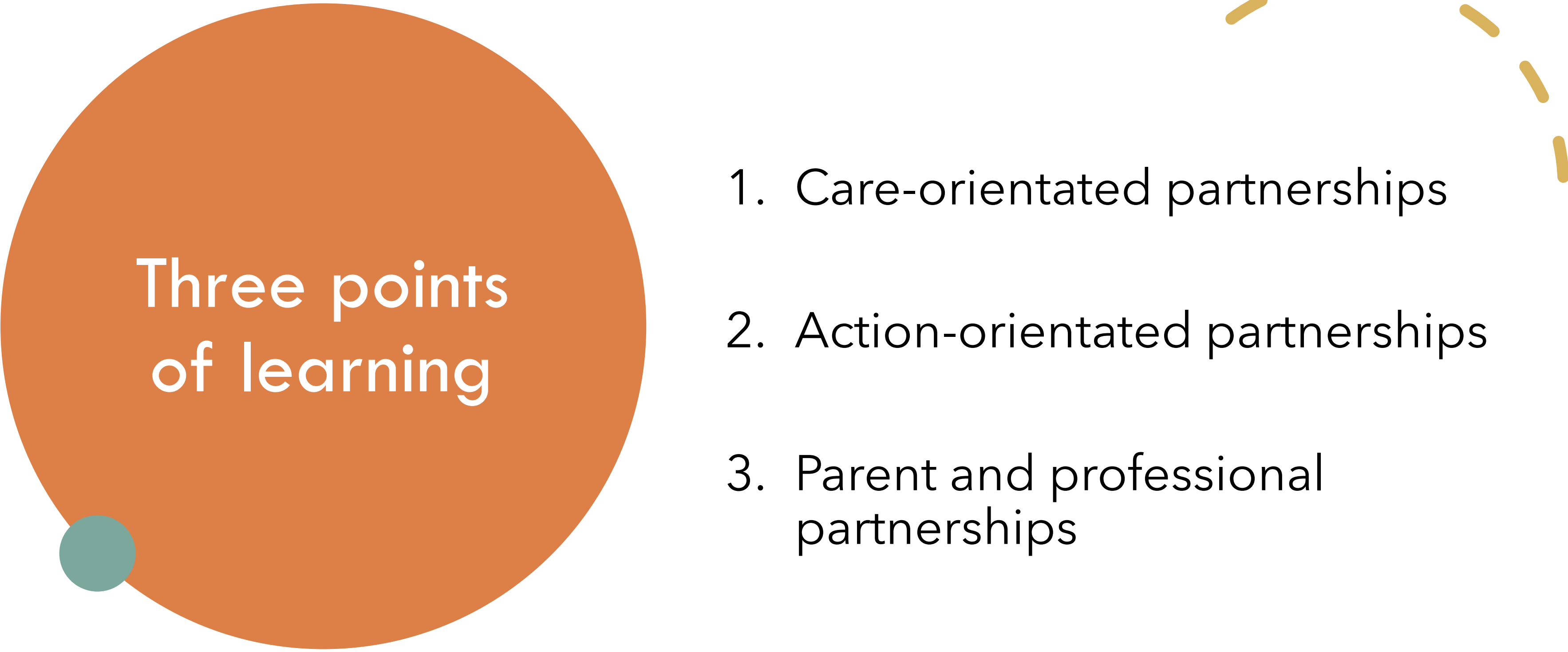


What are we learning about multi-agency working from recent innovations

Prof Carlene Firmin, Durham University

Explore the answer to the question using two studies

- Innovate Project: Four Year Ethnographic study across six sites funded by the ESRC
- Planning for Safety Project: Three phase pilot of alternative child protection pathways funded by the DfE



