

# Really useful guide to recognising NEGLECT



# Introduction

Over the last decade awareness of the extent of child neglect has grown and it is increasingly receiving more attention nationally and locally. Child protection statistics, prevalence research and enquiry reports indicate that too many children are still experiencing chronic neglect throughout large parts of their childhood and are not getting the help they need when they need it. <sup>1</sup> Practitioners also feel there is a lack of agreement around what constitutes child neglect and when professionals should intervene<sup>2</sup> Thus the early indicators of neglect and opportunities for preventative interventions are often missed, and the professional staff tasked to work in this area need support and training to develop the skills to address it.

A crucial part of any intervention to prevent families coming to Children's Social Care attention due to neglect is the "early offer" of help proposed by Professor Eileen Munro in her final report <sup>3</sup> so that families who do not meet the criteria for social care can be helped to address problems before they escalate. There is also emerging research evidence regarding effective early intervention and the difference that therapeutic support for children and their families can make <sup>4</sup>

This guide to recognising neglect is for practitioners across the children's workforce. It aims to address the issue of what neglect is, what it looks like in different age groups and when intervention is necessary. It should be used in conjunction with the Bracknell Forest Continuum of Family Support Services which identifies appropriate provision for different stages of need, from universal services through to crisis intervention.

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<sup>1</sup> Radford et al. 2011 Child Abuse and Neglect in the UK Today. London NSPCC

<sup>2</sup> Gardener 2008 Developing an Effective Response to Neglect and Emotional Harm. London NSPCC

<sup>3</sup> Munro 2011 Review of Child protection: Final Report – A Child Centred System DfE

<sup>4</sup> Long et al 2012 Evaluation of the Action for Children UK Neglect Project Manchester: University of Salford

## What is neglect?

Neglect is not an event but rather an absence of appropriate care, often over a long period of time. It may be difficult to distinguish between neglect and material poverty. Many forms of physical neglect, such as inadequate clothing, exposure to environmental hazards and poor hygiene may be directly attributed to poverty. While some families do face great financial hardship, aspects of neglect cannot be dismissed or overlooked. Neglect is a serious form of maltreatment and can be fatal. It can be summed up as a failure of provision and a failure of supervision.

***Failure of provision*** - is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical or psychological needs, for example:

- Repeated, inadequate provision of food.
- Exposing children to physical circumstances that are inappropriate or unsafe for the child's developmental stage.
- Inadequate provision in the home environment.
- Inadequate attention to a child's medical or health needs.
- Children missing school or parents/carers not supporting a child's learning.
- Indifferent parenting having an impact on a child's emotional development and sense of belonging.

***Failure of supervision*** – is where the level of guidance and supervision is inadequate to ensure that a child is physically safe and protected from harm. Neglect should be considered if for example:

- the explanation for an injury (e.g. burns, sunburn, ingestion of harmful substance, road traffic incidents) suggests a lack of supervision.
- if a child or young person is not being cared for by a person who is able to provide adequate care.
- If a child is abandoned.

## Factors contributing to neglect

A number of factors are commonly present in the lives of children experiencing neglect.<sup>5</sup> These factors should not be viewed as causing neglect in all circumstances, but, whether in isolation or combined, these elements can provide early indication of the potential for neglectful care of a child:

- Mental health – one or both parents has mental health problems.
- Substance misuse.
- Domestic violence – unstable and abusive relationships.
- Low income – the family has low income (below 60% of the median).
- Material deprivation – the family cannot afford a number of food and clothing items.
- Cycles of neglect and the adult caregivers' experience of poor parenting as a child.
- Worklessness – no parent in the family is in work.
- Housing – the family lives in poor quality and/or overcrowded housing.
- Qualifications – no parent in the family has any academic or vocational qualifications.
- Illness/disability – at least one parent has a limiting long-standing illness, disability or infirmity.
- Poor parental functioning (including learning disabilities).
- Social isolation.
- Low self concept or esteem.

