

FACTSHEET: Neglect

Research both locally and nationally shows us that practitioners still frequently fail to recognise the severity or possible consequences of neglect. However, practitioners must respond to neglect with the same degree of seriousness and urgency as all other forms of child abuse. The earlier we intervene to prevent neglect the better the outcomes for the child and workers should be encouraged and supported to take action at the earliest opportunity.

Definition

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in a serious impairment of the child's health and development. This may or may not be deliberate. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- Provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment)
- Protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger
- Ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate caregivers)
- Ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment

It may also include neglect of or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs (Working Together to Safeguard Children, DfE 2015).

Categories of Neglect

Emotional neglect

Persistent emotional unavailability and unresponsiveness from a parent or carer towards a child, particularly an infant. This can cause difficulty developing attachment and a bond between carer and child.

Medical neglect

Minimising or denying a child's health needs. Not taking them for appropriate health care, including dental care. Not giving them their medicines or treatments.

Nutritional neglect

Not providing enough food for growth and development which leads to faltering growth. This can also include providing an unhealthy diet and lack of exercise that leads to obesity. This may not cause immediate ill health but can lead to medical complications of obesity in later life.

Educational neglect

Not complying with state requirements to ensure that a child goes to school or has adequate education at home. Pre-school age and beyond, this can also include not providing a stimulating environment and being supportive of a child's learning.

Physical neglect

A dirty home, lack of hygiene, lack of heating, inadequate furniture and bedding. Not providing appropriate and clean clothing. This can make children appear different from their peers and result in isolation or bullying. Lack of a safe environment, no stair gates, fireguards, unsafe electrical wires, chemicals, kettles and hair straighteners in reach etc.

Abandonment

Leaving a young child without care or supervision. This can also include not providing a home for an older child.

Failure to provide supervision and guidance

Failure to supervise the child appropriate to their age and developmental stage, so that they are physically safe and protected from harm. This may result in frequent accidents that should have been avoided. (*taken from the RCOCH handbook)

Why we need to prevent Neglect in Sheffield

Neglect impacts on all children irrespective of their age, gender and ethnicity and irrespective of where they live. Neglect may occur before the child is born as a result of maternal substance misuse.

Tackling neglect will make a difference and help prevent the serious long term consequences of neglect which includes:

- Poor growth and physical development/delayed learning
- Poor attachment
- Poor language development
- Untreated dental decay
- Poor ability to play, socialize and learn
- Behavioural problems in later childhood
- Adolescent violence and anti-social behaviour
- Increased likelihood of suicidal thoughts and attempts in adolescence
- Mental health problems in adulthood
- Difficulties parenting their own children
- Severe neglect can result in the death (including as a result of suicide) of a child or young person

SCSP Neglect Strategy

In 2016 the SSCB developed a **Neglect Strategy** for the city, setting out Sheffield's approach to tackling neglect. The overarching aim of the strategy is to ensure the early recognition of neglect and improved responses to it by all agencies, so that the life chances of children are promptly improved and the risk of harm reduced. The strategy and associated resources are available at:

www.safeguardingsheffieldchildren.org/sscb/safeguarding-information-and-resources/neglect-strategy-1

For further details also see chapter 1.1 (Neglect) in the Sheffield Children Safeguarding Partnership Procedures.