

Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board



Neglect Strategy 2018 - 2020

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1. Introduction

Neglect is the most common form of child maltreatment in England (Department for Education, 2013; Radford *et al*, 2011) and the USA (Sedlak *et al.*, 2010).

The NSPCC asked the University of East Anglia to explore the circumstances in which neglect can be catastrophic and have a fatal or seriously harmful outcome for a child. The report provides a systematic analysis of neglect in serious case reviews in England, between 2003 and 2011. It looks at how risks of harm accumulate and combine and the points at which intervention might successfully have helped to contain these risks.

The research found that:

- Neglect is much more prevalent in serious case reviews than had previously been understood (neglect was present in 60% of the 139 reviews from 2009-2011)
- Neglect can be life threatening and needs to be treated with as much urgency as other categories of maltreatment
- Neglect with the most serious outcomes is not confined to the youngest children, and occurs across all ages
- The possibility that in a very small minority of cases neglect will be fatal, or cause grave harm, should be part of a practitioner's mind-set
- Practitioners, managers, policy makers and decision makers should be discouraged from minimising or downgrading the harm that can come from neglect and discouraged from allowing neglect cases to drift
- The key aim for the practitioner working with neglect is to ensure a healthy living environment and healthy relationships for children

Practitioners need to be supported by a system that allows them to make good relationships with children and parents and supports them in managing the risks of harm that stem from maltreatment. This includes the harm from neglect and the way that neglect can conceal other risks and dangers.

The study does not provide easy answers about the difficult judgments and decisions that may need to be made where neglect is present, but shows how important it is to be open-minded and vigilant about where and how these risks manifest themselves.

Download the executive summary:

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/neglect-serious-case-reviews-summary.pdf>

The recently published Ofsted report 'Growing up neglected: a multi-agency response to older neglected children' (2018), based on findings from the Joint Targeted Area Reviews, advocates the development of a local multi-agency strategy to address neglect, including the neglect of older children. It notes that while multi-agency partners have been working hard to improve their response to neglect, the focus of this work has largely centred on younger children. It is important to understand the relationship between neglect within the home and the impact on a child's behaviour and emotional well-being and how this may increase their vulnerability to risks outside of the home, such as various forms of criminal and sexual exploitation for older children. Professionals need to be curious as to the underlying causes of an older child's presenting behaviours and seek to understand their lived experience. In older children their needs, as well as their behaviours, should be the focus. Older neglected children are often seen to be making 'lifestyle choices' and the perception that they are therefore more resilient because of these choices needs to be challenged. The Ofsted report acknowledges that this is a complex area of practice whilst stressing the importance of multi-agency partnership working to support the identification of and support for older neglected children.

The report is located at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/growing-up-neglected-a-multi-agency-response-to-older-children>

This Strategy sets out the principles and priorities for an effective multi-agency response to childhood neglect in Worcestershire. The Strategy is supplemented by:

- A Neglect Delivery Action Plan to ensure implementation of the Strategy
- A Neglect Pathway which sets out what a response to concerns about Neglect would look like in Worcestershire
- A Neglect Toolkit to support practitioners in the identification of Neglect
- Examples of Neglect Case Studies at different levels of intervention
- Neglect Prompts for practitioners (signposted with permission from the Hampshire Safeguarding Children Board)

2. Guiding principles

This strategy sets out our approach to tackling neglect in Worcestershire. It will have the following focus:

- Improving Prevention
- Improving Recognition and Assessment
- Improving Response to Children, Young People and Families
- Improving Communication and Awareness
- Monitoring and Evaluation

In order to be successful, our strategy needs to be grounded in the culture and ethos of the Worcestershire Partnership and, as such, it will adhere to the following principles:

- **Child Friendly practice** – Worcestershire has an ambition to be a child friendly and our approach to helping the most vulnerable children, young people and families in neglectful situations needs to reflect these values;

