



HILLINGDON SAFEGUARDING PARTNERSHIP

Neglect Strategy

2021 - 2024

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1. Introduction

1.1. Neglect is defined in *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018)* 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 caregivers)
- Ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.¹

1.2. It is recognised that practitioners often find it difficult to recognise indicators of neglect or appreciate their severity. The following characteristics of neglect may make it harder for professionals to recognise that a threshold for action has been reached:

- the chronic nature of neglect can result in professionals becoming accustomed to a child's presentation and failing to see, or question, a lack of progress;
- the experience of neglect rarely produces a crisis that demands immediate proactive, authoritative action;
- neglect can in some cases be challenging to identify because of the need to look beyond individual parenting episodes and consider the persistence, frequency, enormity and pervasiveness of parenting behaviour which may make them harmful and abusive;
- there is a reluctance to pass judgement on patterns of parental behaviour particularly when deemed to be culturally embedded or when associated with social disadvantages such as poverty.

¹ Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018

- the child may not experience neglect in isolation, but alongside other forms of abuse as multi-type maltreatment.²

- 1.3. Neglect may involve parents and carers failing to provide adequate food, clothing and shelter, not protecting a child from emotional harm or danger, not ensuring adequate supervision, or suitable caregivers, not providing access to education or medical care, and/or not providing a child with the emotional warmth they need.
- 1.4. There is an overlap between emotional abuse and many forms of child maltreatment and this is especially true of neglect. When practitioners are working with children who are experiencing neglect, an understanding of emotional abuse is also important. It is helpful to consider the quality of the parent/child relationship and impact of emotional neglect in addition to the more easily visible physical aspects.
- 1.5. In March 2020 the Department for Education published 'Complexity and Challenge: a Triennial Analysis of Serious Case Reviews 2014 – 2017'. The study's primary aim was to understand the key issues, themes and challenges from the 278 serious case reviews undertaken during the period 2014-2017. It found evidence of neglect in almost three quarters of the cases reviewed. Features of neglect were apparent in 112 out of 165 (68%) fatal cases and 96 out of 113 (83%) non-fatal serious harm cases.³
- 1.6. Protecting children and young people affected by neglect is a longstanding priority of the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership. In 2017 our then Local Safeguarding Children Board developed a three year plan to ensure that effective arrangements were in place across all agencies to respond to early indicators of neglect. The key areas of this strategy are summarised below:

- To develop a multi-agency neglect strategy owned by all partner agencies

² Missed opportunities: indicators of neglect – what is ignored, why, and what can be done?
Research report November 2014 (DfE)

³ Complexity and challenge: a triennial analysis of SCRs 2014-2017 (DfE, 2020)

- To improve awareness and understanding of neglect and the thresholds for intervention
- To ensure the effectiveness of service provision through key performance indicators, for example, a reduction in the number of children subject to a child protection plan under the category of neglect and the length of time the plan was in place
- To ensure that Early Help services are accessed appropriately to identify and respond to neglect.

2. Practice Update

- 2.1. In the year 2019 - 2020 neglect was the second most common reason for children to be made the subject of a child protection plan in the London Borough of Hillingdon. This equates to 116 children known to have suffered significant harm due to neglect. The local authority, and partner agencies, also support children and young people affected by neglect through child in need plans and early help services.
- 2.2. Following the implementation of our new Safeguarding Arrangements in September 2019 a Neglect Subgroup was formed with a remit to consider the impact of the Neglect Strategy 2017, to revisit the areas of priority identified and to further develop multiagency practice in response to neglect. In recognition of the centrality of multiagency engagement and the particular risks faced by very young children this subgroup has been chaired by one of our Named Nurses for Safeguarding.
- 2.3. In 2020 the Neglect Subgroup completed an audit to explore the effectiveness of the Graded Care Profile 2 for those children subject to child protection plans. This identified that the tool was not being used consistently, and a plan to relaunch the training, with a focus upon multi-agency engagement, has been implemented. The audit identified a need for a rolling programme of GCP2 training to ensure that there is a sufficient number of practitioners with the knowledge required to undertake the

assessment. Positively there is a pool of social workers who are licensed as trainers with the NSPCC and are able to lead succession training.