While poverty is believed to increase the risk of neglect, it is important to highlight that poverty does not predetermine neglect. The majority of low-income families are not neglectful and do provide loving homes for their children. When poverty co-exists with other forms of adversity however, it can negatively impact the parent's ability to cope and undermine their capacity to adequately respond to their child's needs.

Neglect may also occur as a short term reaction to a crisis – “ordinary people in extra ordinary circumstances.”

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<sup>5</sup> Daniel Taylor and Scott 2009 Noticing and Helping the Neglected Child: Literature Review. DfCS&F

## **Attributes of Neglectful Parents:**

- Inability to plan.
- Lack of confidence about the future.
- Difficulty in managing money.
- Emotional immaturity.
- Lack of knowledge of child's needs.
- Large number of children.
- Teenage parents.
- High stress levels.

## **The effects of neglect**

Neglect can be far-reaching in its consequences for a child. It is now recognised as one of the most dangerous forms of abuse because of its harmful and sometimes fatal effects. There is now a significant evidence base about its severe impact upon children's well-being and development.<sup>6</sup> Not only will the experience of it make a child's life miserable now but it can affect all aspects of their development. It is also likely to influence the relationships they make with others in both early and later life and have an impact on how they parent their own children. In the most extreme cases, neglect can lead to the death of a child or be one of the causes of non-accidental death.<sup>7</sup>

The main areas of impact on a child will depend on how early the neglect occurs, but neglect can have effects across the child's lifespan, and can lead to the following:

### ***Health and physical effects:***

- Affect on early brain development, which may influence how a child reacts to stress or other stimulation situations in early or later life.
- A child being underweight or grossly overweight.
- Persistent infections.
- Developmental delay such as walking or toileting.
- Cognitive difficulties such as language delay, poor intellectual ability, an inability to concentrate or express feelings.

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<sup>6</sup> Farmer and Lutman 2012 *Effective Working with Neglected Children and their Families: Linking Interventions to Long-term Outcomes*. London Jessica Kingsley

<sup>7</sup> Brandon et al 2013 *Neglect and Serious Case Reviews* London NSPCC

### ***Emotional effects:***

- Insecure attachment problems can lead to difficulties in developing emotional relationships with peers or adults.
- Low self-esteem and self-regard, anxiety and depression, over-compliance or anger/hostility.

### ***Social effects:***

- Social isolation due to difficulties in forming and keeping friendships, being bullied or being ignored by peers.
- Social exclusion leading to becoming involved with groups of children who display anti-social behaviour or who may bully others.
- Behaviour difficulties which can make managing the school environment hard.
- Poor school attendance and attainment which means the child does not reach their potential.

### ***Longer term effects:***

- Difficulties in maintaining relationships.
- Lower educational achievements.
- An increased risk of substance misuse.
- Difficulties in assuming parenting responsibilities later on in life.

### **When can neglect occur?**

Neglect can occur throughout a child's life from the pregnancy until the adolescent years. Examples of neglect during pregnancy would be maternal substance misuse and lack of ante natal care.

Infants are particularly vulnerable to neglect, especially physical neglect. Older children who are not fed properly, for example, may be able to find food from other sources but for infants, a lack of nourishment can soon become life threatening.

Neglected children often become neglected adolescents. In adolescence neglect can be a lack of parental guidance leading to a young person becoming involved in risky behaviours or criminal activities, staying out overnight without their parents knowing where they are, and running away to avoid maltreatment. There is an abundance of research into early years neglect compared with the small amounts conducted into adolescent neglect. This is reflected in the examples given in the Bracknell Forest Neglect Profile. Thus it is vital to raise awareness about neglected adolescents and the importance of working against preconceptions such as the resilience of 11 to 17 year olds to neglect.

### **Children particularly vulnerable to neglect**

Some children are especially vulnerable to neglect. Amongst them are children born prematurely or with very low birth weight, children with disabilities, adolescents, runaways, children in care, asylum seeking children and refugee children.