- **Voice of the child** – in all of our work on neglect, it is vital to hear the child’s voice, and to focus on their experiences and the impact neglect has had - and is having - on their lives. The safety and wellbeing of the child or young person is paramount, and they must be kept at the centre of all of our work;
- **Participation of parents and carers** – as with hearing the voice of the child or young person, so it is equally important that parents and carers are involved in discussions and decision making which impacts on them. Participation of parents and carers supports the restorative approach and ensures that they are able to contribute to assessments and plans in relation to them and their families;
- **Right conversations, right people, right time** – we want children, young people and families to receive the right support and help at the right time, as early as possible in the life of a problem. Preventative and early help responses to neglect are critical to avoid issues from escalating and children experiencing further harm. Our approach to neglect must recognise and respond to the needs of all family members holistically; we cannot lose sight of the child in addressing the needs of their parents and carers, or provide children and young people with short-term responses to neglect without addressing the root causes;
- **Strengths-based practice** - work with families to address neglect must maintain a focus on investing in the relationships we have with children, young people and their families, and with colleagues and partners to improve outcomes, prevent or resolve harm. Practitioners and agencies have a responsibility to offer both support and challenge to families and to each other in order to respond robustly to neglect, whilst appropriately utilising the strengths of families and using restorative language. In Worcestershire our model for strengths-based practice is Signs of Safety which pays equal attention to what professionals are worried about and to what is working well so that professionals and family members can consider what needs to happen.

3. Definition

Defining neglect can rely on assumptions about parental intentions. This is problematic since one of the distinguishing features of neglect is the omission of specific behaviours by the caregivers without intending to harm the child, rather than the deliberate commission of abusive acts (Connell-Carrick, 2003).

Defining neglect in terms of the *likelihood* of significant harm or impairment to the child's development, rather than on whether the child has been harmed, may encourage practitioners to focus on whether a child's needs are being met, regardless of parental intent.

Serious case reviews have time and again highlighted a lack of co-ordinated communication between agencies as a factor when a child has experienced neglect. Therefore it is important for all professionals to work within a recognisable framework with agreed definitions (Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre, 2014).

Working Together 2018 defines neglect as:-

“The persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. 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 care-givers); or
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

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

Neglect is a broad category with varying degrees. The legal definition of neglect should be used as a guide, but then it needs to be broken down further. Jan Horwath (2007) has developed the following categories:

- Medical
- Nutritional
- Emotional
- Educational
- Physical
- Supervision and safety

Medical neglect is the failure to provide appropriate health care for a child, placing the child at risk of being seriously disabled, being disfigured or dying.

Concern is warranted not only when a parent refuses medical care for a child in an emergency or for an acute illness, but also when a parent ignores medical recommendations for a child with a treatable chronic disease or disability resulting in frequent hospitalisation or significant deterioration.

In non-emergency situations, medical neglect can result in poor overall health and compounded medical problems. This includes dental neglect, where a child may have severe untreated dental decay. Is the family missing appointments, is medication not given, etc.? What is the impact on the child?

Nutritional neglect occurs when a parent or caretaker's failure to provide adequate nutrition to a child. Nutritional neglect occurs when children repeatedly experience hunger for hours or a large part of the day, and no food is available.

We are all clear that if a parent is malnourishing a child that would constitute neglect, but our thinking changes when it comes to obesity. Broadly speaking, as parents, we are responsible for what our children eat, until they go to secondary

school at 11. If a child under that age is obese with no medical reason, why is that not neglect of the child's needs? Is the child malnourished, or is the child obese?

Emotional neglect Research in this field often concludes that it is emotional and/or psychological neglect that causes the most lasting damage. Emotional neglect or psychological neglect can include:

- ignoring a child's presence or needs
- consistently failing to stimulate, encourage or protect a child
- rejecting a child or actively refusing to respond to a child's needs, for example refusing to show affection
- constantly belittling, name calling or threatening a child
- isolating a child, preventing a child from having normal social contacts with other children and adults
- terrorising a child, creating a climate of fear and intimidation where the child is frightened to disclose what is happening
- corrupting a child by encouraging the child to engage in destructive, illegal or anti- social behaviour.

Severe neglect of an infant's need for nurture and stimulation can result in the infant failing to thrive and even infant death.

Emotional neglect is often the most difficult situation to substantiate in a legal context and is often reported as a secondary concern after other forms of abuse or neglect.

There is an overlap between emotional abuse and many forms of child maltreatment and this is especially true of neglect. When practitioners are working with children who are experiencing neglect an understanding of emotional abuse is also important.