- 2.4. In 2021-22 Hillingdon Children's Social Care and Midwifery services will be part of an innovative NSPCC pilot to test the use of Graded Care Profile antenatally.
- 2.5. Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership provides specialist multiagency training in Recognising and Working with Child Neglect. This training is provided on a quarterly basis and is well attended across partner agencies, with 94% of places filled. The course aim is to develop practitioners' ability to recognise and work effectively in cases involving neglect, and to develop their ability to determine impact on children. In 2020 the Safeguarding Partnership adopted the use of '7-minute briefings' to disseminate learning from local and national reviews, inspections and research. These briefings are widely disseminated to frontline practitioners across all agencies and made available on the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership Website.
- 2.6. To inform the 21-24 Neglect Strategy, the Safeguarding Partnership has consulted with our Children in Care Council to ensure that children's views are represented and remain central to practice. Our children and young people were asked what neglect means to them, their responses are below:

- *"when you don't get the necessary stuff you need like food, clothes that fit, blankets for warmth"*
- *"it's when you don't get what you need like food or people being nice to you"*
- *"lack of attention"*
- *"being hurt"*

3. Aims and Objectives

- 3.1 The 2021-2024 Neglect Strategy has been developed by Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership and should be considered alongside other key strategies, policies and procedures.

3.2 The following objectives have been identified:

- To progress the work of the Neglect Subgroup and promote a coordinated and effective multi-agency response to neglect
- To enhance multiagency practitioner awareness and understanding of neglect through the provision of high quality training and resources.
- To raise awareness of the signs, indicators and impact of neglect to ensure that children, young people and their families are provided with the support they need.
- To ensure that the lived experience of children, young people and their families is central to practice
- To reinforce and refresh the routine use of the Graded Care Profile 2 for those children affected by neglect
- To disseminate learning from statutory, and non-statutory reviews related to neglect to raise awareness of key factors in working with children and young people that are experiencing neglect.

4. Good Practice

4.1. It is recognised that there are some children who are at increased risk of suffering neglect, including those who have a disability or complex health needs, those born prematurely, children in care and those who are seeking asylum. The pressures faced by parents can also increase the vulnerability of children to neglect. This is particularly so for children living in families where there is domestic abuse, substance misuse or a parent with a mental health issue or learning disability. It is also acknowledged that the experience of the covid-19 pandemic is likely to have placed additional pressures on families, especially for families who were already experiencing poverty.

- 4.2. Everyone working with children, or parents, has a responsibility to ensure that they recognise neglect and take action to reduce the impact on children. Signs and indicators of neglect will inevitably vary according to the developmental needs and ages of children. Simplistically the presentation of neglect in an infant will differ from that in an adolescent, however the need for support and protection will remain. Universal services including schools, general practitioners and other health services have a key role in the early identification of, and early response to, neglect.
- 4.3. Assessment of need is reliant upon good communication, information sharing and partnership working between agencies, and with parents. Information sharing agreements are in place that support this. Practitioners should always seek consent from a parent to share information unless to do so would place a child at increased risk of harm.
- 4.4. The 2013 Ofsted thematic inspection: 'What about the children? Joint working between adult and children's services when parents or carers have mental ill health and/or drug and alcohol problems,' highlighted that most adult mental health and drug and alcohol services were not proactive in helping families to access early support, and that mental health services did not consistently consider the impact of the adult mental health difficulties on children.
- 4.5. Practitioners should ensure that they maintain an approach of professional curiosity, always seeking to understand the impact of known information on the child. Where children are experiencing neglect it is helpful to consider what it is about the quality of the relationship between the parent and child that has resulted in the child's needs not being met. This is particularly important for those practitioners who work predominately with adults. The phrase 'Think Family' is a helpful reminder of the need to consider the impact of adult issues on parenting capacity.
- 4.6. Given what we know about the harmful effects of long term neglect on children the impact of professional intervention should be subject to ongoing review. Where there

is a difference in professional opinion practitioners should make use of the escalation procedures.

5. Early Help: Stronger Families

- 5.1. Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) requires local agencies to have in place effective arrangements for the assessment of need for those children who may benefit from early help services. In Hillingdon, professionals should use the Early Help Assessment (EHA) to assess unmet needs and co-ordinate appropriate support. The delivery of an effective Early Help offer is not the responsibility of a single agency - it requires a 'Whole-Family' approach owned by all stakeholders working with children, young people and families.
- 5.2. The impact of neglect of children is often cumulative, advancing gradually and imperceptibly, this carries a risk that agencies do not intervene early enough to prevent harm. It is important that all agencies, Health, Schools/Education, Children's Centres, Police, Probation, Housing, Voluntary and Community Organisations identify emerging problems and potential unmet needs and seek to address them as early as possible. It is equally important that practitioners are alert to the danger of drift and 'start again' syndrome.
- 5.3. In order to address neglect it is essential that all agencies work together in an integrated way. Our refreshed Early Help offer, Stronger Families, is based upon the use of informed assessment to provide early support to children and families. The provision of early help is the most effective method of supporting families and reduces the likelihood that children will suffer harm. The Stronger Families plan will draw upon family and community supports, it will be regularly reviewed to ensure that it is effective.

