

Childhood Neglect: Improving Outcomes for Children

Learning Outcomes

To recognise signs and symptoms of children and young people who are, or may be, neglected.

Audience Groups 1-8 (Working Together 2010)

Time 45 minutes

Key Reading

Cawson, P., Wattam, C., Brooker, S. and Kelly, G. (2000) Child maltreatment in the United Kingdom: A study of the prevalence of child abuse and neglect. London: NSPCC.

Hicks, L. and Stein, M. (2010) Neglect Matters: A multi- agency guide for professionals working together on behalf of teenagers. London: Department for Children, Schools and Families.

Horwath, J. (2007) Child Neglect: Identification and assessment. Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan.

Horwath, J. (ed) (2009) The Child's World The Comprehensive Guide to Assessing Children in Need Assessing Children in Need. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Moran, P. (2009) Neglect: research evidence to inform practice. London: Action for Children.

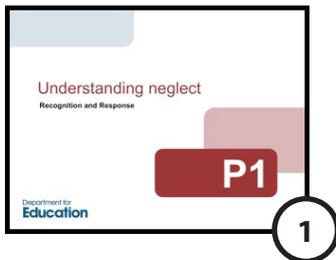
New Economics Foundation and Action for Children (2009) Backing the Future. London: New Economics Foundation.

Radford, L., S. Corral, et al. (2011) Child Cruelty in the UK 2011: An NSPCC Study into Childhood Abuse and Neglect Over the Past 30 years. London, NSPCC.

Links to Common Core

Common Core 2 Child and young person development (knowledge: understand how babies, children and young people develop). Know that development includes emotional, physical, intellectual, social, moral and character growth, and know that they can all affect one another.

Common Core 3 Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child (skills: personal skills). Understand the different forms and extent of abuse and their impact on children's development.

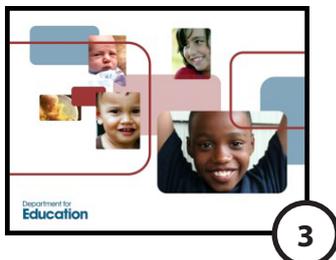


1

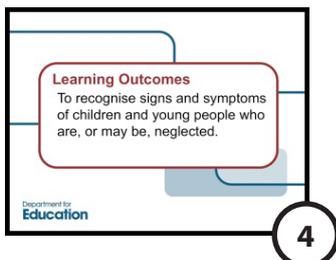


2

Explain that this presentation focuses on the child or young person and their developmental needs. Issues in relation to parents, social factors and organisational requirements will be covered in other presentations and exercises. Remind participants to keep focused on the needs of children and the various ways in which they are expressed and the ways in which unmet needs may be expressed.

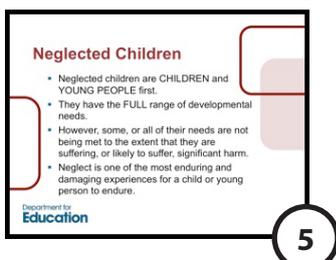


3



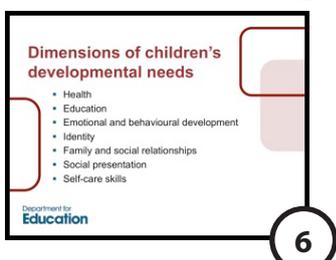
4

Learning outcome discussed.



5

Before beginning to explore the details of official definitions of neglect it is important to provide an initial introduction in everyday language about the concept of neglect.



6

This slide is here to remind participants of children's essential health and developmental needs as set out in the Assessment Framework (Department of Health, Department for Education and Employment, and Home Office 2000). Whilst there may be a range of assessment tools in use that are specific to neglect, effective practice with neglect can be guided and supported by the Assessment Framework. The dimensions of parenting capacity and family and environmental factors should be borne in mind when considering neglect, and will be covered in more detail in other presentations.

Neglected Children...

- ...have some of the poorest long term health and developmental outcomes
- ...are at high risk of accidents
- ...are vulnerable to sexual abuse
- ...are likely to have insecure attachment patterns
- ...are less likely than other children to:
 - develop the characteristics associated with resilience
 - or have access to wider protective factors.