Educational neglect involves the failure to ensure a child receives an adequate and suitable education. Life chances are significantly reduced if a child does not receive an education.

Physical Neglect is the failure to provide for a child's basic needs. It usually involves the parent or caregiver not providing adequate food, clothing or shelter. It is important to ask yourself what the impact will be on the child if they are dirty, smelly and lice-infested, and do not have the clothing and belongings that other children have.

It can also include child abandonment, inadequate or inappropriate supervision, and failure to adequately provide for a child's safety or failure to adequately provide for a child's physical needs.

Physical neglect can severely impact a child's development resulting in failure to thrive; malnutrition; serious illness; physical harm in the form of cuts, bruises, burns or other injuries due to the lack of supervision; and a lifetime of low self-esteem.

Lack of supervision and guidance

In the most extreme cases children die as a result of accidents caused by a lack of supervision. Children need to grow up feeling that someone cares about where they are and what they are doing.

4. National and local context

In England, almost half (43%) of child protection plans are made in response to neglect, and it features in 60% of serious case reviews (Brandon *et al.*, 2012).

A study by Radford and colleagues commissioned by the NSPCC found that 9% of young adults had been severely neglected by parents or guardians during their childhood (Radford *et al.*, 2011). Yet a number of high profile child deaths (see Laming, 2003; Lock, 2013) have shown that it is extremely difficult for professionals to identify indicators of neglect,

to assess whether what they have observed is sufficiently serious for them to take action, and to decide on the most appropriate course of action (Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre, 2014).

What we know about neglect in Worcestershire

The rate of Child Protection Plans due to neglect per 10,000 population has increased sharply in Worcestershire in recent years and as the table below shows is higher than England and Statistical Neighbours.

Rate per 10,000 population due to Neglect	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Worcestershire	19	20	19	17	25	34
Statistical Neighbours	15	13	17	18	19	22
England	19	19	22	23	24	26

Neglect has been increasing as the prime category for Child Protection Plans throughout recent years as shown in the table below. At the end of March 2017 Worcestershire had 415 children on a child protection plan, of these 268 were for the category of Neglect.

% of all Child Protection Plans	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Neglect	44%	50%	51%	44%	56%	65%
Emotional abuse	33%	32%	32%	36%	34%	26%
Physical abuse	8%	6%	6%	6%	2%	1%
Sexual abuse	9%	9%	6%	5%	2%	3%
Multiple	6%	3%	7%	9%	7%	5%

At the end of March 2018 the percentage of child protection plans in Worcestershire in the category of Neglect had increased to 80% compared with the national average of 48%, with a significantly lower proportion of child protection plans in the category of Emotional Abuse than the national average.

% of all Child Protection Plans (2018)

	Worcestershire	National
Neglect	80%	48%
Emotional abuse	9%	35%
Physical abuse	3%	8%
Sexual abuse	5%	4%
Multiple	4%	5%

This increase in children on child protection plans may be for a number of reasons: better understanding and identification of neglect, raised public awareness following high profile media cases and/or professional anxiety around managing cases of neglect, or an issue in respect of classification when decision making . This needs to be better understood as this high rate of neglect would not necessarily be expected in a county with Worcestershire's demographic.

The gender profile of neglect is slightly higher for boys at 55% with girls at 45%, and not yet known 5% (unborn babies).

The age profile of neglect is 42% aged between 0 to 5 years, 28% between 6 to 10 years, 23% between 11 to 15 years, and 8% 16 years and over.

5. Why we need a strategy

The Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) is committed to promoting working in partnership with children, families and partner agencies to identify neglect at the earliest opportunity and, where necessary, to ensure that children, young people and families access the right services at the right time. In order to achieve this all partners agencies agree to work collaboratively to:

1. Work to a shared understanding of neglect, definitions, causes and impact;
2. Identify children at risk of neglect at the earliest opportunity;
3. Ensure effective assessments at all levels of intervention;
4. Respond promptly and effectively to address the underlying factors;
5. Maintain our focus on the experiences of children;
6. Ensure that children are protected from harm and minimise the long term effects of childhood neglect;
7. Review how well we are doing in preventing childhood neglect and safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children at risk of or experiencing neglect.