The neglect of children with disabilities has been largely invisible. The research that does exist indicates that disabled children are more vulnerable to maltreatment than non-disabled children<sup>8</sup>. Reasons for this are varied and complex. Firstly, children with disabilities might be less able to communicate their needs and to access help outside their families or care settings. Secondly, the needs of children with disabilities are often demanding and can overstretch a family's capacity to provide adequate care.

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<sup>8</sup> Spencer et al, 2005; National Working Group on Child Protection and Disability, 2003

## What does neglect look like for the child?

### ***Behavioural signs:***

- Passive baby.
- Constant hunger.
- Constant tiredness.
- Frequent lateness or non-attendance to school.
- Destructive tendencies.
- Low self esteem.
- Neurotic behaviour.
- Demanding attention seeking behaviour.
- Running away.
- Compulsive stealing or scavenging.
- No social relationships.

### ***Physical signs:***

- Poor personal hygiene.
- Poor state of clothing.
- Emaciation, pot belly short stature.
- Poor skin and hair tone.
- Untreated medical conditions.

# The really useful guide to recognising NEGLECT

The tool below is adapted from the Graded Care Profile, designed by Dr Leon Polnay and Dr O P Srivastava (Bedfordshire and Luton Community NHS Trust and Luton Borough Council). It provides practitioners with an objective way of assessing when inadequate care could put a child at risk of harm. It covers the following four domains of care

- PHYSICAL CARE.
- SAFETY.
- AFFECTION & LOVE.
- ESTEEM.

## The purpose of using the neglect profile is:

- to give an objective picture of the care the child is actually receiving.
- to clarify areas of concern for parents and professionals.
- to highlight how parenting support and appropriate single agency or inter agency intervention can be planned and targeted to improve the level of care a child receives.
- to support the completion of a CAF by providing the required level of assessment detail.

There are five grades in the original graded care profile. In our document the first two have been combined under grade 1 (Thriving Family) and any needs are met by universal services.

	<b>Grade 1 Thriving Family</b>	<b>Grade 2 Coping Family</b>	<b>Grade 3 Barely Coping Family</b>	<b>Grade 4 Family in Crisis</b>
<b>1. Level of Care</b>	Essential needs met	Some essential needs unmet	Most essential needs unmet	Essential needs entirely unmet/ hostile
<b>2. Commitment to Care</b>	Child is priority most of the time	Child and carer equal	Child second	Child not considered
<b>3. Action</b>	Universal Services	Targeted Services & Early Intervention	Specialist Services	Crisis Intervention

## **How to use the Neglect Profile:**

- To facilitate discussion with the parent in the home environment.
- In supervision with the lead professional.
- To provide a sufficient level of detail to make the decision whether or not a CAF should be completed.
- With the Bracknell Forest Family Support Continuum to identify appropriate resources. <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/continuum-of-family-support-services.pdf> and the Parenting Support Directory available from [parent.support@bracknell-forest.gov.uk](mailto:parent.support@bracknell-forest.gov.uk)
- To monitor improvement or deterioration in the family's situation.

## **Suggested action following completion of an assessment using the profile.**

The Neglect Profile and the Family Support Continuum are to be used as tools to facilitate assessments. They should be used in conjunction with sound professional judgment and, where necessary, in consultation with your line manager and other professionals involved with the family.

Further guidance is available from the CAF coordinator. Consultation regarding referral to Children's Social Care is available via the Duty team's direct line to Social Workers. Tel: 01344 321211

It should also be noted that while the Continuum of Family Support Services covers the full range of need and provision, the Neglect Profile is specifically focussed on assessing levels of neglect. However neglect often occurs alongside other issues. When assessing a family with multiple problems, for example substance misuse, domestic violence or mental ill-health, these need to be taken into account too when considering what action to take. Any practitioner who is unclear about the level of risk to children evident within a family should escalate to the next level of intervention.

