



City of York

Multi-Agency Child Neglect Strategy

2019-2022

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Foreword

Over the past decade research has shown that neglect has been recognised as the most prevalent type of harm children experience. Our challenge is to develop a coherent, integrated and effective response to neglected children and young people. Neglect is not confined to young children and occurs across all ages. Early help is providing support as soon as a problem emerges at any point in a child's life.

To effectively safeguard children requires professionals to be curious and inquisitive about family circumstances and events. Child neglect can be multifaceted and enduring; it often involves a broad set of circumstances which can only be pieced together through the accumulation of evidence.

Where there are concerns about the safety of a child, the sharing of information in a timely and effective manner between organisations can reduce the risk of harm.

The aim of this strategy is to improve the recognition of neglect in families across universal and specialist services and achieve a multi-agency coordinated approach where neglect is an issue.

We want all agencies to focus on building strength and resilience within families rather than promoting dependency and ultimately this will increase positive outcomes for children, young people and families.

I hope you will play your part to achieve this for all children in York.



Simon Westwood
Independent Chair of the City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership

Linked strategies and documents:

- [City of York Neglect Storyboard](#)
- [Threshold Document](#)
- [Neglect Screening Tool](#)
- [CYSCP One Minute Guide to Neglect](#)
- [York and North Yorkshire Domestic Abuse Strategy](#)
- [Early Help Strategy](#)
- [Children and Young People in Care Strategy 2016-2020](#)
- [Voice and Involvement Strategy](#)
- [SEND Strategy](#)
- [Children and Young People's Plan](#)

This strategy, written originally in 2016, has been reviewed and updated in 2019. Through the ongoing work of the City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership (CYSCP) Neglect Subgroup and its link to the CYSCP this is viewed as a live document and will continue to be reviewed as such, in line with changing local and national drivers

1. Background and Introduction

The impact of neglect on children and young people is enormous. Neglect is a form of chronic abuse, causes great distress to children leading to poor health, education and social outcomes, and is potentially fatal. Lives are destroyed, children's abilities to make secure attachments are affected and their ability to attend and achieve at school is reduced. Their emotional health and well-being is often compromised and this impacts on their success in adulthood and their ability to parent in the future. Additionally research tells us that children neglected in very early childhood (and sometimes later) have demonstrable effects on the biology of brain development. This results in difficulty regulating emotions, reduction of 'cause & effect' thinking, difficulty in recognising emotions in others or an ability to articulate their own emotions, and after 2 years of age these deficits may be difficult – but not impossible - to overcome.

The impact of neglect can start before children are born– A mother may neglect her own (and therefore unborn babies) health during pregnancy for example, as a result of mental health problems, substance misuse or domestic abuse and this may impact the way in which a baby develops in the womb. Once a baby is born, physical and emotional neglect during the early years of life can also have a profound impact on the development of the brain and the body.

In a report to the government in 2011¹, an image of the brains of two 3 year old children offered a high impact view of the significant developmental deficits caused through early neglect of infants. The difference in the two brains is stark and the report emphasises how a 'baby's early experiences are influential in determining the course of their future emotional, intellectual and physical development.'

However, it is worth noting that a further period of growth is also evident in adolescence, supporting the case for intervention around neglect in the teenage years.

A key message, within this document, is that neglect is preventable and can be tackled and this strategic vision supports the case for ensuring that all agencies work together to develop the range of responses required intervening at a number of levels.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-intervention-the-next-steps--2>

More than 50% of Child Protection Plans in York are in the category of neglect, and this rate continues year on year (This is in line with national trends); Referrals to social care, which include neglect concerns, demonstrate a fluctuation over the last 5 years from between 10% to 15 % of all referrals

The findings of Ofsted's thematic inspections of practice in relation to neglect (2014)² presented a mixed picture in respect of the quality of professional responses to neglect. The quality of assessments in neglect cases overall was found to be too variable. Almost half of assessments reviewed either did not take sufficient account of family history or did not sufficiently convey or consider the impact of neglect on the child.

An NSPCC review of published serious case reviews, highlights that professionals face a big challenge in identifying and taking timely action on neglect.³ These reviews were undertaken where neglect was considered a key factor following the death or serious harm to a child in the following ways:

- Chronic neglect over a long period of time sometimes co-existing with physical, emotional and sexual abuse
- Death or serious harm from physical or sexual abuse where neglect was a feature or preceded the abuse
- Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI) related to neglect risk factors such as malnutrition, poor social circumstances or parental substance misuse
- Accidents, sometimes with an element of forewarning when long-term neglect in a family, resulted in an unsafe environment
- Attempted suicide of a young person as a result of the effect of long-term neglect on mental health.

