

**Growing up with ACEs: how early experiences
influence relationships and connections during
adolescence. Lessons for Youth Workers.**

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DECLARATION FORM



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1. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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2. This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts Young People, Communities and Youth Work (ETS Endorsed).

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3. This dissertation is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references.

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ABSTRACT

Relationships are important to young people as they help them feel listened to, understood, valued and appreciated for their contribution to their communities. In feeling this sense of belonging, this can support them in making positive choices in life and for their future. Youth Workers play an important role in supporting this process could include (Sapin, 2014; Glending *et al.*, 2021; Huelsnitz, Jones and Simpson, 2026).

This extended literature review explores the title: Growing up with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): how early experiences influence relationships and connections during adolescence. It starts by exploring the importance of relationships and how this links to young people's mental health and wellbeing. It then it investigates the levels of awareness amongst Youth Workers regarding the signs and symptoms of ACEs in the young people they work with. Finally, it looks at the role Youth Workers play in implementing timely and appropriate interventions to support young people through the challenges they face.

The current literature was reviewed by using the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) library, Google Scholar, and Perplex resources to locate relevant texts. To narrow down the search the following key words were used: Young people; Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs); relationships and adolescence; signs and symptoms of ACEs; Youth Work, Youth Workers and interventions. Twenty five papers were selected for final inclusion in the review.

The findings of the extended literature review indicate that developing good relationships with others has a positive impact on young people's mental health and wellbeing. It was also found that that there is a good knowledge and understanding amongst Youth Workers about

the impact of ACEs on young people, and that appropriate interventions are applied in Youth Work settings to support young people in the best ways possible.

It is recommended that more studies are carried out to examine the impact of interventions on outcomes for young people. This is so that Youth Workers can measure whether interventions are working or not.

Additionally, having access to more recent research would help Youth Workers apply the most beneficial interventions in their professional practice. Finally, including young people's voices in data gathering would help both the young people and Youth Workers to gain the best perspective regarding what support is needed and how this is effectively delivered in practice.

ACRONYMS

ACEs	Adverse Childhood Experiences
UWTSD	University of Wales Trinity Saint David
ERI	Early Rehabilitation Interventions

1. INTRODUCTION

Positive relationships are important to young people as it helps them feel heard and understood and gives them choices about what they would like to communicate about themselves, their background, and their life (Sapin, 2013). According to Sapin (2013) the relationships that young people have with Youth Workers should be voluntary, because they should be able to choose the people they feel happy and comfortable around. This links to the idea of participation, where young people are able to thrive in a “supportive and nurturing environment” (Sapin, 2013, p. 92). Therefore, it is important to look at how young people’s interpersonal relationships might be affected by adverse childhood experiences, as this could help explain some of their more challenging behaviours (Sapin, 2013). Interpersonal relationships are defined as “...social connections or bonds between two or more individuals that vary in closeness, commitment and duration” (Huelsenitz, Jones and Simpson, 2026, p. 1201). Adverse childhood experiences, referred to from now on as ACEs, are defined by Young Minds (2021-2026, np) as “...highly stressful and potentially traumatic events or situations that occur during childhood or adolescence.”

In terms of the role of the Youth Worker, Davies and Merton (2009) argue that Youth Work involves ensuring young people are being heard and listened to and that they are having opportunities to engage in voluntary participation in activities. This allows young people to be informed in decision-making that affects them, and this helps ensure that they are thriving within safe spaces and environments in Youth Work settings, with the support of multi-agency working (Davies and Merton, 2009). Therefore, Youth Work is about getting young people involved and supporting them to make informed decisions so that they feel empowered (Davies and Merton, 2009). This can help support young people to reflect on their choices and decisions with regards to their relationships and friendships. Moreover,

developing a good understanding of the challenges those who have experienced ACEs may have, can help Youth Workers to better understand issues from the young person's perspective. This can help them build more supportive and trusting relationships with young people, and help them to access appropriate support through signposting to the right agencies.

The purpose of this research is to examine the current relevant literature to try and find out how ACEs impact young people's interpersonal relationships with their friends and Youth Workers, as well as other community members. An extended literature review has been chosen because of the ethical issues connected with speaking to young people, as some of the themes being looked at could be triggering for them, and this needs to be avoided to protect their health and wellbeing.

Cottrell (2014, p. 79) suggests that "...at the start of your project browse widely, dipping into the literature to gain a broad sense of the field in which you are working." She goes on to explain how a literature review is about finding and pulling together published papers on a specific topic, then reading through them to determine what the main issues are. This process is then followed up by writing an article that highlights and summarises the key points and information that were discovered. Cottrell (2014) believes that an extended literature review can be useful as it saves having to read all the separate papers, and provides an at a glance summary of the key issues, as well as highlighting any gaps in the research.

After some consideration, the author opted for the following title to guide the extended literature review:

Growing up with ACEs: how early experiences influence relationships and connections during adolescence. Lessons for Youth Workers.

This extended literature review aims to discover how ACEs may affect the dynamics of young people's relationships with friends and Youth Workers in their community. There will be a focus on the relationships built with Youth Workers, and this research can be used as a tool for future practice with young people. Exploring these relationships is vital because it helps create a safe space and environment for young people to find ways of connecting with others and building positive relationships outside the home environment, where they feel better understood and supported.

Additionally, this extended literature review aims to determine what levels of awareness there are amongst Youth Workers regarding ACEs. This is to ensure that there is better awareness around the underlying reasons for some of the challenging behaviours present in young people and how this affects their interpersonal relationships with friends and Youth Workers within community Youth Work settings.

The review also aims to find out how Youth Workers can spot the signs of ACEs, for example, physical, sexual, emotional and behavioural abuse. It is important that Youth Workers are able to spot these things so that they can safeguard young people by reporting anything that they feel is concerning, and signpost them to the help and support they need.

Finally, the review aims to explore interventions to support young people in developing positive relationships, so that they grow and develop into adults who are able to make positive choices for themselves, which will benefit their mental health and wellbeing in the long term.

The objectives of this extended literature review are for the author to research current relevant literature, by searching the articles in the academic journals and text books, as well as the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) library resources. Furthermore, searching relevant additional data through wider reading, for example, from information

found via reputable Youth Work organisations such as, NSPCC, Unicef, ChildLine, Barnardo's, Young Minds, Enterprising Youth and the National Youth Agency. Through this, the author hopes to discover what the signs and symptoms of the various types of abuse are, and how these can be recognised through education and training opportunities for practicing Youth Workers.

Furthermore, by investigating the current relevant literature the author will examine the ways that ACEs can adversely impact young people's interpersonal relationships with friends and Youth Workers. For example, Glending *et al.* (2021) state that by Youth Workers building relationships this provides support to the young people, which is very important in giving them the best chance to succeed in developing positive relationships. Furthermore, Glending *et al.* (2021) believe that creating existing relationships with young people makes it easier to then deliver and support interventions. This is supported by Lester, Khatwa and Sutcliffe (2020) who say that by Youth Workers being empathetic and taking a non-judgemental approach, while actively listening to the young people, this can help build supportive relationships which helps them feel better understood. Moreover, Frederick *et al.* (2023) suggest that by building trustful and supportive relationships will have positive benefits for the young people, such as, increasing self-confidence and self-esteem, decreasing the feeling of sadness and worry, and will have a positive impact on better engagement at home and in the wider community.

Glending *et al.* (2021) suggest that negative impacts on relationships may be because of challenging behaviours from both the young people themselves and also others around them. They also suggest that young people can have a negative view of themselves, and that some behaviours can be made worse because of the way adults react, as well as escalating when other young people get involved. This may be because of Youth Workers not fully

understanding how their own attitudes and reactions can impact a young person's responses (Frederick *et al.*, 2023). Additionally, the young person's circumstances may impact their ability to deal with certain situations on an emotionally mature level, therefore rather than aiming to avoid conflict, it escalates the situation instead (Frederick *et al.*, 2023). Frederick *et al.* (2023) also state that by young people feeling affected by ACEs this can result in them having emotional stress and feeling isolated socially, which can mean that they very much want and seek out supportive relationships, where they feel accepted, heard and understood.

It is therefore vital that Youth Workers support young people by ensuring regular engagement with them, as this can help build supportive and trustful relationships, making young people feel supported, listened to and heard (Frederick *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, by exploring solutions and resolutions around the ways to best support young people who are displaying challenging behaviours, Youth Workers can help develop their interactions and engagement with them to help ensure more positive outcomes. Also, it is important that Youth Workers deliver trauma-informed practice so that young people can be properly supported on an emotional and practical level, to ensure that the spaces and environments provided feel safe and secure for them (Glending *et al.*, 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Huelsnitz, Jones and Simpson (2026, p. 1201) describe relationships as “...social connections or bonds between two or more individuals that vary in closeness, commitment and duration”. According to Sapin (2013), young people’s relationships are important in allowing their voice to be heard, as well as supporting their social skills, such as good communication, self-understanding, and empathy towards others. Building rapport and trust with Youth Workers is also important because it enables young people to thrive in a “supportive and nurturing environment” (Sapin, 2013, p. 92).