Department for Education

7

The presentation returns to some of the effects of neglect, however, it is helpful to headline some of the effects of neglect that are consistently highlighted in research. While awareness of the impact of neglect has increased over recent years, there may still be views that neglect is not as serious as sexual or physical abuse, for example.

Therefore, it is important to remind participants of the extent to which neglect can be coupled with other forms of abuse, but also of the serious short and long term impact that neglect alone has on children’s health and development.

Challenges of definition

- In some ways it is relatively simple to identify a child whose needs are not being met
- But ‘neglect’ as a basis for intervention is a complex phenomenon that is difficult to define.
- In the face of a range of views of what constitutes adequate care, defining children’s needs and determining what constitutes neglect has been problematic.

(NSPCC 2007)

Department for Education

8

Children whose developmental needs are being neglected are often defined as ‘children in need’ requiring family support from children’s social care services. Clearly such children and their families may well benefit from such support. However, it is unhelpful if an assumption is made that there is no basis for such an in-depth assessment of whether the child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm.

Discussion point: Perhaps useful at this point to have a discussion with course participants about their experiences of identifying when a child is suffering harm through neglect from unmet needs, but may not meet the significant harm threshold. Experienced staff will have identified ways to make the distinction but the research indicates that there is no single fail-safe system to be clear that a child who has unmet needs is being neglected.

Working Together description

Neglect is 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 care-givers); or
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

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

(HM Government 2015)

Department for Education

9

The description of neglect set out in Working Together makes it very clear that action can and should be taken to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child in circumstances where the evidence suggests that serious impairment to the child’s health and development is likely. This is important to highlight and reminds participants that the aim should be to prevent impairment rather than only acting after it has occurred.

Neglect is often characterised as acts of ‘omission’ rather than ‘commission’, but the distinction is not always that clear cut because neglect and abuse often coexist and acts such as leaving the child in the care of someone unable to look after them properly can be seen both as commission and omission.

Children can experience different forms of neglect -

- medical neglect
- nutritional neglect
- emotional neglect
- educational neglect
- physical neglect
- lack of supervision and guidance.

(Horwath 2007)

Department for Education

10

Neglect is an umbrella term and covers many different aspects of omission of care. When undertaking an assessment and planning intervention, practitioners may find it helpful to consider whether the all the child's developmental needs are being neglected or whether it is confined to specific dimensions. Horwath's (2007) set of sub-categories of neglect gives helpful pointers.

Some factors associated with neglect

- Being born prematurely.
- Having a disability.
- Having run away from home.
- Being an adolescent out of an adult's control.

Department for Education

11

There are child factors that are likely to be associated with an elevated increase in the likelihood of neglect - this does not mean children are responsible for their own neglect. Instead some children are statistically more likely to be neglected because of certain intrinsic features.

Neglected adolescents

An NSPCC prevalence study on child maltreatment found that 20% of young adults in the UK reported having experienced inadequate supervision as children, including being allowed out overnight without parents knowing their whereabouts as a teenager.

(Cawson et al., 2008)

Department for Education

12

There tends to be a focus on neglect of babies and young children because they are acutely vulnerable to the impact of neglect. However, there is an increasing evidence-base about the effect of neglect on teenagers. This can be when the accumulation of the effects of years of neglect becomes very apparent; but it is important also to be alert to the onset of neglect in teenage years, perhaps because of changes in a family's circumstances.

Stein and colleagues have produced material on this theme; the briefing on the study undertaken as part of the Safeguarding Children Research Initiative is available in the background reading (Hicks and Stein 2010).

Neglected adolescents

- UK research found that a quarter of young people who run away from home were forced to leave home by their parents.
- Young runaways, who run away from home, more than other teenagers feel that their parents don't care about them.

