

Neglect Strategy

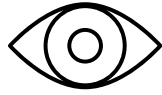


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Vision and Principles

Our vision is to work together to ensure that any child or adolescent experiencing neglect in Lambeth is:



SEEN



HEARD



HELPED

We want to make sure neglect is identified early and that the right kind of help at the right time; reduce repeat referrals and end the cycle of neglect.

The following principles underpin the commitment and approach of all local safeguarding partners to achieve this vision:

- > We recognise that children of **all ages** are affected by neglect, and we need to work to **understand their lived experience** and how neglect impacts on their development and life opportunities
- > We **work with families** to help them achieve positive and sustained change using **strengths-based** approaches and interventions to address concerns
- > Children and families are supported with **timely, appropriate and effective** support and interventions
- > Recognising the signs and symptoms of neglect at the **earliest opportunity** is a priority for all partners
- > We **'think family'** and seek to understand each family's **context, needs, history, and support network**
- > **Shared understanding** of the risks and impact of child neglect drives collaborative and joint working amongst all partners, through joined up procedures and use of the **Child Neglect Toolkit**

Understanding neglect

The impact of neglect can be devastating for a child or adolescent. The impacts may range from poor self-esteem, mental ill-health, as well as psychological, social, academic, and emotional developmental difficulties. These can have life-long, and potentially intergenerational, consequences. It is therefore essential that all professionals and agencies work together, with a sense of urgency and focus to identify neglect – and work with families to safeguard children and adolescents from it.

A definition of neglect

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 caregivers)
- > ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.
- > It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Working Together 2018

Neglect can affect babies, young children and adolescents

Policy and practice activity around neglect has increased in England in recent years, alongside the publication of fresh research into the issue, but for the most part this has focused on neglect of young children. Neglect continues to be regarded as being a particularly complex and multi-faceted issue, sometimes seen as being an intractable problem – and there is evidence to suggest that many adults, including the professionals who work with them, think that adolescents have a natural resilience to poor parenting experiences.

A [Children's Society study](#) found that more than one in seven (15%) 14–15 year olds lived with adult caregivers who neglected them in one or more ways – they may have shown little or no interest in them, not offered warmth or encouragement, made no effort to monitor or protect them or failed to promote their health.

Neglected young people reported low well-being and a higher propensity than their peers to behaving in ways which may jeopardise their health or their prospects. These findings may underestimate the scale of adolescent neglect as they are based solely on the reports of young people who were attending mainstream schools – and so do not account for those in specialist provision, those without a school place or missing from the system, or those in private schools, for whom the experience of neglect may be different.

Types of neglect

Physical neglect



A child's basic needs, such as food, clothing or shelter, are not met or they aren't properly supervised or kept safe.

Educational neglect



A parent doesn't ensure their child is given an education.

Emotional neglect



A child doesn't get the nurture and stimulation they need. This could be through ignoring, humiliating, intimidating or isolating them.

Medical neglect



A child isn't given proper health care and may not be brought to appointments. This includes dental care and refusing or ignoring medical recommendations.

Identifying and assessing neglect

Neglect has been found to be the most likely form of maltreatment to recur. Identifying neglect and determining whether statutory thresholds for action have been reached can be challenging.

Why?

- > The **chronic nature of neglect** can mean that professionals become habituated to how a child is presenting and **fail to question** a lack of progress.
- > Unlike physical abuse, for example, the experience of neglect **rarely produces a crisis** that demands immediate, proactive and authoritative action, making it difficult to evidence that the threshold is met at a specific point in time.
- > Neglect can in some cases be challenging to identify because of the need to look beyond individual parenting episodes and **consider the persistence, frequency or pervasiveness of parenting behaviours**, which may make them harmful and abusive.
- > **Practitioners may be reluctant or lack confidence to make judgements** about patterns of parental behaviour, particularly when these are deemed to be culturally embedded or associated with social disadvantages such as poverty or when the parent is a victim/survivor in their own right.
- > The child may not experience neglect in isolation, but **alongside other forms of abuse**.



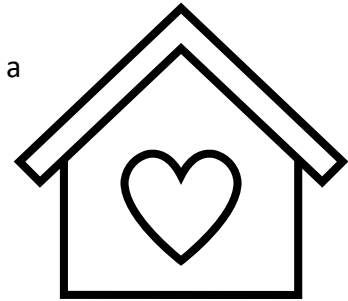
[Bowyer, S. and Wilkinson, J. \(2017\)](#)

Early recognition of neglect is crucial and needs to be based on the following:

- > An understanding of the early indicators of neglect.
- > Understanding of child development and what would be reasonable to expect for that child
- > Observations of the child
- > Observations of the child's behaviour and development
- > Observations of the parental care and the interaction with the child
- > The physical care of the child and the environment in which the child is living
- > Chronological information about the lived experience of the child in relation to care given, and the impact of care given on their health and development
- > An understanding of parental issues which might be contributing to care of the children

Neglect can be more easily understood from a child-centred perspective by asking:

- > What is it like for a child to be living in this household over a 24-hour period?
- > What is it like for the child/young person to be receiving this care?
- > What is the child's day to day lived experience?