This is particularly important for young people who have suffered Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). ACEs are defined by Young Minds (2021-2026, np) as “...highly stressful and potentially traumatic events or situations that occur during childhood or adolescence.” It is therefore vital that Youth Workers have a thorough understanding of the impact of ACEs, so that they can support young people in ways that give them the best chance to grow and develop on both a personal and social level (Davies and Merton, 2009).

This extended literature review investigates three main themes, namely, the relationships that young people experience and the positive impact they can have on their confidence and wellbeing, the signs and symptoms of ACEs and Youth Workers knowledge and understanding of them, and the interventions that can support Youth Workers and young people. Firstly, it focuses on the importance of young people developing and maintaining positive relationships, both within and outside of the Youth Work setting.

Lester *et al.* (2020) found that relationships are vital for young people during adolescence, as they help develop their social and communication skills. Likewise, Whitehead *et al.* (2019)

discovered that young people can form meaningful and trustworthy relationships with Youth Workers, and that:

...young people commonly view relationships with trusted adults as supportive, describing a range of benefits such as greater self-confidence, decreased feeling of sadness and worry, and better school engagement and achievement.

(Whitehead *et al.*, 2019, p.3).

The next part of the review determines the key signs and symptoms of ACEs, and how Youth Workers can spot them in order to ensure young people are appropriately supported. It also explores what current levels of awareness and understanding there are amongst Youth Workers regarding ACEs, and whether this is effectively applied within Youth Work settings. Sapin (2013) proposes that by understanding the challenges that young people face, Youth Workers can help build more supportive and trusting relationships with them, as well as help them to access the right support through signposting and guiding them to the right agencies.

This leads into the final part of this review, which examines appropriate interventions that can aid Youth Workers in providing the most valuable and helpful support to the young people they work with. There is an exploration of solutions and resolutions around the ways to best support young people who are displaying challenging behaviours, and how they can be supported in their interactions and engagement with others to secure more positive outcomes. Also, the review highlights the importance of delivering trauma-informed practice, so that young people can be properly supported on an emotional and practical level (Glending *et al.*, 2021).

2.2 Methodology and methods

Search strategy

The researcher began their search strategy by using the University of Wales Trinity Saint David's (UWTSD) Library, Perplex and Google Scholar because they hold current, relevant literature across several databases that the university subscribes to, as well as having access to Moodle, which also has relevant sources.

Furthermore, they began by using Google Scholar, which helped them find relevant literature by using keywords such as “young people; adverse childhood experiences (ACEs); relationships and adolescence; signs and symptoms of ACEs; and Youth Work, Youth Workers and interventions.” The reason the researcher used these key terms was to narrow down the focus of the research and eliminate literature that was not relevant to the extended literature review. The author also made use of searching the reference lists on relevant selected articles to follow these up and glean more relevant literature to include.

Cottrell (2014, p. 79) suggests that “...at the start of your project browse widely, dipping into the literature to gain a broad sense of the field in which you are working.” She goes on to explain how a literature review is about finding and pulling together published papers on a specific topic, then reading through them to determine what the main issues are. This process is then followed up by writing an article that highlights and summarises the key points and information that were discovered. Cottrell (2014) believes that an extended literature review can be useful as it saves having to read all the separate papers, and provides an at-a-glance summary of the key issues, as well as highlighting any gaps in the research.

The author read the abstracts first to help with selecting appropriate sources. The electronic search editor was used to locate relevant texts within the articles and help narrow down the reading.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

In terms of the inclusion and exclusion criteria used and why, the author focussed their search on literature from 2020-2025. Even though there were older sources available, the author decided to focus on this range as it was less than 5 years old which ensured that current and relevant literature was being used to give the most up to date perspective and view.

Additionally, only English language articles from the academic journals were used, and only those that were peer reviewed were selected because they would have been thoroughly checked to ensure their validity and authenticity. On the contrary, literature from before 2020 was excluded as it was not current. Also, any sources not in the English language, or not peer reviewed, were rejected as they were not considered relevant to this extended literature review.

Table 1: search criteria

Database name	Key words/phrases used	Boolean operators used	Search limits (inclusions/exclusions)	No. of results
• UWTSD Library • Perplex • Google Scholar Because they hold current relevant literature across several databases that the University subscribes to	Young people Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Relationships Adolescence Signs and symptoms of ACEs Youth Work Youth Workers Interventions	OR AND * “” ?	<i>Inclusions:</i> Literature from 2020-2025 Peer reviewed articles/journals <i>Exclusions:</i> Literature from before 2020 Literature that was not peer reviewed Anything that was not relevant to the focus themes	1000 results narrowed down to the final 66 sources included in the extended literature review

Included theories

The author decided to include the following theories in the extended literature review:

- Bandura's (1971) Social Learning Theory as it links to how Youth Workers act as important role models to the young people they support. This theory can also be linked to the positive and negative impact that family and friends have on young people.
- Bowlby's (1969, 1988) Attachment Theory because it focusses on the importance of how young people develop attachments to caregivers, friends, family members and Youth Workers.
- Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) because it demonstrates how the environment can change a person, and how a person can also change their environment. This includes spending time doing outdoor activities as this can help young people appreciate and promote sustainability, as well supporting good mental health and wellbeing in themselves and others.
- Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) which suggests that the basic needs (air, food, water, sleep) and necessities (love, belonging, security) need to be met first before they can achieve higher goals in life (self-actualisation, reaching full potential) .
- Erikson's (1950) Psychosocial Development Theory as it highlights the links between early childhood attachment and later developing relationships of trust.

Ethical considerations

There were no ethical issues in terms of researching and writing up this extended literature review as there were no participants to consider.

2.3 Relationships

Interpersonal relationships are defined by Huelsnitz, Jones and Simpson (2026, p. 1201) as “...social connections or bonds between two or more individuals that vary in closeness, commitment and duration”. It is very important that young people have the opportunity to build supportive and trusting relationships with others in their life, as there are many positive benefits for them (Sapin, 2013). For instance, having good relationships with family, friends and professionals such as teachers and Youth Workers, can help raise self-esteem and self-confidence, reduce feelings of anxiety and depression and encourage positive engagement within their community as well as at home (Sapin, 2013). Also, friendships start to become more important to young people in adolescence, and they value the opinions of their friends as this helps support their sense of belonging within their friendship groups (Bradford Brown and Larson, 2019).

This strongly links to Bowlby’s Attachment Theory (1969, 1988 cited in McLeod, 2025, np) which suggests that relationships are very important to young people. Building attachments to others around them helps young people navigate their social world, where they can feel confident and self-assured. Bowlby proposed that creating bonds and connections with others is fundamental to healthy emotional development in young people and is seen as a survival strategy. By young people creating healthy emotional bonds in the early stages of their lives, they are able to grow and mature into positive and self-confident adults (1969, 1988 cited in McLeod, 2025, np). This is also supported in Erikson’s (1950, cited in Cherry, 2026, np) Psychosocial Development Theory which suggests there is a link between attachments that happen in early childhood and the ability to developing relationships of trust later on in life.

However, some young people can fall into the more negative behaviours displayed within their friendship group in a bid to fit in (Bradford Brown and Larson, 2019). This may be

because many young people lack the resilience to avoid the harmful effects of the group due to ACEs, and this can impact their ability to connect with available support systems there to help them effectively manage the challenges in their life (Healthwatch, 2019). Furthermore, due to not feeling a sense of value or belonging, this can mean that they end up getting involved in anti-social or criminal activities such as animal cruelty, bullying, criminal damage, fighting and gang involvement (Hesselink, 2023). Therefore it is very important that young people are able to achieve a sense of belonging and responsibility within the community and environment they live, so that they feel that they want to look after and value things (Quinones, 2023). This can include community connections which might involve activities that Youth Work offers, such as litter picking or maintaining communal gardens.

According to Sapin (2013), it is important that young people have opportunities to engage in positive relationships with Youth Workers, so that they feel safe, happy and comfortable within the Youth Work setting. For this to happen voluntarily, naturally and successfully, Davies and Merton (2009) argue that Youth Workers should ensure that young people feel listened to and that their voices are heard. They also suggest that Youth Workers provide chances for voluntary participation in a variety of social activities that young people are interested in. This links to Social Learning Theory which can support “desirable behaviour change”, especially when activities promote positive outcomes, such as kindness, compassion, and sustainable practices (Bandura, 1977, cited in Nabavi and Bijandi, 2011, p. 5).