(Safe on the Streets Team 1999; Rees & Skuse 2004)

Department for Education

13

Effects of neglect

Type of effect	Infants 0-2	Early Childhood	The School Years
Development	poor general intellectual capacity under stimulation rapid rash, infections, hospital admissions failure to thrive	social isolation, dirty unkempt clothes in learning free skills learning slow and painful language delay	severe educational deficits learning disabilities, poor problem-solving poor reading, writing and maths
Behaviour	withdrawn, lethargic, depressed self-stimulating behaviour (e.g. rocking)	lacking social skills, often aggressive or withdrawn inadequate friendships	disruptive/withdrawn in class disrupted in attention few friends non-compliance
Emotion	no learned trust	shame and self-doubt lack of confidence and expectations of failure poor self concept	incompetence/withdrawn guilt/self blame self-harming disturbed eating patterns

(adapted from Skuse 1994)

Department for Education

14

Skuse's model (1994) is a useful contribution to help practitioners order their thoughts on neglect and group them in a structured way when undertaking assessments.

Why is neglect so important?

It is bad for children's bodies -

- foetal neglect
- delayed growth within the womb
- non organic failure to thrive
- vulnerability to illness/infections/accidents
- poor medical care.

Department for Education

15

This slide highlights just some of the physiological and medical impacts of neglect. More in-depth information about the effects on health is discussed in presentation 4: Children's health, including mental health.

Why is neglect so important?

It is bad for children's learning -

- lack of exploration
- delayed speech and language
- impoverished play and imagination
- special educational needs / learning disability
- later educational failure
- poor life skills.

Department for Education

16

The negative effects of neglect on children's cognitive development and associated capacity to benefit from formal schooling are discussed. Sometimes the focus of practitioners, perhaps especially in children's social care, is more on social and emotional development, but the research evidence about the longer term effects of neglect on children's cognitive development is stark and makes it imperative that the 'Education' dimension is considered in its widest sense and from as early an age as possible.

More information about what can be provided to support education and learning is covered in presentation 20: The role of the school.

Why is neglect so important?

It is bad for children's emotions -

- disturbed self-regulation
- negative self identity
- low self esteem
- clinical depression
- substance abuse.

Department for Education

17

Recently there has been an increase in the research evidence available about the potential effects of neglect upon brain development. Both physical and emotional neglect can affect brain development in the early years.

Why is neglect so important?

It is bad for children's emotions -

- disturbed self-regulation
- negative self identity
- low self esteem
- clinical depression
- substance abuse.

Department for Education

18

This slide notes some of the short and long term possible effects of neglect. Children typically learn to regulate their emotions with the support of caring and sensitive (attuned) adult attention. The experience of insecure attachment relationships is therefore likely to impact upon the child's capacity to regulate their own emotions and can be associated with longer term problems with emotional development.

Why is neglect so important?

It is bad for children's relationships -

- insecure/disorganised internal working model
- attachment disorders
- transmission of relationship problems to significant others, for example, peers, teachers, substitute carers, professionals.

Department for Education

19

The slide focuses on the impact of insecure attachments. The concept of 'internal working model' refers to Bowlby's (1979) theory that individual's develop an inner 'template' about relationships based upon their early attachment experiences.

These internal working models can then have an impact on the quality of relationships with peers and other adults. These templates for relationships can be modified with the benefit of more healthy interactions.

Why is neglect so important?

It is bad for our society -

- long-term effects on adult physical and mental health and on individuals' social and occupational adjustment
- financial cost of treating or incarcerating victims
- possible association between child neglect and future anti social and criminal behaviour
- intergenerational transmission of neglectful parenting for future generations.

Department for Education

20

There are wider social costs of neglect and it might be useful to bring the recent work on cost effectiveness (See 'Backing the Future' by New Economics Foundation and Action for Children, 2009) to the attention of participants.

There is some discussion that if investment is made in intensive and earlier interventions to support families that are struggling, the costs for society in the long-term will be reduced in both human and financial terms.

The Allen report (2011) also highlights the costs to society of not providing appropriate support during early years and early in the development of problems with parenting. The Munro review (2011) and the Tickell report (2011) reinforce these messages.

The neglected child

Neglect is serious

Neglect can cause impairment of health and development and impair aspiration and achievement.

At its worst, neglect can kill.

Department for Education

21

The trainer should stress that neglect is not in some way a less serious form of maltreatment. Neglect is not usually intentional, but because parents are often affected by a mix of personal factors, the experience of poverty and limited life opportunities, the effects of neglect on children are in danger of being under-played.

Notes