At the time, Local Safeguarding Children Boards providing the strongest evidence of the most comprehensive action to tackle neglect, were more likely to have a multi-agency child neglect strategy, and a systematic improvement programme addressing policy, thresholds for actions

² In the child's time: professional responses to neglect (March 2014) <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/childs-time-professional-responses-neglect>

³ NSPCC: Learning from Case Reviews, Summary of risk factors and learning for improved practice around neglect (2015)

and professional practice at the front line. It is the intention of the current City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership to continue in this manner.

2. Definition of Neglect

Neglect is defined⁴ 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 e.g. as a result of maternal substance misuse. During infancy and through childhood and into adolescence, 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
- Ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment

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

Determining what constitutes a 'persistent failure'; 'adequate clothing' or 'adequate supervision' should be a matter of objective professional judgement. Even when professionals have concerns about neglect, national research indicates that they may be unlikely to consider how they can help or intervene, apart from referring to Children's Social Care services. The factors contributing to neglect are not always well recognised and the impact not always well understood. Neglect, is the result of a pattern of behaviours, actions or inactions rather than attributed to a 'one off event'. This often results in delayed detection and action due to a normalisation of the child's situation and staff becoming blind to the growing concerns. This long term accumulation of factors for the child contributes to entrenched disadvantage and prolonged impact upon health and wellbeing, social and emotional development.

⁴ [HM Government, Working Together to Safeguard Children – A guide to inter-agency working to promote the welfare of children 2018.](#)

3. Guiding Aims

This strategy rests on the following principles, which provide a strategic framework for professionals across the City of York:

- A shared understanding of neglect and the safety, well-being and development of children and young people as an overriding priority.
- The early recognition and identification of the signs and symptoms of neglect and the importance of effective collaboration and intervention amongst agencies.
- Early help of a type and duration that both improves and sustains the safety and recovery of children and young people into the future.
- Recognition that children with additional needs such as premature babies, those with special education needs and disabilities are potentially more vulnerable⁵
- Partners considering approaches to collating the views of children and young people and using these to refresh the strategy
- A 'whole-family' approach owned by all stakeholders, and the voice of the child is clearly documented at the beginning, during and at the end of the intervention.
- All practitioners considering historical information (about the child and the parents' upbringing) to inform the present position and identify families at risk of inter-generational neglect and professional drift. A 'start again' approach must be avoided.
- Effective information-sharing processes to inform assessments and evaluation of risks.
- Agencies challenging each other about the improvements made by families and their sustainability.
- Work with children and young people being measured by its impact and outcomes.

⁵ The Ofsted thematic inspection 'Protecting Disabled Children' identified delays in disabled children who were suffering neglect receiving appropriate services. Ofsted (2012)
<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources>

5 Child Neglect: Be Professionally Curious! Investigators/practitioners Guidance Notes. National Multiagency Child Neglect Strategic Work Group. October 2015

- Appropriate statutory action being taken if insufficient progress is achieved and methods have been unsuccessful in addressing the levels of risk that are present. This must take account of the child's timeframe, and drift must be avoided.
- Significant regard being given to the overlap between neglect and other forms of maltreatment such as domestic abuse, substance misuse and child sexual exploitation.
- Practitioners being 'professionally curious'.
- Professionals viewing the family situation and parenting through the eyes of the child and asking 'What is life like for this child?'

4. Prevention of Neglect

A number of factors increase the likelihood of neglect. . Families may have a combination of the following risk factors:

Child Risk Factors

- Disability and learning difficulties
- Social and emotional issues
- Chronic ill-health

As a result of neglect, children *can* display behaviours including (but not exclusively):

- becoming anxious
- being fractious, fretful, clinging, and difficult to soothe;
- being very still, quiet and sleepy /lethargic with a failure to thrive
- displaying attention seeking behaviours,
- events having an exaggerated effect on mood
- displaying poor confidence and concentration;

Parents may feel angry and helpless.

All of the above increase the likelihood that children may become further neglected by their parents/carers.

Adolescent Neglect

Neglect is not something which only happens to younger children. Adolescents can also be subject to neglect.

A report published by the Children's Society in April 2018⁶ states that

'One in seven 14-15 year olds are living with parents who neglect them in one or more ways. This may include a lack of emotional care, warmth and encouragement, young people not being adequately supervised or not being given sufficient physical care to preserve their health, and having little or no interest shown in their education.'