Davies and Merton (2009) also go on to say that Youth Workers should ensure that young people are informed of, and are able to participate in, any decision-making that affects them. This helps ensure that they are thriving within safe spaces and environments provided for them, and have the assistance of multi-agency working when appropriate, so that they are

able to build healthy relationships with those they come into contact with (Davies and Merton, 2009).

However, sometimes young people, especially those who have suffered ACEs, struggle with expressing themselves appropriately, and this can have a negative effect on their behaviour, which can escalate and create conflict within their relationships (Frederick *et al.*, 2023).

Glenning *et al.* (2021) suggest that negative impacts on relationships may be because of challenging behaviours from the young people themselves and also others around them. They also suggest that young people can have a negative view of themselves, and that some behaviours can be made worse because of the way adults react, as well as situations often escalating when other young people get involved. Additionally, the young person's personal circumstances and life experiences may impact their ability to deal with certain situations on an emotionally mature level, therefore rather than aiming to avoid conflict, it escalates the situation instead (Frederick *et al.*, 2023).

Therefore, Sapin (2013) argues that it is important that Youth Workers look at how young people's interpersonal relationships might be affected by ACEs, as this could help explain some of their more challenging behaviours. Moreover, exploring and observing young people's relationships is vital because it helps Youth Workers create safe spaces and environments for them to find ways of connecting with others, fostering positive relationships outside their home, and building environments where they feel better understood and supported (Sapin, 2013). Frederick *et al.* (2023) go on to state that by young people feeling affected by ACEs this can result in them having emotional stress and feeling isolated socially, which can mean that they very much want and seek out supportive relationships, where they feel accepted, heard and understood.

However, sometimes Youth Workers, other adults, or figures of authority themselves play a part in situations escalating, because of not fully understanding how their own attitudes and reactions can impact a young person's reactions and responses (Frederick *et al.*, 2023). Hiles Howard *et al.* (2015) suggest this may be because of things that they might be struggling with in their own history or personal life, work stress, or that they have compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue is something that can happen to professionals working in caring or educational roles where they lose their sense of empathy and understanding towards the young people they are working with and become cold and dismissive towards them (Hiles Howard *et al.*, 2015).

Sapin (2013) also highlights how Youth Workers can benefit from taking notice of young people's perspectives on a range of issues, which can help them develop a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by those who have experienced ACEs. It is therefore vital that Youth Workers support young people by ensuring regular engagement with them, as this can help build supportive and trustful relationships, making young people feel supported, listened to and heard (Frederick *et al.*, 2023). Sapin (2013) goes on to say that having an empathetic non-judgmental approach, when working with young people who have experienced ACEs, can help Youth Workers build more supportive and trusting relationships with them as well as helping them to access appropriate support through signposting to the right agencies.

Furthermore, Lester, Khatwa and Sutcliffe (2020) and Glending *et al.* (2021) believe that by continuing to nurture existing relationships with young people, this makes it easier to then deliver support interventions as and when needed. Glending *et al.* (2021) state that by Youth Workers focussing on building strong long lasting and meaningful relationships with young people in these ways, it provides continuous support to them, which is very important in

giving them the best chance to succeed in developing positive relationships with others in their life. This can in turn positively impact other areas of young people's lives, "helping them to grow up to become healthy, caring and responsible" (Clary and Rhodes, 2006, pp. 6-7).

Therefore, Davies and Merton (2009) suggest that Youth Workers should take every opportunity to support young people, whilst continuously reflecting on their own attitudes, behaviours, and professional practice, so that they are presenting themselves as good role models to the young people. They also draw attention to the fact that Youth Work is about getting young people involved in their communities, providing them with a sense of belonging, as mentioned earlier (Quinones, 2023), and supporting them to make informed decisions so that they feel empowered to build strong healthy lasting relationships that benefit them across the whole of their lives in a variety of positive ways (Davies and Merton, 2009).

2.4 Signs and symptoms of ACEs and levels of awareness amongst Youth

Workers

Definition

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are defined by the NHS (2026, np) and Young Minds (2021-2026, np) as "...stressful or traumatic experiences that can greatly impact children and young people throughout their lives".

The NHS (2026, np) suggest there are ten types of ACEs that could affect young people in their lives:

...physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, emotional neglect, physical neglect, ...adults with alcohol and drug problems, ...adults with mental

health problems, ...domestic violence, ...adults who have spent time in prison and parents that have separated.

(NHS, 2026, np)

ACEs matter to Youth Workers and young people, because, as pointed out by the NHS (2026, np), they affect young people's lives, as they "...can create harmful levels of stress, which impact healthy brain development. This can result in long-term effects on learning behaviour and health".

Signs and symptoms of ACEs

The signs of ACEs that a Youth Worker could spot in young people are stated in Young Minds (2021-2026, np) as "...Nightmares or flashbacks, acting out, withdrawing, agitated and hyper-sensitive, zoned out, substance misuse and changes in eating habits".

According to Hardcastle *et al.* (2018), young people's early life experiences, whether they be positive or negative events, can affect cognitive development in a number of ways. They suggest that this can include things such as experiencing trauma and chronic stress which can affect their neurological and hormonal development, resulting in poor mental health and behavioural issues, also they may have trust issues, especially when it comes to those who are figures of authority. Likewise, O'Neill, Boullier and Blair (2021) found that young people who have experienced four or more ACEs are more likely to have a risk of poor mental health and wellbeing and display behaviours that can cause a risk to their health. They also found that people who had suffered ACEs in childhood were four times more likely to suffer chronic disease before the age of 69 years, including Type 2 diabetes, and they are three times more likely to develop respiratory or heart disease compared to those who had not suffered ACEs. Moreover, O'Neill, Boullier and Blair (2021) found an America study that

showed that those who suffered ACEs in childhood were more likely to die 20 years earlier than those who had not suffered ACEs.

Young people experiencing ACEs were three times more likely to never, or hardly ever relax, or form social closeness with other people, and were six times less likely to feel positive and optimistic about their future, or feel useful (O'Neill, Boullier and Blair, 2021). Furthermore, O'Neill, Boullier and Blair (2021) say that by having these feelings, young people were more likely to increase their risk taking behaviours, such as drinking alcohol to excess, using drugs like crack cocaine or heroin, and were twenty times more likely to end up in jail.

Young people who have experienced three or more ACEs are also more likely to have a risk of poor school attendance, behavioural issues, and a failure to reach grade standards in mathematics, English, and writing (Blodgett and Lanigan, 2019). Having ACEs can also lead to poor sexual health outcomes in young people, resulting in them having early sexual intercourse, becoming a mum or dad at a young age, and increasing their risk of having a lifetime diagnosis of sexually transmitted infections (Wood *et al.*, 2022).

Furthermore, Stout, Tsotsoros and Hawkins (2022), suggest that young people with ACEs can suffer isolation and loneliness, and this can affect their cognitive and social functioning. They go on to explain that because young people with ACEs may not have the ability to instigate social interactions, partly because they do not have the coping mechanisms to navigate what they perceive to be potential stressful situations. Mohling *et al.* (2024) also discovered that female young people were more at risk of self-harm and cutting behaviours as well as suicidal ideation, if they had suffered ACEs.

Levels of awareness amongst Youth Workers

Riley *et al.* (2019) have found that there is a high level of awareness of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), including among individuals employed within the publicly funded services and sectors in Wales. Riley *et al.* (2019, p. 7) suggests that “75% of 3,033 respondents reported having heard of the term ACEs before engaging with the survey”. They also found that awareness of the term ACEs was highest within the Youth Work sector at 92%, and the charitable and third sector at 90%. This suggests that the more awareness of ACEs in the Youth Work sector, the more they can prevent and mitigate the impact of ACEs on young people.

The Institute of Health Equity (2015) suggests that if Youth Workers have low awareness of ACEs, it may result in a range of problems that could impact effective relationships and delay support for vulnerable young people. This could result in Youth Workers not understanding the young people's challenging or misunderstood behaviours, missed opportunities for interventions, and potentially retraumatising the young people they serve (Institute of Health Equity, 2015).

Young Minds (2021-2026, np) states that this lack of awareness can mean that young people may not engage with Youth Work services. This could result in a breakdown in trust, with the consequence of them engaging in risk-taking behaviours, such as substance misuse, behavioural issues, and low engagement in accessing and attending support services (Young Minds, 2021-2026, np).

Recent studies in Wales, have found that Youth Workers have demonstrated a commitment to developing and forming an understanding of ACEs through an effective nationwide response, via a series of ACE-based studies (Bellis *et al.*, 2015; Ashton *et al.*, 2016; Hughes *et al.*, 2018, all cited in Spratt and Kennedy, 2020, p. 5).