## ***Concerns at Grade 2***

If a family exhibits a number of concerns at grade 2 (coping family) the worker should consider using the pre CAF checklist to determine whether or not a CAF is appropriate. If there is only one area of concern the worker should consider direct referral to the appropriate service.

The Bracknell Forest Continuum of Family Support indicates the types of assessment, response, intervention and services in Bracknell Forest available across various sectors for different age groups and different levels of need.

### ***Concerns at Grade 3***

If a family exhibits one or more concerns, at grade 3 (barely coping family) the worker should refer, via a CAF, to the Early Intervention Hub to access multi agency specialist assessments and intervention. However if the concerns are serious the worker should make a referral to Children's Social Care.

### ***Concerns at Grade 4***

If a family exhibits any concerns at grade 4 (family in crisis) the worker should make an immediate child protection referral to Children's Social Care.



## Bracknell Forest Neglect Profile

### Areas of physical care

	<b>Coping Family Grade 2</b>	<b>Barely Coping Family Grade 3</b>	<b>Family in Crisis Grade 4</b>
Nutrition (quantity)	Adequate to variable	Variable to low	Mostly low or starved
Nutrition (organisation)	Poorly organised, irregular timing, no care about where meals taken.	Ill organised, no clear mealtimes	Chaotic: eat what you want when you can
Hygiene 0-4 years	No routines, personal care undertaken or supervised sometimes	Personal care occasionally undertaken or supervised	Seldom or irregular personal care
Hygiene 5-7 years	Irregularly reminded and products provided. Sometimes supervised	Reminded only now and then minimum supervision	Not supported or encouraged
Hygiene 7+ years	Irregularly reminded and products provided. Sometimes supervised	Left to their own initiatives. Provision minimum and inconsistent	Not supported or encouraged
Clothing (fitting)	Clothes too large or too small	Clothes clearly the wrong size	Improper fitting of almost all clothing
Clothing (insulation)	Adequate to variable weather protection	Inadequate weather protection	Inappropriate for weather conditions
Health (opinion sought)	Frequent unnecessary consultation, and/ or not seeking appropriate medication or treatment	Delayed consultation, only when illness becomes moderately severe	When illness becomes critical or even then ignored. Inappropriate medication given or for prolonged periods
Health checks, immunisation or regular dental appointments	Omissions for reasons of personal inconvenience. Takes up if persuaded	Omission because of carelessness. Accepts if challenged and/or supported	Clear disregard of child's welfare. Blocks home visits
Housing (facilities)	Some essential fixtures and fittings but little consideration of child's needs	Adults' needs come first, rarely consider needs of the child	Child dangerously exposed, unsafe or not provided for

# Bracknell Forest Neglect Profile

## Areas of safety

	<b>Coping Family Grade 2</b>	<b>Barely Coping Family Grade 3</b>	<b>Family in Crisis Grade 4</b>
Awareness of safety issues	Poor awareness and perception except for immediate danger	Oblivious to safety risks	No consideration or action for safety
Practice pre-mobility age	Handling careless, sometimes unattended when laid within the house	Handling unsafe, unattended even during care chores (bottle left in the mouth)	Dangerous handling, left dangerously unattended during care chores like bathing
Acquisition of mobility	Measures taken against danger about to happen ineffective	Few measures against danger. Improvement from mishaps soon lapses	Inadvertently exposes to dangers or fails to act when dangers apparent
Infant/primary school	Little supervision indoors and outdoors. Acts if in noticeable danger	No supervision, intervenes after mishaps which soon lapse again	Minor mishaps ignored or child is blamed, fails to prevent or intervenes casually after major mishap
Junior/primary & secondary school	Not always aware of whereabouts outdoors believing it is safe as long as returns on time	Not concerned about daytime outings, concerned about late nights in case of younger child	Unconcerned despite knowledge of dangers outdoors, or staying away until late evening/night
Safety in absence	For recreational reason leaves younger child with older child or unsuitable person	For recreational reason a very young child left with a slightly older child or unsuitable person	For recreational reason young child left alone or with another young child or unsuitable person
Traffic 0-4 years	Infants not secured in pram, young child expected to catch up with adult when walking, glances back now and then if left behind. Babies not secured	Young child left far behind when walking or dragged with irritation	Babies unsecured. Careless with pram. Young child left to wander and dragged along in frustration when found
Traffic 5+ years	Younger child sometimes allowed to cross with older child and watched. Older child crosses alone with some knowledge of road safety	Younger child allowed to cross busy road alone in belief that they can, without knowledge that they have been taught road safety	A child crosses a busy road alone without any concern or thought

