



Safeguarding children and young people: Neglect Autumn 2019

What is the impact of neglect on children?

- A baby who is neglected in their first year can have impaired brain development. Child neglect can alter the way in which a brain functions leading to an increased risk of depression, dissociative disorders and memory impairment in later life. There are also links with panic disorders, posttraumatic stress and ADHD.
- Poor nutrition, hygiene and lack of parental supervision can result in faltering growth, skin conditions, infections, anaemia, more accidental injuries, dental problems and poor educational outcomes.
- Emotional damage caused by the absence of love and care can alter how children behave and achieve at school, how they interact with peers and adults, and how they have relationships in their adult life.

Children who feel unloved or unwanted can be at increased risk of going missing, self-harm, anti-social behaviour, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse

Spotting the signs of neglect:

- A child always reporting to being hungry – stealing or hoarding food.
- Hygiene concerns, i.e. matted hair, skin often dirty, poor body odour.
- A child who is always tired.
- Medical needs not being met – i.e. not being taken to medical appointments on a repeat basis.
- Inappropriate clothing – i.e. inadequate clothing to keep warm in winter.
- A child saying they are left at home alone or concerns around poor Supervision.
- Frequent illnesses and infections – medical advice not being sought.
- Regular absence or lateness from school.
- Poor home conditions.
- Living in dangerous conditions, e.g. around drugs, alcohol and/ or violence.
- Failing to meet developmental milestones.

All agencies have a responsibility to tackle signs of neglect at the earliest opportunity -

Be curious: when in contact with children and families always look for signs of neglect and record any concerns

Neglect and the link with other forms of harm

Research suggests a relationship between neglect experienced in childhood and later experience of childhood sexual exploitation (CSE). This relationship is often linked to childhood running away, which is found to be higher in children who experienced neglect at a younger age. Reasons for this include that a neglected child who is lonely and has low self-worth may be particularly vulnerable to a perpetrator's strategy of cultivating a so-called 'special relationship'. The child's social isolation may also mean they do not easily recognise their experiences as abusive because they have no wider reference point. A potential impact of neglect is poor problem-solving skills, which may mean that when they find themselves faced with bribery or coercion, children are less able to make clear decisions about how to seek help. <https://www.rip.org.uk/resources/publications/evidence-scopes/child-neglect-and-its-relationship-to-sexual-harm-and-abuse-responding-effectively-to-childrens-needs-updated/>

Talking to children and young people about neglect

Childline has a webpage about neglect that is aimed at children and young people. Written in an accessible way, it can help children to understand what neglect is and whether they might be affected. It also has advice on what they can do and how they can find the support they need.

<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/abuse-safety/neglect/>

Learning from National Case Reviews

https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1345/learning-from-case-reviews_neglect.pdf

Neglect is a factor in 60% of serious case reviews nationally. The following learning has been identified from reviews in recent years:

- Be aware of children who are more vulnerable to neglect. This includes new-born babies, premature babies, babies with ongoing health needs, and teenagers.
- Frequent accidents may be an indicator of poor-quality parenting through lack of supervision or living in an unsafe home. Repeated visits to A&E should raise concern.
- Have the confidence and knowledge to effectively assess parental capability to change. Be clear with parents about what needs to change and by when.
- Improvements to poor home conditions should be regularly reviewed, especially if the family is unlikely to sustain them.
- Always take the full history of the family into account and patterns of previous episodes of neglect. Include background information of the parents' own childhood to better assess parenting capability.
- Use staff supervision to avoid case drift. If a case becomes 'stuck' there should be a process where practitioners can escalate the situation to senior managers. This may help to provide a fresh, objective approach to address the problems.
- Where families refuse to engage with early assessments, this shouldn't prevent professionals from sharing information or making referrals about child protection concerns.

BECurcious - USE the Neglect Toolkit

<https://kingstonandrichmondsafeguardingchildrenpartnership.org.uk/news-resources/policies-and-procedures-87/child-neglect-toolkit-181.php>



THINK

Home visits: Housing providers conducting home visits may spot signs that families with young children are starting to struggle. It is important to look out for signs in the home, such as cleanliness and maintenance of the property as a safe environment for children.

- **Social factors:** Consider background social factors in a family and whether these might make neglect more likely, for example the family's ethnicity, cultural background and historic mental health concerns, which can lead to isolation and family difficulties.
- **Pregnancy complications:** Consider where mothers have experienced pregnancy complications or recurrent miscarriages, as this can increase the stress felt by parents with a new baby.
- **Care to disabled children:** Be aware of the early signs of the provision of poor-quality care to disabled children, as this can be neglect.

Health appointments: A parent or carer not taking a child to health appointments, particularly where the child is additionally vulnerable, should be an indicator that the child may be at risk of neglect.

National Characteristics of effective support where neglect is suspected (from Research in Practice, 2016):

<https://www.rip.org.uk/resources/publications/evidence-scopes/child-neglect-and-its-relationship-to-sexual-harm-and-abuse-responding-effectively-to-childrens-needs-updated/>

- Operate in genuine partnership with parents but also keep the child in mind at all times.
- Provide support that is respectful, rather than stigmatising or shame-inducing.
- Draw on the strengths of families and communities.
- Ensure support is properly connected to specialist services to allow fluid transition and appropriate protection.

Focus on promoting resilience, rather than risk management, whilst ensuring that effective analysis of risk and vulnerability is maintained.