Furthermore, Hughes (2018, cited in Spratt and Kennedy, 2020, p. 5) examined the importance of resilience and managing relationships with harms from ACEs, and discovered that having a reliable, trustworthy and supportive adult figure may moderate negative outcomes. The positives of Youth Workers having a good understanding of ACEs are that young people are more likely to engage in Youth Work services and attend support groups or services that practitioners have referred them to. Youth Workers will also be more likely to be able to help and support young people to thrive and grow in a safe space and environment. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979, cited in Guy-Evans, 2024) states that the environment young people are raised in and interact with will determine their long term outcomes. Similarly, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943, cited in McLeod, 2026) demonstrates the importance of young people's basic needs being met so that they can achieve their full potential in life.

2.5 Interventions

Interventions are defined by Youth Link Scotland (2024, p. 1) as "Youth work can be targeted or universal. Targeted Youth Work involves focused and tailored interventions aimed at specific groups of young people to bring about often pre-agreed outcomes". Youth Futures Foundation (no date) say that interventions are an important part of Youth Work practice, because by tackling issues as they arise, Youth Workers can intervene at an early stage which can help reduce the young person's chance of disengagement. It can also support them in making better choices towards improved long term outcomes (Youth Futures Foundation, no date). Interventions can also help improve short term outcomes, such as better mental health and wellbeing, improved educational accomplishments, and reduced risk-taking behaviours (UK Youth, 2024).

Sonneveld *et al.* (2021), say that although interventions are focussed on young people, they can also help practitioners further develop their knowledge and understanding, by promoting good standards of professional practice, extending experiences with a variety of young people, which can then help refine interventions, to provide more tailored approaches in future. Youth Workers can exercise interventions by offering group activities within Youth Work settings, designed to educate and guide the young people in a variety of areas, such as substance misuse, sexual health, and treating others with kindness and respect. Similarly, interventions can also happen on individual one-to-one basis. This may be in response to observing issues that arise within the Youth Work setting, for instance, bullying, challenging behaviours, or racist language. Using these different methods they can reach more young people and help them to develop team working skills as well as share good practice outcomes amongst Youth Workers (Sonneveld *et al.*, 2021). Sonneveld *et al.* (2021), also talk about how interventions can happen within Youth Work settings, but also as detached Youth Work which takes place out and about on the streets. Youth Workers can use this way of connecting with young people as a means to link young people with support networks that they might not be aware of if they do not attend traditional youth groups (Milburn *et al.*, no date, cited in Sonneveld *et al.*, 2021, p. 341).

Healy and Rodriguez (2018) further explain how interventions are appropriate whenever individual or group needs arise. It is important that Youth Workers are able to spot when interventions are necessary and choose what kind of action is appropriate for the issue that has occurred (Healy and Rodriguez, 2018). They also highlight how it is important that young people's needs are being met appropriately, and their voice is heard and listened to. This is because the young people need to be at the centre of any intervention carried out, with their best interests at heart, rather than prioritising the needs of the Youth Workers or Youth Work setting to make their life easier in some way (Healy and Rodriguez, 2018).

Youth Workers need to know whether the interventions they use actually work. The National Youth Agency (NYA) (2024) say that they know when interventions have worked as they notice positive changes in behaviour, for example, young people become more enthusiastic about wanting to take part in activities offered at Youth Work settings. NYA (2024) also discovered that deeper trust develops between Youth Workers and the young people they work with. The young people also showed improved self-esteem, better relationships, and they appeared to be able to regulate and manage their emotions in more appropriate and healthier ways.

Additionally, from gathering feedback and evaluation from young people, Youth Workers can measure the effectiveness of any interventions they use (NYA, 2024). Also, through observing the young people, and actively supporting them to make positive choices, Youth Workers can encourage them to practise their skills in team work, active listening, and ways of negotiating fair outcomes, within their local Youth Work settings, at home, and in their community NYA (2024).

However, Elias (2026) says that it is also very important that Youth Workers take a trauma informed approach when actioning any interventions. A trauma informed approach involves Youth Workers following a framework that supports and strengthens their ability to recognise and pre-empt the impact of trauma, so that they can help “prevent re-traumatisation by creating safe spaces and environments” (Bainborough and Ord, 2017-2026, np).

Two such interventions are the TrACE-Informed Organisations Toolkit and ERI, both of which offer key ways to help support young people who are displaying the signs and symptoms of ACEs. They both embrace the importance of Youth Workers delivering trauma-informed practice. This is so that the young people can be appropriately and empathetically

supported so that they are protected emotionally and get the right practical tailored advice for their specific needs.

According to Elias (2026), it is important that, when professional Youth Work practitioners talk to young people about trauma or ACEs, they should always follow the young person's lead. If and when young people choose to talk about their trauma and ACEs, Youth Workers can consider a variety of ways to respond to them (Elias, 2026). For example, Young Minds (2021-2026, np), suggest they "...do not assume, listen, reflect, help them find the right support and signpost". As Youth Workers, it is important that by listening to and talking to young people, practitioners can create a safe space and environment, and this links to the National Occupational Standards, "YW01 Building and maintaining relationships with young people" (CLD Standards Council Scotland, 2019, p. 1).

Furthermore, ACE Hub Wales (2022) are an organisation with a website that promotes free training around ACEs. They also offer training on trauma informed approaches that can be applied with Youth Work settings, as well as raising awareness around the ways that new and experienced practitioners can apply these methods in their professional practice within Youth Work settings (ACE Hub Wales, 2022). Likewise, Early Rehabilitation Interventions (ERI) is a trauma informed awareness intervention that links adolescent resilience with positive development in young people (Chandler, Roberts and Chiodo, 2015). This approach helps build resilience in young people by helping them explore their emotions in a safe space via Mindfulness techniques, and supporting them in developing their sense of self, building maturity, as well as supporting their mental health and wellbeing (Chandler, Roberts and Chiodo, 2015).

2.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this extended literature review set out to examine how early experiences of growing up with ACEs and trauma can influence young people's relationships and connections with Youth Workers during adolescence. The review focussed on the role of Youth Workers and the lessons they can learn in order to help improve their future practice. It investigated three main themes, specifically, relationships, signs and symptoms of ACEs and Youth Workers knowledge and understanding of them, and the importance of appropriate interventions.

Firstly, it was found that by young people developing positive interpersonal relationships with Youth Workers this can help strengthen their bonds and help promote and support their voice being heard. This is seen as important because it helps young people feel valued, and that they are part of any decision making process. It also helps young people develop strong lasting relationships with Youth Workers, peers, and other community members, which supports their social skills and allows them to feel a sense of belonging within their community. These things often take shape and develop in the nurturing environments within Youth Work settings, especially for those who have a family background of trauma and ACEs. It also helps young people to develop and succeed in terms of their personal and social attributes.

Secondly, the review determined the key signs and symptoms of ACEs, and how Youth Workers can spot them and help ensure young people are appropriately supported. It also explored current levels of awareness amongst Youth Workers regarding and whether these are effectively applied within Youth Work settings. It appears from the research that Youth Workers generally have good knowledge and awareness of the signs and symptoms of ACEs and they are able to apply their knowledge in a range of appropriate ways in order to help and

support young people. It was also found that this helped Youth Workers to build trusting relationships with young people which enabled them to signpost to appropriate external agencies.

The final part of the review examined appropriate interventions that help Youth Workers provide the most valuable and helpful support to the young people they work with. Various interventions were explored including the TrACE-Informed Organisations Toolkit and ERI, both of which offered ways to best support young people who are displaying signs and symptoms of ACEs. The review also highlighted how it is important that Youth Workers deliver trauma-informed practice. This is so that the young people can be properly and suitably supported so that they are protected emotionally and get the right practical advice moving forward.

Overall, this review demonstrates that Youth Work plays a vital role in supporting young people who have experienced ACEs and trauma, not only by recognising their needs but by creating environments where they can rebuild trust, confidence, and connections. The evidence suggests that when Youth Workers combine relational practice with trauma informed approaches, they are better equipped to respond to the complex emotional and social challenges that young people face. What emerges clearly is the need for Youth Work settings to remain reflective, well informed, and responsive, ensuring that staff continue to develop their understanding of trauma and its impact. By strengthening professional knowledge and embedding supportive interventions, Youth Workers can contribute meaningfully to young people's resilience and long term wellbeing. This highlights the ongoing importance of investing in training, resources, and practice frameworks that enable Youth Workers to offer safe, consistent, and empowering support.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 Introduction

This section summarises, interprets, and evaluates the results and findings of the extended literature review. It also identifies some gaps in the research, which will be explored and evaluated in detail. The main findings were that it is important for young people to have opportunities to develop healthy relationships and bonds with Youth Workers and peer groups. Furthermore, this should be encouraged within safe spaces and environments, such as Youth Work settings, so that young people have every opportunity to thrive in life. It was also found that there are really good levels of awareness amongst Youth Workers regarding ACEs and their impact on the young people they work with. A few interventions were discovered in the research, for example TrACE-Informed Organisations Toolkit and ERI, both of which appeared to work well (Chandler, Roberts and Chiodo, 2015; ACE Hub Wales, 2022). However, there is a clear need for more interventions to be applied and their outcomes scrutinised in order to further Youth Workers' understandings of how interventions best work, especially when adopting tailored approaches to young people's needs.

