

2-minute briefing

Neglect

What is Neglect?

Neglect is a form of chronic abuse which causes great distress to children leading to poor health, education and social outcomes, and is potentially fatal. Physical health is compromised, 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.

Definition of neglect

Neglect is defined 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 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)
- Ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment

Indicators of neglect in children

The growth and development of a child may suffer when the child receives insufficient food, love, warmth, care and concern, praise, encouragement and stimulation. Apart from the child's neglected appearance, other signs may include:

- faltering Growth (failure to thrive) in a child because an adequate or appropriate diet is not being provided
- severe and persistent infestations (for example, scabies or head lice) in a child
- parents or carers who repeatedly fail to attend essential follow-up appointments that are necessary for the health and wellbeing of their child
- medical advice is not sought, compromising the health and wellbeing of a child, including if they are in ongoing pain
- a child who is persistently dirty, particularly if the dirtiness is ingrained
- parents or carers who persistently fail to engage with relevant child health promotion programmes which include immunisations, health and development reviews, and screening
- if parents or carers persistently fail to anticipate dangers and to take precautions to protect their child from harm
- repeated observation or reports of any of the following home environments that are in the parent's or carer's control;
- poor standard of hygiene in the house that affects the child's health
- living environment that is unsafe for the child's developmental age
- inadequate provision of food at home
- abnormal voracious appetite at school or nursery
- child's emotional needs are not being recognised and met on a persistent basis
- purple mottled skin, particularly on the hands and feet are seen in the winter due to cold
- dental decay, and persistent parental failure to present their child for NHS dental treatment
- childhood obesity
- unresponsiveness or indiscriminate in relationships with adults (may seek affection from any adult)

Parental behaviours that pose a risk:

- Parent's negative feelings towards the pregnancy
- Young parents
- Low income families/unemployed carers
- Lacking sensitivity or responsiveness towards their children
- Parent's unrealistic expectations of the child
- Parent's unrealistic expectations and perceptions of parenthood
- Failure to attend antenatal appointments and/or comply with medical advice
- Maternal medical conditions/ill health and failure to comply with medical treatment including medication
- Domestic violence in pregnancy
- Misuse of illegal or prescription drugs or alcohol
- Alcohol consumed within the first two trimesters
- History of neglect/abuse of previous children
- Maternal mental health difficulties and failure to engage or comply with medical treatment

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. This includes dental care and refusing or ignoring medical recommendations.

Responding to concerns of neglect

- Share your concerns with the DSL/DDSL Even the smallest piece of information, when put together, can make a bigger picture of what might be happening to a child or young person online.
- Record accurately your concerns/disclosure
- Ensure the child knows that it is not their fault and you are going to help them

Further information

[Children's MARS guidance for recognising and responding to neglect](#)
[Children's MARS website – Neglect - Graded Care Profile 2](#)