Universal services play an essential role in early identification

Children whose needs are not being met by their parents or carers may, in the first instance, be identified by universal services, like health and education. It may be the failure of parents to use or access healthcare or education that raises concerns.

An assessment of neglect needs to consider the individual developmental needs of a child and the care they are receiving. The impact of neglect on individual children needs to be considered in the context of the child's age, development, the relationship they have with their parents/carers and the role they have within the family. All the children in a family may not receive the same levels of care; one child may receive significantly poorer care. Children will have different vulnerability to the impact of neglectful care depending on their developmental stage, or health and disability.

Practitioners should ensure that the judgments made about parenting are objective and not based on assumptions about different cultures or communities, or qualities of housing provision or environment. The quality of the parent/carer relationship with the child is key.

Once practitioners identify possible indicators of neglect, consideration should be given to undertaking an Early Help Assessment and accessing multi-agency support. Practitioners should discuss initial concerns with managers and designated safeguarding leaders within their organisation.

The **Neglect Toolkit** and reference to Lambeth's **Levels of Need** guidance will help in the assessment of the seriousness of the concerns and possible pathways to referrals.

One or more indicators of neglect may be present, and this may be sustained or episodic. A pattern of episodic neglect may reflect what is happening in the family at a particular point in time, such as a new partner or fluctuating poor parental mental health.

There is no single criterion for determining the presence of neglect and there is no substitute for professional judgement. In any situation where there are a series of minor incidents, or mounting concern about a child, agencies should consider the possibility that the child is being neglected. This hypothesis can then be tested to determine whether the child is in need of services and/or protection. In all cases of professional concern, the impact upon the child of the care given must be the critical focus.

The importance of sharing information

Any assessment of neglect, whether using the neglect toolkit, an early help assessment, or a Children's Social Care assessment, will generally require sharing information between agencies involved with the family. Information held by one professional may take on a different meaning when laid alongside information held by others. Professionals who have initial concerns regarding the presence of neglect will need to test out this hypothesis by talking to parents/carers about their concerns, and then providing support services to address the adult's and children's needs. It is important to remember that the recognition of unmet needs may not in itself indicate deliberately neglectful parenting; rather it may point towards the need for support. If the provision of support does not result in sustained, improved care to the children, professionals would need to consider whether there is neglect and seek advice from the Safeguarding Lead in their agency.

Assessment should be a dynamic process which analyses and responds to the changing nature and level of need and/or risk faced by the child. A good assessment will result in an action plan with SMART goals that will monitor and record the impact of any services delivered to the child and family and review the help being delivered.

Neglect which constitutes significant harm is:

- > Persistent
- > Cumulative
- > Chronic (ongoing and having cumulative impact) or Acute (episodic and often associated with crisis)
- > Resistant to Intervention

Serious neglect, leading to significant harm, creates the need for a Child Protection enquiry (Children Act 1989, Section 47).

Learning to improve practice

Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and multi-agency audits – nationally and locally – provide useful learning and reflection to help all practitioners continue to develop and improve their responses to neglect. Some of these practice issues and learning points are listed below.

Start Again Syndrome

Practitioners must be mindful of the 'start again syndrome', where practitioners, overwhelmed by the complexity of the family, put aside knowledge of the past and focus on the present, supporting parents to make a fresh start. Any new or re-assessment of a family must consider the family's history in order to make sense of the present. Start again syndrome leads to drift in professional's intervention and planning for children.

Due to the cumulative impact of neglect, delay can lead to further avoidable harm to

children. In order to prevent this, a multi-agency **chronology** should be used to underpin assessment. This will assist in making sense of episodic neglect, providing information regarding other factors in family life that may be having an impact. The chronology will also provide insight into parents'/carers' response to professional intervention and what support has already been provided.

The Rule of Optimism

Professionals can often think the best of families with whom they work. This is more likely when the parent is vulnerable or has a history of abuse themselves. This can lead to a lack of objectivity and focus on the child, minimising concerns, failing to see patterns of abuse and generally not believing or wanting to believe that risk factors are high.