3.2 Themes and findings

Theme 1: Relationships

A key significant finding was that relationships are very important to all young people, but especially for those who have suffered ACEs (Sapin, 2024). This appears to be because the impact of ACEs has a negative effect on young people's ability to form healthy meaningful relationships (Sapin, 2014; Glending *et al.*, 2021; Huelsnitz, Jones and Simpson, 2026). The research (Glending *et al.*, 2021) indicates that providing young people with safe spaces and environments to suit their needs, gives them lots of opportunities to form, and further build on, their relationships. Moreover, when there is good rapport between young people and

Youth Workers this can enhance their chances of developing healthy, positive and meaningful bonds with others in their peer groups as well as the adult Youth Workers who also act as role models (Huelsenitz, Jones and Simpson, 2026).

Although these findings were interesting, it was noted that there was little current research to draw upon. This is significant because in the last three years there may have been further developments in research, which could provide information to enhance Youth Workers' practice. This could then further their knowledge and understanding around the key role that relationships play, helping them in nurturing young people's holistic development.

Theme 2: Signs and symptoms of ACEs and levels of awareness amongst Youth Workers.

The lit review discovered that Youth Workers actually had a very good knowledge and understanding of the signs and symptoms of ACEs and how these can be spotted in Youth Work and external settings, such as schools or outreach work. It was also found by Institute of Health Equity (2015) and Riley *et al.* (2019) that they were able to apply this knowledge and understanding well in their practice, and that Youth Workers utilised trauma-informed approaches to ensure the best possible outcomes for the young people they support. They applied this approach in order to safeguard young people in their time of crisis or need. It was apparent that Youth Workers always aim to apply a young person-centred approach to any issues arising.

It would have been informative to have seen more case studies to get real-life examples of how Youth Workers apply and utilise their approach to various situations that commonly arise in Youth Work settings. This would be helpful for other Youth Workers to see outcomes, and learn from others' practice and experiences. It would also assist Youth Workers to take on some of these approaches and apply them to their own unique settings to see what works well and what does not. Case studies could have also provided a starting

point for dialogue and discussion on what approaches to use in individual professional practice.

Theme 3: Interventions

The findings show that there are many interventions that Youth Workers are able to access to help further develop their knowledge and understanding and support young people well (Chandler, Roberts and Chiodo, 2015; ACE Hub Wales, 2022). Youth Workers have a good awareness of the term ACEs and as such, the interventions they use are based on trauma informed practice. The findings also demonstrate that the second and third sectors have a good working knowledge of ACEs and the importance of applying appropriate interventions in practice (Riley *et al.*, 2019).

The findings suggest that interventions can be targeted or universal; what is important is that a Youth Workers take a tailored approach to any issues that arise. The literature indicates/implies that tackling issues as they arise, and not leaving things to escalate, is important because early intervention can help the young people to get the support they need in a timely manner (Elias, 2026). This can support young people's short- and long-term outcomes, particularly in terms of their mental health and wellbeing. Taking this approach also demonstrates good standards of professional practice, which links to being a positive role model showing kindness, understanding and respect towards young people and the situations they find themselves in. Taking a trauma informed approach, and ensuring that the young person leads any conversation can help young people feel listened to, heard and not judged. This way they are more likely to open up and share their problems with Youth Workers, as they will feel that safe to do so (Elias, 2026).

3.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, it was discovered that building healthy relationships with family, friends, and Youth Workers is very important to young people. This is because it helps them feel a sense of belonging in their community, build trustful associations with others, develop good social and communication skills, and allows them to feel safe in their environment.

It was found that there were high levels of awareness amongst Youth Workers regarding the signs and symptoms of ACEs and levels of understanding regarding trauma informed approaches to Youth Work. This is an important finding as it means that Youth Workers are able to recognise when young people are experiencing difficulties and consider how to approach any issues or situations that arise appropriately.

It was determined that there are many interventions that are available to Youth Workers, the two key ones covered here were TrACE-Informed Organisations Toolkit and ERI (Chandler, Roberts and Chiodo, 2015; ACE Hub Wales, 2022). It is important that Youth Workers take a trauma-informed approach to supporting young people, therefore they need to think carefully and consider which intervention, or approach, is appropriate to apply. This involves ensuring that a tailored approach is taken in line with the young person's individual needs and unique circumstances.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

To conclude, this extended literature review set out to examine the current literature regarding the impact of ACEs young people's relationships with their friends, families, Youth Workers, and other community members. Firstly, it explored how ACEs can have a detrimental impact on the relationships that young people form with those around them in their communities. It was found that these relationships are very important to young people in general, but especially to those who have experienced ACEs, as they form the foundation for stable and positive outcomes in adolescence which can carry through to the rest of their adult life too (Sapin, 2014; Huelsnitz, Jones and Simpson, 2026)). By Youth Workers having a good understanding of ACEs and the impact they have on young people, they are better able to support them in individual appropriate ways. This can help the young people grow and develop their personal and social skills, so that they have the best chance to succeed in life and take advantage of the same opportunities that are open to their peers.

Next, it was found that there were very good levels of awareness amongst Youth Workers concerning ACEs and how to spot the signs and symptoms in young people. It is encouraging to discover that this is the case, because when professional Youth Workers have a good knowledge and understanding of the issues that young people face, this adds strength to their practice ref. This means that Youth Workers are in a strong position to recognise and know when young people are experience challenges with ACEs, and how to intervene and provide the right support in a timely manner. Early intervention is important because it could help young people avoid falling into negative behavioural patterns and/or get involved in substance abuse/misuse.

Finally, the review explored interventions that Youth Workers can access and use in order to offer appropriate and timely support to the young people in need that they work with.

Interventions are of key importance in Youth Work practice, as they tackle issues as they arise and by Youth Workers intervening early this can help reduce the young person's chance of disengagement. It was also found that using appropriate interventions can help keep young people safe, and improve their long term outcomes, for instance, TrACE-Informed Organisations Toolkit and ERI, both seemed to work well and make a positive difference (Chandler, Roberts and Chiodo, 2015; ACE Hub Wales, 2022). Interventions can also help Youth Workers find out the ways that work best for the young people they are in contact with, as distinct and unique circumstances may arise at different settings. Most importantly, by using the right interventions in practice, Youth Workers can demonstrate their skills at being good role models, which can support the young people in making positive life choices for themselves and their futures.

4.2 Recommendations

One of the key recommendations is that more studies need to be carried out that examine the impact of interventions on outcomes for young people. This is so that the profession can measure whether outcomes from using current recommended interventions are working, and to what extent they are successful or not. Also, more up to date information on any new interventions would be helpful for current Youth Work practitioners so that they can stay up to date with the most recent developments and apply these in their professional practice. Additionally, by including young people's voices in data gathering this would help improve the research and help both young people and Youth Workers to gain more insightful perspectives regarding the type and frequency of any support that is needed and how this might be effectively delivered in practice.

Finally, including young people's voices in data gathering would help both the young people and Youth Workers to gain the best perspective regarding what support is needed and how this is effectively delivered.

4.3 Limitations

One of the limitations of the extended literature review was that it was difficult to locate relevant case studies, which may have illustrated how the interventions were working in practice.

Another limitation was that the interventions cited in the literature were few, and of those many were outdated, therefore it would have been useful to have discovered more recent interventions with information on how well they are working. Additionally, it would have been insightful to have up to date information on how interventions are measured so that we know what works well and this can be generalised across different Youth Work settings.

Finally, another limitation was that a lot of the literature was coming from the viewpoint of the Youth Work practitioners, therefore a young-person centred approach to gathering data would have been good for raising better awareness on how young people perceive the support they receive from Youth Workers.

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6. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Ethics Form

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

RESEARCH STUDENTS

This form is to be completed by the student within **SIX** months for full-time students and **TWELVE** months for part time students, after the commencement of the research degree or following progression to Part Two of your course.

Once complete, submit this form via the **MyTSD Doctoral College Portal** at (<https://mytsd.uwtsd.ac.uk>).

This document is also available in Welsh.

RESEARCH STAFF ONLY

All communications relating to this application during its processing must be in writing and emailed to pgresearch@uwtsd.ac.uk, with the title 'Ethical Approval' followed by your name.

STUDENTS ON UNDERGRADUATE OR TAUGHT MASTERS PROGRAMMES should submit this form (and receive the outcome) via systems explained to you by the supervisor/module leader.

In order for research to result in benefit and minimise risk of harm, it must be conducted ethically. A researcher may not be covered by the University's insurance if ethical approval has not been obtained prior to commencement.

