Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Partnership - 7 Minute Briefing

Neglect

01 Introduction

Neglect can be difficult to define and identify because it often develops gradually over time rather than through a single incident. It may present in different ways, including unmet physical, emotional, educational or medical needs, and the signs can be subtle or easily explained by other factors. Children and families may adapt to difficult circumstances, making concerns less visible, while practitioners may become accustomed to long-standing issues.
Identifying neglect therefore requires professional curiosity, effective information sharing, and a cumulative understanding of the child's lived experience to recognise the impact on their health, development and wellbeing.

02 Definition Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026

The persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy due to 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 and provide suitable education.

It may include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

07 Further Information

- Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel - Neglect
- Types of Neglect
- Visit the WSCP Neglect Webpage for additional guidance, tools, training and resources including:
  - WSCP Multi-Agency Initial Screening Toolkit
  - Day in the Life of a child direct work tool
  - Webinar recording and slides
  - Training videos
  - Health Navigation Flowchart
  - Multi-agency chronology
  - WSCP Neglect Strategy



03 Understanding Neglect

We must understand the different ways neglect can present itself, its causes, and the significant, cumulative and long-lasting impact it can have on children of any age. Practitioners should consider:

- Culture, ethnicity, disability, identity communication needs and family circumstances can affect how neglect is experienced and presented.
- Neglect is not always intentional; it can be the result of a parent or carer struggling to cope. With the right help and support they may be able to make life better for the children or young people in their care.
- Neglect may arise from a single act, a series of actions, or a failure to take appropriate action. Neglect is often chronic and can become normalised over time, making it harder for children, families and professionals to recognise its impact.
- Neglect can occur in any family, home or caregiving environment, regardless of class, culture, race or gender.

06 Good Practice

A strong response to neglect should be child-centred, timely and focused on the child's lived experience. Practitioners should:

- Be professionally curious, work in partnership with families, and consider the cumulative impact of unmet needs over time.
- Remain alert to disguised compliance.
- Use effective information sharing, multi-agency collaboration, and assessment tools to identify concerns and plan support.
- Regularly review progress, escalate where needed, and ensure the child's voice is heard. Record facts not opinions.
- Identify strengths and protective factors alongside risks.
- Seek advice from your manager, safeguarding lead or Children's Social Care if unsure.

05 Protection and Action

- Multi-agency collaboration and use of a chronology is vital to form a full picture of the child's life and lived experience.
- Early identification, helped by understanding thresholds and using neglect resources such as the screening tool and toolkit, removing barriers, and coordinating support help ensure every child can thrive.
- Listening to the child's voice and observing their daily experiences are key to recognising and responding early.
- Effective multi-agency information sharing and professional challenge are essential to ensuring concerns are escalated and addressed at the earliest opportunity.

04 Risks associated with Neglect

- Neglect can have significant impact on children of any age, regardless of their level of independence.
- Neglect can have a developmental impact including cognitive delays, emotional dysregulation and attachment issues.
- Neglect may impact school attendance, educational achievement, social development and future life opportunities.
- Can be increasingly vulnerable to other forms of harm, including exploitation, going missing, poor mental health and are five times more likely to be victims of intra-familial sexual abuse.
- Understanding the child's lived experience and cumulative vulnerabilities is essential in recognising and responding to risk.

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