Three points of learning

1. Care-orientated partnerships
2. Action-orientated partnerships
3. Parent and professional partnerships

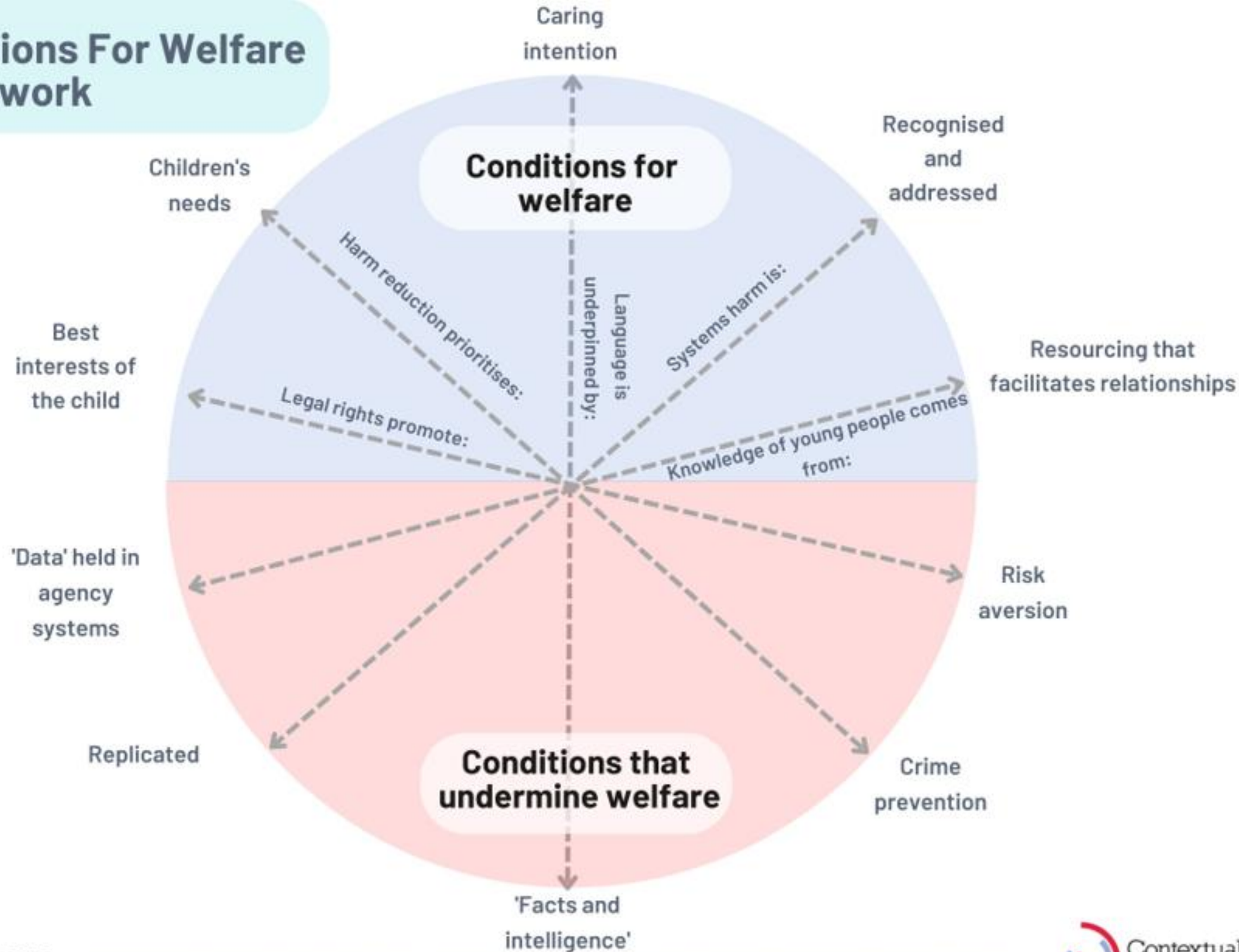


Care-orientated partnerships

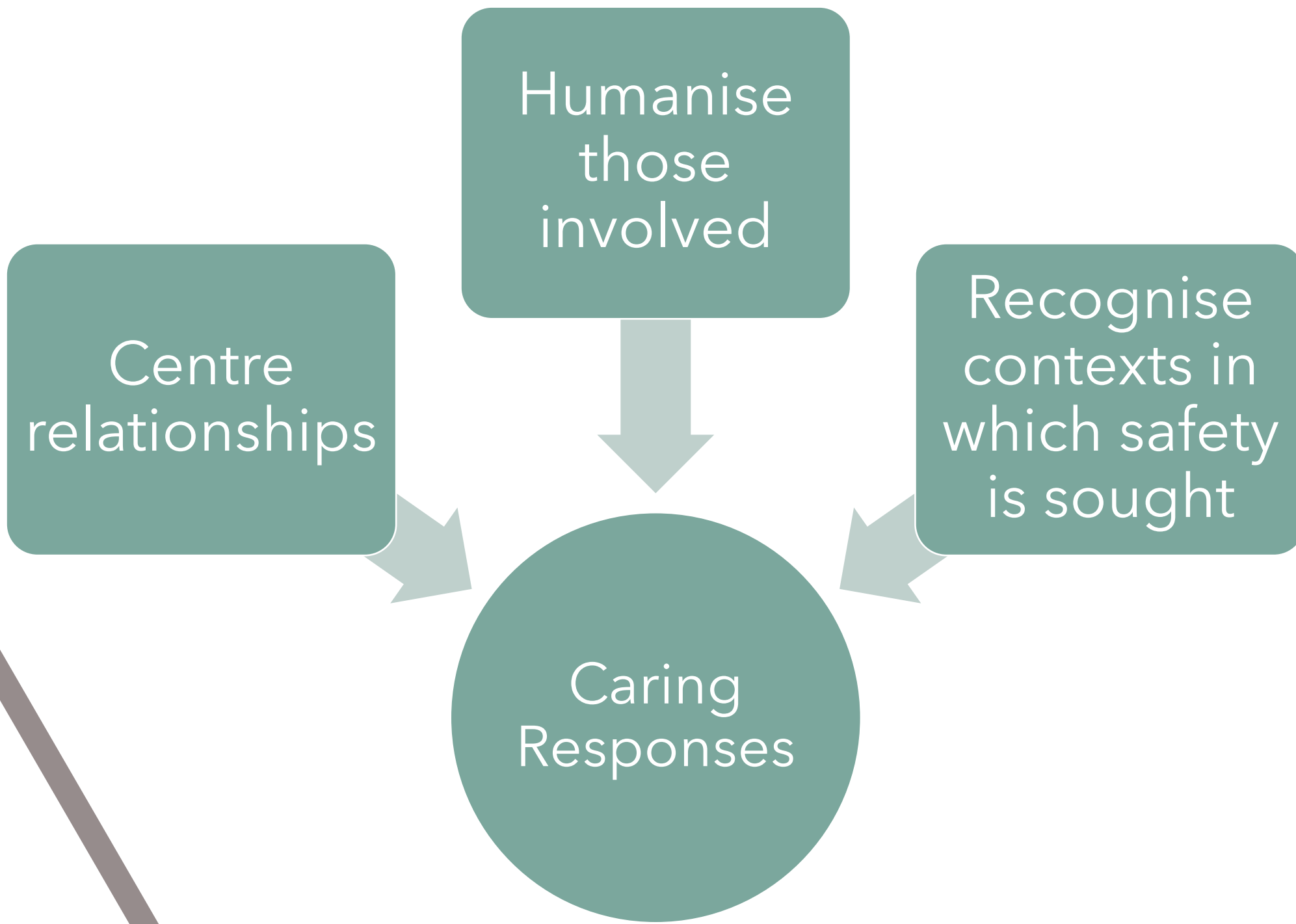
We are seeking
to safeguard
young people
from harm
using a system
that they had
been designed
out of.....

*[intended to separate out] delinquent or
naughty children – those who were out of
control, falling into bad associations or in
moral danger – rather than proceedings in
respect of children who were suffering or at
risk of suffering neglect or abuse (Hale 2019:2)*

Conditions For Welfare Framework



My young man that's missing currently, the police think they may know where he is, but they're not willing to disclose that information to anyone because they want to shut down the county line that he's operating within. And they have said that when they find him, they will most likely arrest him. He's fourteen... The police have one angle, social care have an angle... (Innovate Project, Transitional Safeguarding Learning Group)



Foundation of Care

We have two main things to work on still - finding more ways to offer 'Laura' and her friends fun, exciting opportunities to spend time together so they feel less need to go missing and getting the necessary school support in place so that Laura can feel safe and comfortable to be in school every day. (Planning for Safety, ROTH Social Work Assessment, Document 3, Site 1)

*Chair – tell us what type of person XXX is
Grandad – He was a lovely kid (Grandad getting emotional) he's just got mixed up with wrong crowd, don't want to give it as an excuse, can't defend it, but don't know if it's him or them...
Social worker – he loved to draw didn't he
Grandad – he loved running, was so good at it, but stopped doing it ((Planning for Safety, Observation 05, Researcher Notes)*

Procedural features of partnership working that struggle to facilitate this....