The University follows the OECD Frascati manual definition of **research activity**: "creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications". As such this covers activities undertaken by members of staff, postgraduate research students, and both taught postgraduate and undergraduate students working on dissertations/projects.

The individual undertaking the research activity is known as the "principal researcher".

Ethical approval is not required for routine audits, performance reviews, quality assurance studies, testing within normal educational requirements, and literary or artistic criticism.

Please read the notes for guidance before completing ALL sections of the form.

This form must be completed and approved prior to undertaking any research activity. Please see Checklist for details of process for different categories of application.

SECTION A: About You (Principal Researcher)

1	Full Name:	Courtney Rumsey			
2	Tick all boxes that apply:	Member of staff:	☐	Honorary research fellow:	☐
	Undergraduate Student	☒	Taught Postgraduate Student	☐	Postgraduate Research Student

3	Institute/Academic Discipline/Centre:	Institute of Education and Humanities/Young People, Communities and Youth Work/Centre for Childhood, Youth and Education
4	Campus:	Carmarthen
5	E-mail address:	2316479@student.uwtsd.ac.uk
6	Contact Telephone Number:	07572 76 88 98
For students:		
7	Student Number:	2316479
8	Programme of Study:	BA Young People, Communities and Youth Work (ETS Endorsed)
9	Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Angharad Lewis/Alana Enoch

SECTION B: Approval for Research Activity

1	Has the research activity received approval in principle? (please check the Guidance Notes as to the appropriate approval process for different levels of research by different categories of individual)	YES	☒	NO	☐
					Date
2	If Yes, please indicate source of approval (and date where known): Approval in principle must be obtained from the relevant source prior to seeking ethical approval	Research Degrees Committee	☐		
Institute Research Committee		☐			
Other (write in) Alana Enoch		☒	04/12/2025		

SECTION C: Internal and External Ethical Guidance Materials

	Please list the core ethical guidance documents that have been referred to during the completion of this form (including any discipline-specific codes of research ethics, location-specific codes of research ethics, and also any specific ethical guidance relating to the proposed methodology). Please tick to confirm that your research proposal adheres to these codes and guidelines. You may add rows to this table if needed.	
1	<u>UWTSD Research Ethics & Integrity Code of Practice</u>	☒
2	UWTSD Research Data Management Policy	☒
3	<i>[List any other relevant documents here]</i> BERA (2024) UNCRC (1989) Youth Work in Wales: Principles and purposes (2022) National Youth Work Strategy for Wales. (WG, 2019)	☒

SECTION D: External Collaborative Research Activity

If there are external collaborators then you should gain consent from the contact persons to share their personal data with the university. If there are no external collaborators then leave this section blank and continue to section E.

1	Institution	n/a				
2	Contact person name	n/a				
3	Contact person e-mail address	n/a				
4	Is your research externally funded?	YES	☐	NO	☒	
5	Are you in receipt of a KESS scholarship?	YES	☐	NO	☒	
6	Are you specifically employed to undertake this research in either a paid or voluntary capacity?	Voluntary	YES	☐	NO	☒
7		Employed	YES	☐	NO	☒
8	Is the research being undertaken within an existing UWTSD Athrofa Professional Learning Partnership (APLP)?	If YES then the permission question below does not need to be answered.	YES	☐	NO	☒
9	Has permission to undertake the research has been provided by the partner organisation?	(If YES attach copy) If NO the application cannot continue	YES	☐	NO	☒

Where research activity is carried out in collaboration with an external organisation (-n/a)

10	Does this organisation have its own ethics approval system?	YES	☐	NO	☒
	If Yes, please attach a copy of any final approval (or interim approval) from the organisation (this may be a copy of an email if appropriate).				

SECTION E: Details of Research Activity

1	Indicative title:	Growing Up with ACEs: How Early Experiences Influence Friendships and Connections		
2	Proposed start date:	16 th December 2025	Proposed end date:	7 th May 2026
	Introduction to the Research (maximum 300 words per section) Ensure that you write for a <u>Non-Specialist Audience</u> when outlining your response to the points below: <i>Purpose of Research Activity</i> <i>Proposed Research Question</i> <i>Aims of Research Activity</i> <i>Objectives of Research Activity</i> Demonstrate, briefly, how <u>Existing Research</u> has informed the proposed activity and explain <i>What the research activity will add to the body of knowledge</i> <i>How it addresses an area of importance.</i>			
3	Purpose of Research Activity The purpose of this research is to examine the current relevant literature to try and find out how adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) impact young people's interpersonal relationships with family members, friends, teachers and other professionals such as Youth Workers, as well as other community members. An extended literature review has been chosen because of the ethical issues connected with speaking to young people, as some of the themes being looked at could be triggering for them, and this needs to be avoided for their health and wellbeing. Positive relationships are important to young people as it helps them feel heard and understood and gives them choices about what they would like to communicate about themselves, their background, and their life (Sapin, 2013). The relationships that young people have with others should be voluntary, because not everyone is going to get along together so they should be able to choose the people they feel happy and comfortable around (Sapin, 2013). This links to the idea of participation, where young people are able to thrive in a "supportive and nurturing environment" (Sapin, 2013, p. 92). Therefore, it is important to look at how young people's interpersonal			

	relationships might be affected by ACEs, as this could help explain some of their more challenging behaviours (Sapin, 2013). According to Davies and Metton (2009), Youth work involves getting young people involved in being heard and listened to and engaging in voluntary participation in activities and ensuring that young people are informed in decision-making so that the young people can have a say and ensuring that they are thriving in a safe space and environment within a youth club and multi-agency working. Youth work is about getting young people involved and supporting them to make informed decisions so that they feel empowered (Davies and Merton, 2009). Developing a good understanding of the challenges young people who have experienced ACEs may have, could also help Youth Workers to better understand the young people from their perspective, helping them build more supportive and trusting relationships with them, and helping young people to access appropriate support through signposting them to the right agencies. References Sapin, K. (2013) <i>Essential skills for Youth Work practice</i>. 2nd edn. London: Sage Publications. Davies, B. and Merton, B. (2009) 'Squaring the Circle? The State of Youth Work in Some Children and Young People's Services', <i>Youth and Policy</i>, 103, pp. 1-108. Available at: youthandpolicy1031.pdf (Accessed: 16 December 2025). (this box should expand as you type)
4	Research Question Growing Up with ACEs: How Early Experiences Influence Friendships and Connections (this box should expand as you type)
5	Aims of Research Activity The aim of this research activity is to determine what levels of awareness there are amongst Youth Workers regarding ACEs. This is to ensure that there is better awareness around the underlying reasons for some of the challenging behaviours present in young people. The research also aims to find out how Youth Workers can spot the signs of ACEs, for example, physical, sexual, emotional and behavioural abuse. It is important that Youth Workers are able to spot these things so that they can safeguard the young person by reporting anything concerning and also signposting them to getting the help and support they need. Additionally, the research aims to discover how ACEs may affect the dynamics of young people's relationships with family, friends and others in their community. This is vital because it helps create a safe space and environment for young people to find ways of connecting with others and building positive relationships, where they feel better understood and supported. Finally, this research aims to explore interventions to support young people in developing positive relationships, so that they as they grow and develop into adults they are able to make positive choices for themselves, which will benefit their mental health and wellbeing.

	(this box should expand as you type)
6	Objectives of Research Activity To be able to achieve the intended aim of this research project, the author intends to research current relevant literature by searching the articles in the academic journals and text books and case studies by using Google, Google Scholar and the UWTSD library resources. Furthermore, searching relevant additional data through wider reading around, for example, information found via reputable Youth Work organisations. By using appropriate information from reputable organisations, for example, NSPCC, Unicef, ChildLine, Barnardo's, Young Minds, Enterprising Youth and the National Youth Agency the author hopes to find out what the signs and symptoms of the various types of abuse are and how these can be recognised through staff education and training opportunities for Youth Workers. By investigating the current relevant literature the author will examine the ways that ACEs can adversely impact interpersonal relationships. For example, Glending <i>et al.</i> (2021) state that by Youth Workers building relationships it is giving support to the young people, which is very important in giving them the best chance to succeed in developing positive relationships. They also say that by creating an existing relationship with young people it makes it easier to then deliver and support interventions. This is supported by Lester, Khatwa and Sutcliffe (2020) who say that by Youth Workers being empathetic and taking a non-judgemental approach and actively listening to the young people it can help build supportive relationships which helps them feel understood. Moreover, Frederick <i>et al.</i> (2023) suggest that by building trustful and supportive relationships this will have positive benefits on the young people, such as increasing self-confidence and self-esteem, decreasing the feeling of sadness and worry and will have a positive impact on better engagement in school. Negative impacts on relationships may be because of challenging behaviours from both the young people themselves and also others around them (Glending <i>et al.</i>, 2021). They also suggest that young people can have a negative view of themselves, and that some behaviours can be made worse because of the way adults react, as well as escalating when other young people get involved. This may be because of adults not fully understanding how their own attitudes and reactions can impact a young person's responses. Additionally, the young person's circumstances may impact their ability to deal with certain situations on an emotionally mature level, therefore rather than aiming to avoid conflict, it escalates the situation instead. Frederick <i>et al.</i> (2023) state that by young people feeling affected by ACEs this can result in them having emotional stress and feeling isolated socially, which can mean that they very much want and seek out supportive relationships, where they feel accepted, heard and understood. It is vital that Youth Workers support young people by ensuring regular engagement with them, as this can help build supportive and trustful relationships, making young people feel supported, listened to and heard (Frederick <i>et al.</i>, 2023). Therefore this suggests that by exploring solutions and resolutions around the ways to best support young people who are displaying challenging behaviours, Youth Workers can help develop their interactions and engagement with others to make it a positive outcome. Also, it is important that Youth Workers deliver trauma-informed practice so that young people can be properly supported on an emotional and practical level, to ensure that the spaces and environments provided feel safe and secure for the young people (Glending <i>et al.</i>, 2021).