The inspectorates' report, following the Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAI) on Neglect⁷, found that:

- Neglect of older children sometimes goes unseen.
- Work with parents to address the neglect of older children does not always happen.
- Adult services in most areas are not effective in identifying potential neglect of older children.
- The behaviour of older children must be understood in the context of trauma.
- Tackling neglect of older children requires a coordinated strategic approach across all agencies.

Teenagers may appear immature, and/or display impulsive behaviours, needing to be noticed. This may manifest itself in trouble at school, in the community and within families.

Parental Risk Factors

- Poor mental health,

⁶ [Think about adolescent neglect; A review of research on identification, assessment and intervention \(The Children's Society\)](#)

⁷ [Growing Up Neglected; a multi-agency response to older children who are living with neglect.' \(July 2018\)](#)

- Deep seated attitudinal/behavioural/psychological problems
- Problematic drug and/or alcohol misuse
- Domestic abuse
- Parents own exposure to maltreatment during childhood
- Young parents
- Lack of experience of positive parenting in childhood
- Lack of skill and/or knowledge about a child's needs at different life stages
- Temporary illness of parent/carer
- Lack of support/socially isolated

Wider Determinants

- Poverty
- Unemployment or family pressures and difficult working hours
- Poor social support

The above underline the importance of a preventative, contextual approach that focuses on the risk factors that may cause child and adolescent neglect.

5. Working with Families

A whole-system, contextual approach challenges us to consider how and where we work with families to prevent, and reduce the impact of, neglect when it is identified.

The impact of neglect for children is often cumulative, increasing gradually, and therefore there is a risk that agencies do not intervene early enough to prevent harm, or that professionals become ‘acclimatised’ to the neglect as a family norm. It is important that all agencies – health, social care, education, police, and probation, housing, voluntary and community organisations – identify emerging problems and potential unmet need and seek to address these as early as possible, in an attempt to prevent actual neglect of the child’s needs and welfare.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) requires local agencies to work together to put processes in place for the effective assessment of the needs of individual children who may benefit from early help services and intervention.

The delivery of an effective preventative approach to tackling neglect requires a co-ordinated response from all agencies and the delivery of services at a range of levels. It also requires a ‘whole-family’ approach, owned by all stakeholders working with that child/young person and their family.

City of York is training staff in the use of the Graded Care Profile neglect assessment tool. Staff within the 0-19 Healthy Child Service and in Children’s Social Care have been trained and a rolling programme of training is in place. This example of a unified approach will ensure that key staff across the spectrum are fully aware of the impact of neglect on individual children and also ensure that they are using a shared language to identify, assess and implement packages of care to those most vulnerable within our city. This provides a clear focus and a consistent approach city-wide, through local area teams, early intervention and the provision of services.

The use of assessment tools for neglect will be increased for early help practitioners. A multi-agency screening tool for neglect is already in place and its use is intended to promote a clear evidence-base for referrals and enquiries to the Children’s Front Door..

6. Strategic Objectives

The City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership (CYSCP) aims to ensure that partners demonstrate early recognition of, and intervention in, child neglect and to improve multi-agency responses to children and young people affected by neglect through strong and effective multi-agency leadership. To that end the strategy has four core objectives.

These are:

- To seek assurance of collective commitment to addressing child neglect robustly across all partner agencies, and to demonstrate effective leadership in driving the appropriate system, culture and process changes required forward;
- To raise awareness and understanding of child neglect across the city. This includes developing a common understanding of neglect and the thresholds for intervention;
- To promote timely identification, assessment and intervention for children and young people experiencing neglect and living in neglectful situations, at all levels of intervention, including the use of evidence based tools and interventions ;
- To support and challenge effective service provision to prevent child neglect occurring in the first instance, and address the impact and prevent re-occurrence once substantiated, in order to ensure that children are safely cared for and provided with optimum caring environments.

7. Governance and Accountability

It is proposed that governance will be provided by the City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership (CYSCP). The CYSCP will monitor progress against the strategic objectives on a quarterly basis.

It is important that measures of success are established and agreed. A delivery plan has been developed in conjunction with this Strategy setting out the activities required to deliver the objectives. The Delivery Plan is monitored by CYSCP via the Neglect Sub-group.

Whilst an overarching aim is to reduce the number of children and young people who are experiencing neglect and need statutory intervention, it should be recognised that in the short to medium term there may be an increase in the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan and/or removed into care as a result of neglect, due to improved recognition and reporting of neglect.