



One Minute Guide

Neglect

What is neglect?

Neglect is a form of maltreatment. Neglect is defined in [Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2018\) \(guide\)](#) 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:

- a. provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment)
- b. protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger
- c. ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers)
- d. ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment

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

In Bedfordshire we recognise that prenatal neglect may be influenced by factors other than, or in addition to, substance misuse. Prenatal neglect may be associated with: failure to attend prenatal appointments or to follow medical advice; smoking; and/ or experiencing domestic violence during pregnancy.

Neglect is the most common type of abuse experienced by children and young people in England; figures from 2014 recorded neglect as the primary need for 43% of children and young people on Child Protection Plans.

What types of neglect might children and young people experience?

Howarth (2007) identified six different types of neglect, which may include the following:

Medical neglect - the child's health needs are not met, or they are not provided with appropriate treatment needed as a result of illness or accidents.

Nutritional neglect - the child is given insufficient calories to meet their physical/ developmental needs, or they are given food of insufficient nutritional value, e.g. high fat or high sugar junk food in place of balanced meals; childhood obesity can be a sign of neglect.

Emotional neglect - the carer does not respond to the child's basic emotional needs, including failing to interact or provide affection.

Educational neglect - the child does not receive appropriate learning experiences; they may be under-stimulated and/ or experience a lack of interest in their achievements. This may include not sending their child to school regularly, and/ or failing to respond to special educational needs.

Physical neglect - the child may have inadequate or inappropriate (e.g. for the weather conditions) clothing, poor levels of hygiene, lack of clean-living conditions, abandonment or exclusion from home.

Lack of supervision and guidance - the child may be exposed to hazards, parents or caregivers may be inattentive to avoidable dangers or may leave the child with inappropriate carers. Lack of supervision can include not providing appropriate boundaries for young people, e.g. about under-age sex and alcohol use.

What is the impact of neglect for children at different ages?

Research has shown that children and young people's experiences of neglect, and the short and long-term impact it has on them, can vary with age. For example:

Prenatal neglect - adverse experiences during pregnancy have been linked with a number of poor outcomes, including low birth weight, premature birth, higher risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and impaired cognitive and social functioning;

Infancy (birth - 2 years) - Disinterest or failure to offer stimulation (e.g. through games like 'peek-a-boo' will limit the child's cognitive

development as well as their attachment, since babies learn and develop neural connections and cognitive functioning through interaction with the world and with their caregivers;

Pre-school (2 - 4 years) - children of this age tend to be mobile, but lack understanding of danger and need close supervision for their physical protection, which neglectful families may not provide. Children who are experiencing neglect may not be appropriately toilet trained, and their language development may be delayed;

Primary (5 - 11 years) - if neglected children have delayed cognitive development, school can be a source of frustration and distress. Signs of neglect such as dirty clothing will be apparent, which may lead to embarrassment and social difficulties. Children without boundaries may find it difficult to follow school rules, and if neglect includes failure to ensure school attendance their attainment is likely to be affected; and

Adolescence (12 - 18 years) - neglect is likely to have an impact on their ability to form and maintain friendships. If they have never been taught to prepare meals, their diets may lean towards high-fat, high-sugar convenience foods. Risk-taking behaviour e.g. alcohol or substance use, risky sexual behaviour or criminal activity may be attributed to or exacerbated by a lack of parental supervision.

How do we respond to neglect in Bedfordshire?

In supporting a family in which neglect is an issue, the greatest of care must be taken to resist the pressure to focus on the needs of the parents/carers: intervention should concentrate on ensuring that the child's needs are being met. This may require action to ensure that the parents/carers have access to specialist (and if necessary independent) advice and assistance, including assistance in communicating with professionals.

Neglect may arise from lack of knowledge, competing priorities, stress or deprivation. It may also be linked to parents/carers who retain cultural behaviours which are inappropriate in the context in which the family is living.

When a child's needs are unmet because the parents/carers lack knowledge or skill the first choice for intervention should generally be the provision of Early Help services such as information, training and support services. If there is no progress and the assessment by professionals is that progress is unlikely without more proactive intervention a referral to Children's Services in line with the Referrals Procedure should be considered.

Neglect often occurs in a context in which parents/carers are dealing with a range of other problems such as substance misuse, mental ill-health, learning disability, domestic violence, and lack of suitable accommodation.

On many occasions the birth of an additional child may add to the pressure on the family. The parents/carers may provide an acceptable standard of care until a new pressure or an unexpected crisis arises: then they lose sight of their child's needs. In this situation the first choice for intervention should be the provision of support in dealing with the competing pressures. This may require referral to appropriate adult services or family support services.

Messages for Good Practice

- Practical resources are often beneficial but their impact on meeting the child's needs must be kept under review;
- Relieving financial poverty does not necessarily relieve emotional poverty;
- Neglectful families are more likely to be isolated and to have weak informal networks. Providing volunteer support, and facilitating better relationship with family and in the community, can be effective in raising standards of care;
- Dealing with neglect can be overwhelming for professionals: support and regular supervision are crucial;
- It is important to carry out regular reviews of the rate at which the required change is being achieved in terms of the child's improved health and development.

Graded Care Profile 2

Within Bedfordshire practitioners are using the Graded Care Profile 2 – which one of several tools available that provides professionals with a common tool to objectively measure neglect, to facilitate discussion with the parent/carer and agree interventions to make changes to improve the outcomes for their own children. The Graded Care Profile 2 will provide professionals with a common baseline measure to identify and assess the effectiveness of professional interventions.

The Graded Care Profile 2 can be used by professionals along the continuum of need from Universal to Statutory intervention. However, it is anticipated that the Graded Care Profile 2 will be used to identify neglect at the earliest opportunity to ensure early intervention. It can also be used to escalated to statutory intervention including Public Law Outline processes.

Key Contacts and more information:

Children's Services Contacts

- Central Bedfordshire Access and Referral Team – 0300 300 8585
- Bedford Borough Multi Agency Support Hub (MASH) – 01234 718700
- Luton Multi Agency Support Hub (MASH) – 01582 547 653
- Emergency Duty Team (out of hours) – 0300 300 8123

Further Reading:

- [Neglect Procedure](#);
- [Responding to Abuse and Neglect Procedure](#);
- [Pan Bedfordshire Neglect Strategy \(2016-2019\)](#).