- Panel practices
- Risk ratings and scores
- Referral framed as a response
- Unclear dominant culture / outcome mechanism

Elsewhere, we saw little-to-no interagency disagreement, and in the process, a loss of social care identity, such as a police officer being considered a sufficient replacement for a social worker to provide a young person with a consistent relationship (Vignette 1), or hearing social workers use the term 'intel' to describe information gathered for their assessments (three sites).

Can lead to social care blurring with policing

YP1 has been stop checked with YP2. YP1 does not talk about his peers/associates. YP1 has links to YP4, as they were arrested for Burglary offence together. YP1 is also linked to YP8 and they are close friends at present. [...] Professionals have not been able to engage with YP6 and YP3 and their peers and associates. (Peer assessment)

They are all talented with many positive core values and a capacity for kindness and, to use one of their favourite words, love. It is my opinion that they all have the potential for successful life outcomes if they can receive and make use of the best possible support. (Peer assessment)



Action orientated meetings

Difference between tone and action

- Welfare-orientated *tone* increasingly evident

Chair opens the conference: This type of conference is also about learning, and remembering the appropriateness of the language that we use, very important that they are framed as a child and kindly...(Observation O9, Researcher Notes)

- Justice-orientated *actions* often still the result

They reported that 'relationships have not been great with local kids', and they were now 'trying [to] get to know the kids'. When a panelist asked if anyone was doing 'group mapping', the police offered to take this forward.

Difference between information sharing and sharing actions

- Evidence of over-sharing in both projects
- Actions often not taken on information that is held
- Meetings contain anxiety but do not necessarily facilitate action
- What is it people are seeking to do?

‘... So what is our safeguarding responsibility to this person?...[our] greatest tool is about a way of being in relationship with young people...[but] we go into those meetings and nobody really knows how to fix it. We’re kind of sitting there and going, ‘these things feel beyond our grasp’, and that feels quite self-defeating’. (Interview, Site 4)

Effort vs. Change

- Multi-agency panels can generate a lot of effort:
 - Referrals
 - Information sharing
 - Mapping
 - Further meetings

But is it not clear that all of this effort results in change for the young person

Measuring effort or measuring change?

"We have mapped the peer group"

(Clue: A peer map might help you understand who is friends with whom, but it doesn't tell you the needs of the group or make them safer)

"The peer group can name adults who they trust in this context where they spend their time"

"We have switched off the wifi"

(Clue: this is an activity designed to disperse young people not make a place safer for them. It could increase their risk and undermine any positive relationships with adults who work in that space)

"Young people can safely access the internet in public spaces"

"We made an information sheet so people can share concerns about young people"

(Clue: it's good to share information, but to count as a contextual outcome you would need to know 1) if it is being used and 2) if people are reporting with a caring intention or to increase the surveillance and punishment of young people)

"There are adults who live in this context who used to be hostile towards young people and who now feel positively towards them - they know their names and look out for them"

