

This Guide has been developed to provide those working with children, young people and their families and understanding of what is meant by the term child neglect, the impact that it can have on children and young people, how to identify neglect and what to do in response.

What do we mean by neglect?

Neglect, the most common form of child abuse, is defined in [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#), 2015 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 unresponsive to, a child’s basic emotional needs.”

Neglect usually happens over a period of time, although can also be a single event. There are different types of neglect: physical, emotional, medical and educational. A child or young person who is neglected may also suffer from other forms of abuse.

The term ‘self-neglect’ is one typically used in relation to adults. However, it is important that professionals are clear that for children and young people, this term can have the potential for implication of blame on a child who may not have the capacity to actively make a choice or is not consciously doing so. Use of this term could also have a negative impact on direct work or later in life should an individual request access to records. The definition of neglect of children and young people (see above) relates to the abuse or inaction of an adult who has ultimate responsibility for taking appropriate care.

The harm resulting from neglect can be wide-ranging, apparent in multiple domains of a child’s life and can manifest across the life course. It is important practitioners consider the developmental impact of neglect across the life course of a child, i.e. early, medium and longer term impact, which can be compounded by adolescent’s emotional regulation. Specifically with adolescents, the risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), gang involvement, being trafficked, harmful sexual behaviours, interlinked with neglect is higher.

What are the possible indicators?

Professionals should be aware of the warning signs and symptoms of child neglect, and respond to those indicators so that problems can be addressed as early as possible and the right support and services for the child, young person and their family provided. Indicators can include:

- Physical signs such as appearing unwashed, dirty, smelly, wearing inappropriate or unclean clothes and in extreme cases they may appear hungry, or not growing and developing as they should.
- Socially they may not have many friends and appear anxious, or withdrawn.
- Parents may be notable by their absence, with the child or young person left for long periods of their own, a lack of warm relationship and attachment and no clear boundaries.

The above are just some examples – neglect will appear different on a case by case basis. Whilst neglect is usually an act of omission – failing to do something, it can be a deliberate act. Neglect of older children and adolescents is much harder to identify and hidden, such as not providing health care, not taking an interest or failing to provide support with problems or offering encouragement. Read more about the signs, indicators and effects of neglect on the [NSPCC website](#).

How to respond?

Neglect is preventable and can be tackled if agencies work together to develop the range of responses required for intervening at different levels. The earlier the intervention, the more likely a positive outcome. It is the cumulative effect of neglect which has the most impact which is why the historical context needs to be taken into account, rather than just any particular incidence.

Once neglect has been identified, and a referral made (see [LSCB Are you worried about a child? How to access early help, and thresholds for referral to children's social care](#), the relevant assessment will indicate what support for the family can be provided through universal services in health and education and specialist services, such as Parenting Programmes. Key to preventing neglect is listening to children's experiences, helping families create and sustain positive change.

Redbridge LSCB has a Multi-Agency [Neglect Strategy](#). One of the key elements of the Strategy is the promotion of the [LSCB Neglect Toolkit](#) and [Checklist](#) as practical tools for use by practitioners to identify and respond to neglect. If repeated after a period of intervention, the findings from the toolkit can be used to identify progress, see what is and isn't working, and to inform a change in a CAF, Child in Need Plan or other care plan.

Case Examples

The [NSPCC](#) present a number of real cases of children and young people who have experienced neglect –including [Sophie's story](#) – a young girl neglected through her parents use of drugs; [John](#) – who was forced to go without adequate food; and [Leanne](#) – bullied and accused by other children as smelling and not receiving emotional support at home. Sophie, John and Leanne are all children and young people that have been helped by the NSPCC and their lives have now changed.

Sometimes neglect is not tackled and there are a number of Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) featuring harm or fatality caused by neglect which can be viewed from the [National SCR Repository](#) – including [Halton, 2017 – medical neglect](#); [Thurrock, 2016 – Child 'M'](#); and [Coventry, 2013 – Daniel Pelka](#).

A [summary report](#) of a number of cases, written by Brandon et al, University of East Anglia, 2013, draws together findings and learning from child deaths or serious injury involving neglect between 2003 and 2011.

Further Reading & Learning

- Redbridge [LSCB website](#) – information on neglect for professionals
- Neglect – [NSPCC website](#)
- [Redbridge Local Safeguarding Children Board \(LSCB\) Training Programme](#)
- [Missed opportunities: indicators of neglect – what is ignored, why, and what can be done?](#) Research report, DfE, 2014
- [In a child's time: professional responses to neglect](#), Ofsted, 2014
- [Understanding Adolescent Neglect: Troubled Teens](#), Children's Society, 2016
- [Child Neglect Be Professionally Curious! Investigator/Practitioners Guidance Note](#), National Multi-Agency Child Neglect Strategic Work Group, 2015
- [Neglect Matters – A multi-agency guide for professionals working together on behalf of teenagers](#), DCSF, 2010

Useful Contacts

Redbridge LSCB: 020 8708 3289

Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO): 020 8708 5350

If you are concerned about a child, call the Child Protection and Assessment Team (CPAT) on 020 8708 3885

(020 8708 5897 after 17:00 and at weekends) or e-mail CPAT.Referrals@redbridge.gov.uk.