6. Children's Social Care

- 6.1. A clearly understood threshold for access to Children and Young People's Services is crucial to ensuring that neglect is responded to robustly in order to protect children. The very nature of neglect - cumulative harm, non incident focused, improving and worsening often in line with the advance and retreat of professional help - can present challenges for practitioners assessing parental behaviours and the impact on children. The completion of the Early Help Assessment as the method of referral to statutory services ensures that the child's circumstances are fully understood and support can be provided by the most appropriate service.
- 6.2. Children and Young People's Services is accessed via the Stronger Families Hub where decisions are made about whether to progress a contact to a Child and Family Assessment under s.17 or s.47 Children Act 1989 or whether support can be offered via universal services, including Early Help. In 2014 The London Borough of Hillingdon adopted the London Child Protection Procedures and Practice Guidance, this document lays out the Continuum of Help and Support.
- 6.3. All agencies that complete an Early Help Assessment to refer to Children and Young People's Services can expect clear communication about whether the referral has been accepted, and the role of the referrer going forward. If the referral has not been accepted, information should be shared why this is the case and what support the referrer can offer or seek for that child.
- 6.4. Referrals that have been accepted by Children and Young People's Services will be followed by a Child and Family Assessment that will seek to identify what is working well for the child in addition to identifying any ongoing support needs. Where the statutory threshold for social care support is met a multiagency plan is developed to address identified needs. The aim of all our plans is that children have permanent and secure homes where the adults are able to meet their needs without on-going support from statutory services.

6.5. Children and Young People's Services will work with universal services throughout their involvement with the child or young person and support a 'step down' approach to ensure that children continue to have the support needed, from the most appropriate professionals, at the end of statutory social work intervention.

7. Measures of Success

7.1. It is important that measures of success are established and agreed. The following outcome indicators will demonstrate the effectiveness of the strategy and its implementation:

- The voice of children and young people is evident in single and multi agency audits, with their lived experience central to practice
- Practitioners continue to have access to high quality training
- There is a reduction in the number of child protection plan re-registrations under the category of neglect
- A reduction in the number of repeat referrals to social care following completion of Child and Family Assessments
- There is evidence of increased use of Stronger Families Plans to prevent children from suffering harm due to neglect
- The use of the Graded Care Profile 2 tool to assess neglect is embedded across the multiagency partnership, at all stages of intervention

It should be acknowledged that in the short to medium term, through improved recognition of neglect, there may be an increase in some of the above indicators.

8. Governance and Accountability

8.1 Governance and challenge will be provided by Hillingdon Safeguarding Children Partnership Board. The Practice Development Forum will monitor progress against the strategic objectives on a quarterly basis.

9. Delivery Plan

Objective	Activity	Lead	Timescale
To improve awareness and understanding of neglect across the Safeguarding Partnership	Develop and disseminate briefings, learning and training in respect of neglect.	SCP	March 2022
Ensure the effectiveness of service provision.	Multi-agency and/or single audit activity to take place to ensure timely identification of, and response to neglect	SCP	March 2022
Enhance good practice across the Safeguarding Partnership	To use the learning from statutory, and non-statutory reviews related to neglect	SCP	Ongoing
Embed the use of GCP2 across the multiagency partnership	Graded Care Profile 2 Training to be rolled out across the Safeguarding Partnership Audit of use of GCP2 for those children subject to Child Protection Plans to be repeated in order to measure the impact of training		March 2024

10. References

- Department for Education (2018) Working Together to Safeguard Children (updated 2020)
- Ofsted (2013) What about the children? Joint working between adult and children's services when parents or carers have mental ill health and/or drug and alcohol problems.
- Department for Education (2014) Missed opportunities: indicators of neglect – what is ignored, why, and what can be done?
- Department for Education (2014) Understanding Neglect - recognition and response
- Ofsted (2014) In the child's time: professional responses to neglect
- Department for Education (2020) Complexity and challenge: a triennial analysis of SCRs 2014-2017
- The London Child Protection Procedures accessed here:
<http://www.londoncp.co.uk/>