During both the initial stages of assessment and the longer-term work with children, it is imperative that professionals maintain their focus on the child and the areas of risk that are being assessed. If during this process, optimism replaces objectivity, the risk to the child will be heightened as the protective professional network "relaxes".

In order to reduce the likelihood of the rule of optimism it is important to use professional or peer supervision so that reflection and challenge can take place. It is also important that evidence is considered in its totality. This is an essential element of any assessment being analytical and as accurate as possible.

Disguised Non-compliance and Risk

The NSPCC define disguised non-compliance as a parent or carer giving the appearance of co-operating with child welfare agencies to avoid raising suspicions, to allay professional concerns and ultimately to diffuse professional intervention. A crucial task for the professional is to assess the parent's real commitment to engaging and implementing change.

Disguised non-compliance is a theme that has been raised in a high number of safeguarding reviews. Reflective supervision, professional challenge and the effective use of chronologies can all mitigate against the risks of disguised compliance.

Drift of Cases

The rule of optimism, the start again syndrome and disguised compliance are common causes of drift in the assessment, intervention and planning for children experiencing neglect.

The threat of such drift is that there will be insufficient professional contact with the child and family to ensure that the child's welfare is being safeguarded and promoted. The ongoing exposure of the child to significantly harmful circumstances and the absence of professional support and monitoring substantially increases the level of risk to the child concerned.

Frequent purposeful 1-1 support that provides space for reflection and tracks the impact of the actions agreed as a result of discussion, together with ongoing inter-agency consultation and challenge must be maintained to ensure the children do not “slip through the net” and that levels of risk are regularly reviewed. Neglect cases are often long term, and it is important to maintain focus on the child and their needs throughout the intervention.

The Impact of a Professional’s Values and Experiences

Neglect, more than other forms of abuse, is open to significant degrees of interpretation. This interpretation will undoubtedly vary amongst professionals who will differ in opinion about whether certain circumstances are neglectful or not. For example, a family’s home conditions may be assessed as neglectful by one practitioner and “good enough” by another. Differences in opinion are to be expected and do not necessarily impinge on the assessment of neglect, rather they can and should encourage further exploration to justify significant harm or not.

Maintaining a clear focus on the developmental needs of **that child in that household** is useful to help avoid this.

Professionals must always bear in mind that values, ideologies, theories, and their own experiences have the potential to influence observable facts. Staff must ensure that such issues do not confuse or cloud the necessary objective view of the situation in terms of significant harm. Professionals must be explicit when describing concerns of neglect basing their assessment on evidence. Professional training should enable analysis of this evidence in terms of likely impact on children.

Healthy professional challenge as opposed to “group think” is important especially in long standing and complex family situations. Where there is significant professional disagreement regarding the progress of a plan, professionals will need to consider whether they should use the [LSCP’s escalation policy](#).

Neglect of learning and educational needs

Educational neglect refers to a parent failing to provide for their child’s basic needs with regards to schooling and education.

Educational neglect can involve the failure to provide a stimulating environment; failure to show interest in education or support learning; failure to respond to any additional needs related to learning; and failure to comply with statutory requirements regarding attendance.

This may involve not sending a child to school or not enrolling them in a school or providing them with suitable elective home education or supporting them to miss school or truant from school.

Furthermore, some children may be entitled to funded childcare in the early years. This is not compulsory. However, consideration and conversation should be had with parents/carers to encourage take up and to prevent longer term neglect of learning.

As part of an assessment of neglect, the child's current education attendance and previous education attendance needs to be carefully considered and including presentation, attendance and punctuality and the commitment by parents to improve this where this is a concerning factor. However, this needs to be considered alongside the changes made within the family to avoid seeing increased educational attendance as a way of reducing risk of neglect, rather than reducing the amount of exposure for the child to a neglectful environment.

Strengthening Protective Factors

Family Group Conferences can provide a helpful forum for families to come together to discuss concerns around neglect, supporting them to make a plan to address these concerns and safeguard the children in the family. They are effectively used within Children's Social Care at all stages, from Early Help, Child in Need, Child Protection, Public Law Outline (PLO) and permanency planning.

A Family Group Conference (FGC) is a meeting organised for families, to discuss and make decisions about a child or young person's care. The meeting is arranged by an independent and neutral FGC Coordinator, who will discuss and agree arrangements with the wider family network.

Feedback suggests that the process can help family networks to feel empowered as they use their relationships and knowledge to make safety plans for their family. Through encouraging a family to address their own issues and create an informal network of support, an FGC aims to build resilience and strengthen relationships. If a family is already supported by a social worker, the social worker should make a referral for a Family Group Conference. This referral should be made on Mosaic. If a family does not currently receive support from Children's Social Care, a referral can be made by contacting [Lambeth Early Help](#).