	Reference list Frederick, J., Spratt, T. and Devaney, J. (2023) 'Supportive Relationships with Trusted Adults for Children and Young People Who Have Experienced Adversities: Implications for Social Work Service Provision', <i>The British Journal of Social Work</i>, 53(6), pp. 3129–3145. Available at: https://academic.oup.com/bjsw/article/53/6/3129/7091809 (Accessed: 11 December 2025). Glending, F., Rodriguez, G.R., Newbury, A., and Wilmot's, R. (2021) <i>Adverse childhood experience (ACE) and trauma-informed approaches in youth justice services in Wales: An evaluation of the implementation of the enhanced case management (ECM) project the views and experiences of children and youth justice workers</i>, . Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Annemarie-Newbury/publication/358911937_Adverse_childhood_experience_ACE_and_trauma-informed_approaches_in_youth_justice_services_in_Wales_An_evaluation_of_the_implementation_of_the_enhanced_case_management_ECM_project_The_views_and_experie/links/621d08ddb1bace0083a2fda1/Adverse-childhood-experience-ACE-and-trauma-informed-approaches-in-youth-justice-services-in-Wales-An-evaluation-of-the-implementation-of-the-enhanced-case-management-ECM-project-The-views-and-experie.pdf (Accessed: 27 May 2025). Lester, S., Khatwa, M. and Sutcliffe, K. (2020) 'Service needs of young people affected by adverse childhood experiences (ACEs): A systematic review of UK qualitative evidence', <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i>, 118, pp. 1-18. Available at: Service needs of young people affected by adverse childhood experiences (ACEs): A systematic review of UK qualitative evidence (Accessed: 11 December 2025). (this box should expand as you type)
	Proposed methods (maximum 600 words) Provide a brief summary of all the methods that may be used in the research activity, making it clear what specific techniques may be used. If methods other than those listed in this section are deemed appropriate later, additional ethical approval for those methods will be needed. You do not need to justify the methods here, but should instead describe how you intend to collect the data necessary for you to complete your project.
7	The proposed method will be an extended literature review. According to Cottrell (2022), an extended literature review involves doing detailed searches for literature that has already been published and is directly relevant to the theme or topic chosen by the author. This literature then needs to be analysed to select and decide what literature will be included in the final review. The strengths of doing an extended literature review are that it helps make interested readers aware of the key relevant research that has already been done. It also brings together in one place the relevant key sources that discuss a particular theme or topic area. It also support good ethics as it protects young people who may be triggered by being asked to participate in research, by avoiding the need for them to relive experiences they may not want to remember. This extended literature review will be carried out through an initial search of peer-reviewed articles from academic journals within the last 5 years. These will be sourced from ProQuest Central, the UWTSD Library and Google Scholar. The key words used will be: adverse childhood experiences (ACEs); interpersonal relationships; Youth

	Workers; young people; signs of abuse; trauma-informed practice; interventions. Articles will then be selected depending on their strengths, weaknesses and relevance, therefore at this stage some will be discarded whilst others will be chosen to be included in the extended literature review because of their relevance. (this box should expand as you type)
	Location of research activity Identify all locations where research activity will take place.
8	At the researcher's home (this box should expand as you type)
	Research activity outside of the UK If research activity will take place overseas, you are responsible for ensuring that local ethical considerations are complied with and that the relevant permissions are sought. Specify any local guidelines (e.g. from local professional associations/learned societies/universities) that exist and whether these involve any ethical stipulations beyond those usual in the UK (provide details of any licenses or permissions required). Also specify whether there are any specific ethical issues raised by the local context in which the research activity is taking place, for example, particular cultural and/or legal sensitivities or vulnerabilities of participants. If you live in the country where you will do the research then please state this.
9	n/a (this box should expand as you type)

10	Use of documentation not in the public domain: Are any documents NOT publicly available?	NO	☒
		YES	☐
11	If Yes, please provide details here of how you will gain access to specific documentation that is not in the public domain and that this is in accordance with the current data protection law of the country in question and that of England and Wales. (this box should expand as you type)		

	Does your research relate to one or more of the seven aims of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015?	YES	NO
12	A prosperous Wales	☒	☐
13	A resilient Wales	☒	☐
14	A healthier Wales	☒	☐
15	A more equal Wales	☒	☐
16	A Wales of cohesive communities	☒	☐
17	A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language	☐	☐
18	A globally responsible Wales	☒	☐
19	If YES to any of the above, please give details:		

	The research will relate to the following aims of the well-being of future generations (Wales) act as the author believes that in carrying out this research, it will support a more resilient and healthier generation of young people in Wales whereby young people feel supported and safe in their environments. Having compassion for young people's mental health issues and recognising that it may be harder for them when they have suffered ACEs, and for Youth Workers to provide good support for them to help them overcome any difficulties they are facing. To create more equal opportunities for young people so that they can participate in activities that help raise their self-esteem and confidence, regardless of the background they come from, especially if they have suffered ACEs. Creating connected communities may be possible when young people are better understood, and Youth Workers are well trained in trauma-informed practice so that they can support young people with emotional and behavioural challenges. (this box should expand as you type)
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SECTION F: Scope of Research Activity

	Will the research activity include:	YES	NO
1	Use of a questionnaire or similar research instrument?	☐	☒
2	Use of interviews?	☐	☒
3	Use of focus groups?	☐	☒
4	Use of participant diaries?	☐	☒
5	Use of video or audio recording?	☐	☒
6	Use of computer-generated log files?	☐	☒
7	Participant observation with their knowledge?	☐	☒
8	Participant observation without their knowledge?	☐	☒
9	Access to personal or confidential information without the participants' specific consent?	☐	☒
10	Administration of any questions, test stimuli, presentation that may be experienced as physically, mentally or emotionally harmful / offensive?	☐	☒
11	Performance of any acts which may cause embarrassment or affect self-esteem?	☐	☒
12	Investigation of participants involved in illegal activities?	☐	☒
13	Use of procedures that involve deception?	☐	☒
14	Administration of any substance, agent or placebo?	☐	☒
15	Working with live vertebrate animals?	☐	☒
16	Procedures that may have a negative impact on the environment?	☐	☒
17	Other primary data collection methods. Please indicate the type of data collection method(s) below.		
	Details of any other primary data collection method: (this box should expand as you type)	☐	☒

If NO to every question, then the research activity is (ethically) low risk and **may** be exempt from **some** of the following sections (please refer to Guidance Notes).

If YES to any question, then no research activity should be undertaken until full ethical approval has been obtained.

SECTION G: Intended Participants

If there are no participants then do not complete this section, but go directly to section H.