## Bracknell Forest Neglect Profile

### Areas of affection and love

	Coping Family Grade 2	Barely Coping Family Grade 3	Family in Crisis Grade 4
Carer – sensitivity	Not sensitive enough – messages and signals have to be intense to make an impact e.g. crying	Quite insensitive, needs repeated or prolonged intense signals	Insensitive to even sustained intense signals or even dislike of child
Timing of response	Does not respond at time of signals if during own leisure activity. Responds at time of signals if fully unoccupied or child in distress	Response delayed even when child is in distress	No responses unless a clear mishap for fear of being accused
Mutual engagement – beginning interactions	Child mainly starts interaction, sometimes the carer, and some reciprocal response. Carer negative if child's behaviour is challenging	Child mainly starts interactions, seldom the carer and rare reciprocal response	Child does not attempt to start interactions with carer. Carer does not start interactions. Child appears resigned or apprehensive.  No reciprocal interactions



## Bracknell Forest Neglect Profile

### Areas of esteem

	Coping Family Grade 2	Barely Coping Family Grade 3	Family in Crisis Grade 4
0-2 years – stimulation and equipment	Inadequate and inappropriate stimulation. Baby ignored while carer pursues own amusements, sometimes interacts with baby	Baby ignored while adult gets on with pursuing own amusements unless strongly sought out by baby	Stimulation absent even mobility restricted (confined in pram/chair) for carer's convenience. Cross if baby demands attention
2-5 years	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. interactive stimulation variable</li> <li>2. toys and resources – little effort to make do if unaffordable</li> <li>3. outings – child accompanies carer whenever carer decides, usually suitable child friendly places</li> <li>4. special occasions – sometimes included, provided for or made to feel special</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Interactive stimulation scarce even if doing nothing else</li> <li>2. toys and resources – lacking on essentials</li> <li>3. outings – child simply accompanies, plays out doors in neighbourhood with little supervision.</li> <li>4. special occasions – seldom included, provided for or made to feel special</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. No interactive stimulation</li> <li>2. toys and resources – non unless provided by others</li> <li>3. outings – no outings for the child but may play in the street but carer goes out locally</li> <li>4. special occasions – rarely is the child included or provided for or made to feel special</li> </ol>
2 – 5 + years	Maintains education but little support at home even if has spare time	Little effort to maintain education. No concern about child missing school	Not concerned, no understanding of the benefit of education

Thanks to Southampton LSCB for allowing the use of the 'Really useful guide to recognising NEGLECT' for the basis of this booklet and to Bracknell Forest LSCB for commissioning and funding this work.

Berkshire LSCB Child Protection Procedures  
<http://berks.proceduresonline.com/index.htm>

CAF Practitioners Tool Kit  
<http://schools.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/caf.htm>

<http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/continuum-of-family-support-services.pdf>

Copies of this booklet may be obtained in large print, Braille, on audio cassette or in other languages. To obtain a copy in an alternative format please telephone 01344 352000.

### **Nepali**

यस प्रचारको सक्षेप वा सार निचोड चाहिं दिइने छ ठूलो अक्षरमा, ब्रेल वा क्यासेट सून्नको लागी । अरु भाषाको नककल पनि हासिल गर्न सकिने छ । कृपया सम्पर्क गनुहोला ०१३४४ ३५२००० ।

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