6. Aims of the Strategy

- Quantify the extent of neglect in Worcestershire and understand more fully the profile of neglected children
- Ensure practitioners are able to recognise neglect at the earliest opportunity, including the neglect of older children, and provide appropriate and timely responses
- Evaluate practice and its effectiveness in order to assure ourselves of its quality and support continuous improvement
- Reduce the prevalence and impact of neglect within Worcestershire

7. Strategic Objectives

- To improve the awareness and understanding of neglect, both within and between agencies working in Worcestershire, including services for adults, children, young people and families and the wider general public. This means developing a common understanding of neglect. Each agency is responsible for ensuring their workforce has access to relevant training and development opportunities and supporting practitioners by signposting them to the WSCB multi-agency neglect tools and appropriate training to help with the identification of neglect.
- To improve the recognition, assessment and response to children and young people living in neglectful situations; which prevents the need for statutory intervention. This includes the use of the Early Help Assessment incorporating a Signs of Safety approach, appropriate information sharing and agreed thresholds of intervention.
- To secure and sustain a collective commitment to addressing and responding to neglect across all partner agencies and to demonstrate effective leadership in driving the appropriate system, culture and process changes forward.
- To ensure the effectiveness of service provision:

- Evidence-based practice will be developed and promoted
- Work with children and young people will be measured by its impact on outcomes
- The views of children and young people and their families will inform the development of effective interventions
- Single and multi-agency audits will be undertaken to monitor the effectiveness of interventions. This process will seek evidence that the voice of the child has been taken into account in all assessments, planning processes and reviews

8. Strategic Priorities

Priority 1: Leadership and Partnership

Secure a collective commitment to tackle neglect across the partnership and demonstrate effective leadership in driving forward changes required

- Early identification and the effective response to neglect is a priority across all organisations, both statutory and non-statutory
- Develop a multi-agency strategy to support the delivery of an effective range of interventions to tackle neglect
- Promote a clear local partnership response to neglect that takes a Signs of Safety approach in early help interventions across the partnership which are focused on supporting those at risk of disadvantage
- Leaders drive the importance of sharing information appropriately in order to tackle neglect effectively
- Leaders ensure their staff are sufficiently trained to recognise and tackle neglect and are particularly alert to the risks arising for children with special needs and disabilities

Priority 2: Prevention

Improve awareness, understanding and early recognition of neglect

- The multi-agency workforce has a better understanding of neglectful parenting and its potential impact on babies, children and adolescents
- The multi-agency workforce is better able to recognise neglectful parenting and the importance of early intervention, and practitioners are confident enough to identify early where sustained change in families cannot be achieved
- Members of the community are better equipped to recognise neglect in all its forms and how to report it

Priority 3: Intervention

Improve the effectiveness of interventions to tackle neglect

- Effective, multi-disciplinary assessment processes are in place and routinely used. The Neglect Toolkit utilises the Signs of Safety approach and is used to enable a comprehensive consideration of the wide ranging aspects of parenting and risk factors
- Timely, multi-agency services are provided to prevent problems getting worse so that fewer children and young people are being brought up in households suffering from neglect. Families are supported to develop the skills, knowledge, resilience and capabilities required to be self-reliant and thrive
- Interventions match the assessed needs with clear achievable targets in realistic timescales
- Professionals receive effective supervision to help them test, challenge and reflect upon their analysis of risk to children and young people, particularly in the context of neglect and the cumulative indicators of harm

- Professionals challenge each other and escalate as appropriate when there are professional differences of opinion

9. Review and Evaluation

This Strategy will be reviewed on a two-yearly basis for relevance and effectiveness. The first review is due in September 2020.

The Delivery Action Plan will be monitored against identified outcomes and the difference made to children, young people and their families will be evaluated through audits and other quality assurance activity.