	Who are the intended participants:	YES	NO
1	Students or staff at the University?	☐	☒
2	Adults (over the age of 18 and competent to give consent)?	☐	☒
3	Vulnerable adults?	☐	☒
4	Children and Young People under the age of 18? (Consent from Parent, Carer or Guardian will be required)	☐	☒
5	Prisoners?	☐	☒
6	Young offenders?	☐	☒
7	Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator or a gatekeeper?	☐	☒
8	People engaged in illegal activities?	☐	☒
9	Others. Please indicate the participants below, and specifically any group who may be unable to give consent.		
	Details of any other participant groups: (this box should expand as you type)	☐	☒

	Participant numbers and source Provide an estimate of the expected number of participants. How will you identify participants and how will they be recruited?	
10	How many participants are expected?	n/a (this box should expand as you type)
11	Who will the participants be?	n/a (this box should expand as you type)
12	How will you identify the participants?	n/a (this box should expand as you type)

	Information for participants:	YES	NO	N/A
13	Will you describe the main research procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	☐	☐	☒
14	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	☐	☐	☒
15	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	☐	☐	☒
16	Will you explain to participants that refusal to participate in the research will not affect their treatment or education (if relevant)?	☐	☐	☒
17	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?	☐	☐	☒
18	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	☐	☐	☒
19	With questionnaires, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	☐	☐	☒
20	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	☐	☐	☒
21	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation, in a way appropriate to the type of research undertaken?	☐	☐	☒
22	If NO to any of above questions, please give an explanation			
	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>			

	Information for participants:	YES	NO	N/A
24	Will participants be paid?	☐	☐	☒
25	Is specialist electrical or other equipment to be used with participants?	☐	☐	☒
26	Are there any financial or other interests to the investigator or University arising from this study?	☐	☐	☒
27	Will the research activity involve deliberately misleading participants in any way, or the partial or full concealment of the specific study aims?	☐	☐	☐
28	If YES to any question, please provide full details			
	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>			

SECTION H: Anticipated Risks

	Outline any anticipated risks that may adversely affect any of the participants, the researchers and/or the University, and the steps that will be taken to address them.		
	If you have completed a full risk assessment (for example as required by a laboratory, or external research collaborator) you may append that to this form.		
1	Full risk assessment completed and appended?	Yes No	☐ ☒
2	Risks to participants For example: sector-specific health & safety, emotional distress, financial disclosure, physical harm, transfer of personal data, sensitive organisational information		
	Risk to participants: n/a <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	How you will mitigate the risk to participants: n/a <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	
3	If research activity may include sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use) or issues likely to disclose information requiring further action (e.g. criminal activity), give details of the procedures to deal with these issues, including any support/advice (e.g. helpline numbers) to be offered to participants. Note that where applicable, consent procedures should make it clear that if something potentially or actually illegal is discovered in the course of a project, it may need to be disclosed to the proper authorities		
	n/a <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
4	Risks to the investigator For example: personal health & safety, physical harm, emotional distress, risk of accusation of harm/impropriety, conflict of interest		
	Risk to the investigator: While the research will not be based on the participants personal experience of ACEs, it may cause distress when reading the negative impacts of ACEs. Feeling overwhelmed or emotional fatigue <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	How you will mitigate the risk to the investigator: The researcher will attend regular supervision meetings with their allocated supervisor, where they can discuss any concerns or potential risks. The researcher will also use reflective supervision, take breaks when needed and discuss challenges or feelings with a supervisor to manage stress <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	
5	University/institutional risks For example: adverse publicity, financial loss, data protection		
	Risk to the University: Reputational risk Risk of data protection breaches <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	How you will mitigate the risk to the University: The researcher will ensure to read and adhere to the UWTSD research and code of integrity on ethics following procedures	

		Data will be anonymised, securely stored and handled according to UWTSD and legal guidelines to prevent any breaches. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
6	Environmental risks For example: accidental spillage of pollutants, damage to local ecosystems	
	Risk to the environment: n/a <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	How you will mitigate the risk to environment: n/a <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>

	Disclosure and Barring Service			
	If the research activity involves children or vulnerable adults, a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate must be obtained before any contact with such participants.	YES	NO	N/A
7	Does your research require you to hold a current DBS Certificate?	☒	☐	☒
8	If YES, please give the certificate number. If the certificate number is not available please write "Pending"; in this case any ethical approval will be subject to providing the appropriate certificate number.			

SECTION I: Feedback, Consent and Confidentiality

1	Feedback What de-briefing and feedback will be provided to participants, how will this be done and when?
	n/a <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
2	Informed consent Describe the arrangements to inform potential participants, before providing consent, of what is involved in participating. Describe the arrangements for participants to provide full consent before data collection begins. If gaining consent in this way is inappropriate, explain how consent will be obtained and recorded in accordance with prevailing data protection legislation.
	n/a <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
3	Confidentiality / Anonymity Set out how anonymity of participants and confidentiality will be ensured in any outputs. If anonymity is not being offered, explain why this is the case.
	n/a <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>

SECTION J: Data Protection and Storage

	Does the research activity involve personal data (as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 “GDPR” and the Data Protection Act 2018 “DPA”)?	YES	NO
1	“Personal data” means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person (‘data subject’). An identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person. Any video or audio recordings of participants is considered to be personal data.	☐	X
	If YES, provide a description of the data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
2	n/a (this box should expand as you type)		
	Does it involve special category data (as defined by the GDPR)?	YES	NO
3	“Special category data” means sensitive personal data consisting of information as to the data subjects’ – (a) racial or ethnic origin, (b) political opinions, (c) religious beliefs or other beliefs of a similar nature, (d) membership of a trade union (within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992), (e) physical or mental health or condition, (f) sexual life, (g) genetics, (h) biometric data (as used for ID purposes),	☐	X
	If YES, provide a description of the special category data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
4	n/a (this box should expand as you type)		
	Will data from the research activity (collected data, drafts of the thesis, or materials for publication) be stored in any of the following ways?	YES	NO
5	Manual files (i.e. in paper form)?	☐	☒
6	University computers?	☐	☒
7	Private company computers?	☐	☒
8	Home or other personal computers?	☒	☐
9	Laptop computers/ CDs/ Portable disk-drives/ memory sticks?	☐	☒
10	“Cloud” storage or websites?	☒	☐
11	Other – specify:	☐	☐
12	For all stored data, explain the measures in place to ensure the security of the data collected, data confidentiality, including details of backup procedures, password protection, encryption, anonymisation and pseudonymisation:		
	Extended literature review thesis will be stored on the OneDrive, which is password protected		

Data Protection			
	Will the research activity involve any of the following activities:	YES	NO
13	Electronic transfer of data in any form?	☐	☒
14	Sharing of data with others at the University outside of the immediate research team?	☐	☒
15	Sharing of data with other organisations?	☐	☒
16	Export of data outside the UK or importing of data from outside the UK?	☐	☒
17	Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, emails or telephone numbers?	☐	☒
18	Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals?	☐	☒
19	Use of data management system?	☐	☒
20	Data archiving?	☐	☒
21	If YES to any question, please provide full details, explaining how this will be conducted in accordance with the GDPR and Data Protection Act (2018) (and any international equivalents, where appropriate):		
	n/a <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
22	List all who will have access to the data generated by the research activity:		
	Courtney Rumsey (student), Angharad Lewis (programme manager), Alana Enoch supervisor), marker and external verifier. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
23	List who will have control of, and act as custodian(s) for, data generated by the research activity:		
	Courtney Rumsey <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
24	Give details of data storage arrangements, including security measures in place to protect the data, where data will be stored, how long for, and in what form. Will data be archived – if so how and if not why not.		
	n/a <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
25	Please indicate if your data will be stored in the UWTSD Research Data Repository (see https://researchdata.uwtsd.ac.uk/). If so please explain. <i>(Most relevant to academic staff)</i>		
	n/a <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
26	Confirm that you have read the UWTSD guidance on data management (see https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/research-data-management/)	YES	☒

27	Confirm that you are aware that you need to keep all data until after your research has completed or the end of your funding	YES	☐
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SECTION K: Declaration

	The information which I have provided is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge. I have attempted to identify any risks and issues related to the research activity and acknowledge my obligations and the rights of the participants. In submitting this application I hereby confirm that I undertake to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice which is published on the website: https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/research/research-ethics/		
1	Signature of applicant:	Courtney Rumsey	Date: 27/11/25

For STUDENT Submissions:

2	Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Alana Enoch	Date: 15/12/25
3	Signature:		

For STAFF Submissions:

4	Academic Director/ Assistant Dean:		Date:
5	Signature:		

Checklist: Please complete the checklist below to ensure that you have completed the form according to the guidelines and attached any required documentation:

☒	I have read the guidance notes supplied before completing the form.
☒	I have completed ALL RELEVANT sections of the form in full.
☒	I confirm that the research activity has received approval in principle
☐	I have attached a copy of final/interim approval from external organisation (where appropriate)
☐	I have attached a full risk assessment (where appropriate) ONLY TICK IF YOU HAVE ATTACHED A FULL RISK ASSESSMENT
☒	I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice.
☒	I understand that before commencing data collection all documents aimed at respondents (including information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires, interview schedules etc.) must be confirmed by the DoS/Supervisor, module tutor or Academic Director.

RESEARCH STUDENTS ONLY

Once complete, submit this form via the **MyTSD Doctoral College Portal** at (<https://mytsd.uwtsd.ac.uk>).

RESEARCH STAFF ONLY

All communications relating to this application during its processing must be in writing and emailed to pgresearch@uwtsd.ac.uk , with the title 'Ethical Approval' followed by your name.

STUDENTS ON UNDERGRADUATE OR TAUGHT MASTERS PROGRAMMES should submit this form (and receive the outcome) via systems explained to you by the supervisor/module leader.