

Briefing in a minute: Child Neglect

March 2016

Child neglect is defined in [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015](#) as "the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical, emotional 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 and once the child is born may involve parents or carers failing to provide adequate food; clothing and shelter; protect the child from physical and emotional harm or danger; provide adequate supervision or access to required medical care or treatment.

Neglect is characterised by the absence of a relationship of care between the parent or carer and the child, and the failure to prioritise their needs. The impact of neglect during the first two years of a child's life can have profound and lasting effects on the development of the brain, leading to problems with self-esteem and relationships.

Neglect can occur at any age, including the teenage years and adolescence.

Neglect differs from other forms of abuse in that there is rarely a single incident or crisis that draws attention to the family. It is the repeated and persistent neglectful behaviour of the parent or carer that causes incremental damage over time. It is also important to remember that neglect can be fatal to a child, which includes for example, through accidental and non-accidental injuries such as physical abuse, co-sleeping, falls and fires, road traffic accidents.

Early help to support families where neglect is apparent is essential. This may require action to ensure that the parents have access to specialist advice, assistance and services. However, the needs of the child must always remain the focus, paramount and at the centre of what you do. Accurate recording by all practitioners, the use of significant life chronologies and robust information sharing are also crucial to the protection of children at risk of neglect.

In Newcastle we have developed a neglect strategy to minimise the risk of harm to children and young people from neglect and have also set up a practitioner special interest group, which is designed to consider practice issues and ways of becoming more effective when we work with families where neglect is apparent. If you are interested in joining this group contact Consultant Social Worker Vicky MacPhail Victoria.Macphail@newcastle.gov.uk

In addition there are also a number of evidenced based initiatives and programmes underway to support families and provide help at the earliest opportunity, these include: MST CAN; Family Insights; Parents under Pressure and NSPCC Thriving Families. Newcastle Safeguarding Children Board also provides neglect guidance and training to practitioners, which are available on its website <http://www.nscb.org.uk/>

If you require any further information contact Sue Kirkley, NSCB Co-ordinator susan.kirkley@newcastle.gov.uk