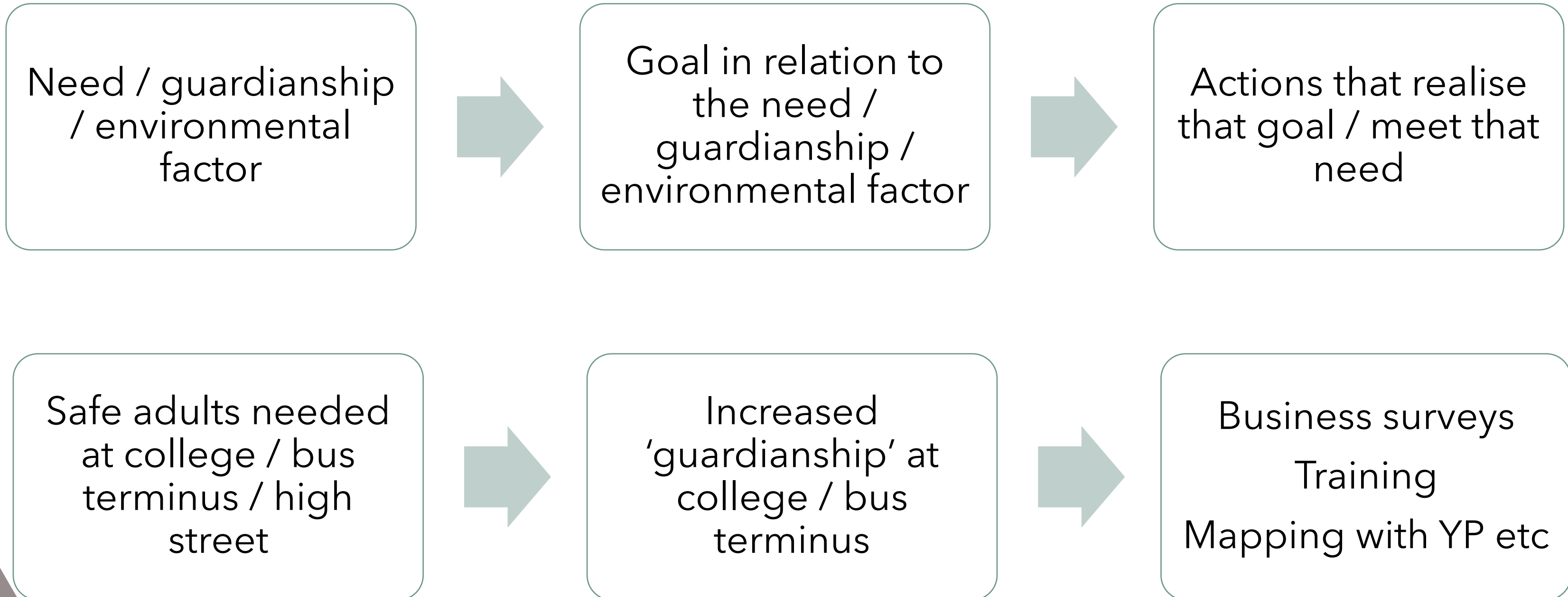
"The school have brought in a zero tolerance policy to weapon carrying"
(Clue: this might decrease disclosures but not necessarily experiences of harm and it can disproportionately penalise some young people over others)

"Young people can safely access the internet in public spaces"

Planning that meets individual needs



Planning that responds to contexts





Partnership with parents/carers

Parents/carers participate in safeguarding processes in certain conditions

Chair: [it's] very difficult to disrupt what's happening. In the meantime, you are having to hold that risk as a family...
Mum: ... We ground him and the second he's not grounded he's out doing the same stuff. (Mum seems really defeated)
Chair: make sure she has out of hours number, you need to ensure you have emotional support as this is really difficult
(Observation 04, Researcher Notes)

CARE

Conference preparation and structure

Share their priority concerns

Share contextual and system harms/risks

Identify what was needed to increase safety

Outline what was/had been working well



But be alert to complexities

she's still my baby. And she will always be. And it's just, I think a little bit more understanding for those that aren't parents of how much, you know, how much that sort of stuff hurts and how much it affects you, how long it takes you to get over listening to all of that stuff (Parent interview, I25)

Impact on familial relationships	How might a young person experience their parent/carer collaborating with professionals?
Overlap with familial harm	How do you recognise and respond to emergent challenges withing the family?
Maintain engagement	How to maintain engagement when risks continue to escalate or take time to recede?
Partners not professionals	How to be attentive to the fact that parents are partners but not professionals

Where we are at reflects three stages of development



Stage 1: System
implementation is at fault



Stage 2: System design is at
fault



Stage 3: System foundation
is at fault

Four shortcomings in **system purpose** (Firmin et al 2024)

- Individualistic approaches to service design and delivery
- Prioritising risk mitigation over creating safety and flourishing
- Prioritising criminal justice interests over children's interests
- Institutional and structural discrimination remains unaddressed



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