10. Measuring Success

The success of the strategy will be measured based on a range of quantitative and qualitative measures:

Quantitative Measures

- Reduction in the percentage of children on child protection plans for neglect for 12 months or more
- Reduction in percentage of repeat child protection plans for neglect (this is where the 2nd plan category is neglect and the previous plan was also neglect)
- Reduction in percentage of children and young people subject to a children in need plan for neglect for more than 6 months
- Reduction in percentage of children and young people referred for a Social Work Assessment where neglect is identified as the primary reason

- Reduction in the number of children becoming looked after where neglect is identified as the primary reason
- Increase in practitioner confidence and skills across the workforce

Qualitative Measures

- Audits of neglect cases evidence early identification of neglect and clear plans which avoid drift and delay and reduce the impact of neglect on children
- Audits of early help assessments, social work assessments and their corresponding plans demonstrate effective use of the neglect toolkit and Signs of Safety approach to improve outcomes for children and young people
- Service user feedback evidences effective use of the neglect toolkit in engaging with children and families and reducing or preventing neglect

11. Appendices

Appendix 1: Neglect Strategy Delivery Action Plan

	Actions	Lead	Timescale	Update (May 2019)
Leadership and Partnership: Secure a collective commitment to tackling neglect across the partnership and demonstrate effective leadership in driving forward changes required				
1.1	Secure agreement from strategic leads to endorse the Strategy and support the embedding of the toolkit as a priority across the partnership	Maria White (Chair of Task and Finish Group)	December 2018	Completed December meeting of WSCB
1.2	Deliver communications plan across the partnership to raise awareness of the collective commitment to identifying and tackling neglect, and to ask agencies to embed use of the toolkit to support practice	Sue Haddon (WSCB Business Manager)	June 2019	On target but not yet completed Launch events to take place on 21.6.19 targeted at managers/safeguarding leads who are able to support embedding of the toolkit in their own organisations
Prevention: Improve awareness, understanding and recognition of neglect				
2.1	Production and piloting of neglect toolkit to include screening tool	Maria White (Chair of Task and Finish Group)	May 2019	Completed Tools amended following feedback from practitioners
2.2	Production of materials for managers/leads to use with teams to raise awareness of the pathway and toolkit	Sue Haddon (WSCB Business Manager)	June 2019	On target but not yet completed To be made available at the launch events
2.3	Production of practice standards against which partner organisations can self-assess their effectiveness in the identification and response to neglect	Adam Johnston (Chair of PPG)	April 2019	On target but not yet completed Self-assessment tool has been drafted and will be published on website
Intervention: Improve the effectiveness of interventions to tackle neglect				
3.1	Development of a clear pathway which illustrates a systematic approach to the '3 questions' to be asked at all levels of intervention to support timely decision making	Maria White (Chair of Task and Finish Group)	January 2019	Completed On agenda for IFPG meeting on 17.4.19
3.2	Production of guidance on developing SMART Plans for CYP with clear, achievable targets and realistic time scales, and for identifying when sustained change in families cannot be achieved	Adam Johnston (Chair of PPG)	April 2019	Completed Guidance has been produced and is available within the Neglect Toolkit
3.3	Production of tools to support practitioners' understanding of the lived experience of CYP experiencing neglect	Maria White (Chair of Task and Finish Group)	January 2019	Completed Consultation with CYP has been completed and tools have been revised to reflect feedback
3.4	Develop audit programme with focus on reflective supervision, use of toolkit to inform assessments and plans, voice of the child/lived experience and timeliness of interventions/decision making	Sarah Wilkins (Chair of MEG)	May 2019	On target but not yet completed To be co-ordinated by WSCP Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures Group

Appendix 2

Worcestershire Neglect Pathway and Toolkit

West Midlands Safeguarding Children Procedures (Section 3.13)

<http://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/local-content/xkjN/neglect-tools-and-pathways/?b=Worcestershire>

(select Worcestershire from the drop down list if required)

- Experiences of Neglect (Horwath)
- Neglect Screening Tool
- Home Conditions Assessment
- Home Conditions (tracking progress)
- A Day in My Life (baby)
- A Day in My Life (pre-school child)
- A Day in My Life (primary school child)
- A Day in My Life (teenager)
- SMART planning guidance
- Neglect case studies
- Neglect Prompts (signposted with permission of Hampshire Safeguarding Children Board)
<http://www.hampshiresafeguardingchildrenboard.org.uk/professionals/neglect/practical-tools/neglect-prompts>

Appendix 3

Inter-agency Neglect guidance

West Midlands Safeguarding Children Procedures (Section 2.9)

<http://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/pkph/regional-safeguarding-guidance/neglect>