

# Two Page Guide

## Neglect

### What is Neglect?

Neglect is a form of maltreatment and is defined [in Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2018\)](#)

Full details of the definition and statutory framework for neglect are set out within [Safeguarding Warwickshire Neglect Procedure](#). Warwickshire Children and Families Service have also developed their own internal practice guidance for working with children, young people and families where there is neglect.

A detailed understanding of the parenting behaviour, ability, motivation and background need to be factors which contribute to an assessment of the circumstances in which the child lives.

National research (Stevenson 2007; Howarth 2007) and statistics (NSPCC 2011-16) indicate that while the numbers of children made subject to a Child Protection Plan for physical and sexual abuse have fallen, the numbers for neglect have risen steadily throughout the last decade (with the numbers for emotional abuse also increasing).

The overarching principle in Warwickshire is that we have the child at the heart of what we do and must strive to ensure the child is at the heart of all our interventions, we must have a clear focus on what their life is like for them.

### What types of neglect might children and young people experience?

Howarth (2007) identified six different types of neglect, which may include the following:

- **Medical neglect** - the child's health needs are not met, or they are not provided with appropriate treatment needed as a result of illness or accidents.
- **Nutritional neglect** - the child is given insufficient calories to meet their physical/developmental needs, or they are given food of insufficient nutritional value, e.g. high fat or high sugar junk food in place of balanced meals; childhood obesity can be a sign of neglect.
- **Emotional neglect** - the carer does not respond to the child's basic emotional needs, including failing to interact or provide affection.
- **Educational neglect** - the child does not receive appropriate learning experiences; they may be under-stimulated and/ or experience a lack of interest in their achievements. This may include not sending their child to school regularly, and/ or failing to respond to special educational needs.
- **Physical neglect** - the child may have inadequate or inappropriate (e.g. for the weather conditions) clothing, poor levels of hygiene, lack of clean-living conditions, abandonment or exclusion from home.
- **Lack of supervision and guidance** - the child may be exposed to hazards, parents or caregivers may be inattentive to avoidable dangers or may leave the child with inappropriate carers. Lack of supervision can include not providing appropriate boundaries for young people, e.g. about under-age sex and alcohol use.

## What is the impact of neglect for children at different ages?

The Research has shown that children and young people's experiences of neglect, and the short and long term impact it has on them, can vary with age. For example:

**Prenatal neglect** - adverse experiences during pregnancy have been linked with a number of poor outcomes, including low birth weight, premature birth, higher risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and impaired cognitive and social functioning;

**Infancy (birth - 2 years)** - Disinterest or failure to offer stimulation (e.g. through games like 'peek-a-boo' will limit the child's cognitive development as well as their attachment, since babies learn and develop neural connections and cognitive functioning through interaction with the world and with their caregivers;

**Pre-school (2 - 4 years)** - children of this age tend to be mobile, but lack understanding of danger and need close supervision for their physical protection, which neglectful families may not provide. Children who are experiencing neglect may not be appropriately toilet trained, and their language development may be delayed;

**Primary (5 - 11 years)** - if neglected children have delayed cognitive development, school can be a source of frustration and distress. Signs of neglect such as dirty clothing will be apparent, which may lead to embarrassment and social difficulties. Children without boundaries may find it difficult to follow school rules, and if neglect includes failure to ensure school attendance their attainment is likely to be affected; and

**Adolescence (12 - 18 years)** - neglect is likely to have an impact on their ability to form and maintain friendships. If they have never been taught to prepare meals, their diets may lean towards high-fat, high-sugar convenience foods. Risk-taking behaviour e.g. alcohol or substance use, risky sexual behaviour or criminal activity may be attributed to or exacerbated by a lack of parental supervision.

## How do we respond to neglect in Warwickshire?

Learning from a serious case review in Warwickshire identified that there are three groups of neglectful carer, and each needs a different type of response.

Intervention needs to tackle the factors maintaining the neglectful care. Understanding what type of neglect it is (passive, chaotic or active) is therefore very important. Identify a small number of factors which are powerful influences on the situation, such as relationships, a lack of alignment (disagreement between parties to the plan about an important aspect of the situation) and the factors the social worker has identified as causing the type of neglect. Plans should build on the strengths identified in the family to tackle the specific type of neglect identified. It is important to guard against over optimism; this is where the social worker's knowledge of patterns of improvement and decline in the past is important.

**'Passive' neglect** requires helping and taking care of the parent/s to enable them to find the energy and means to parent adequately. To make this sustainable into the future it is really important that the parents' own network is part of this as well as professionals. Finding the balance of support and challenge needs to be addressed thoughtfully to ensure enough help is provided to create change but facilitate the family to maintain it.

**'Chaotic' neglect** is likely to be addressed by support from parenting programmes and challenge to the parents about the impact of their behaviours on their children.

**'Active neglect'** is primarily underpinned by abuse of power and control, and decisive statutory action may be required to safeguard the children.

**Key contact:** Multi-agency safeguarding hub 01926 414144 (out of hours tel: 01926 886 922)

**More information:** You can read the NSPCC webpages on [neglect](#).