



## Neglect Strategy 2016-19



**Safeguarding the children of West Sussex**

**The impact of neglect on children and young people is enormous. Neglect causes great distress to children, leading to poor health, educational 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 attain 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. Neglect increases children’s vulnerability to other types of abuse such as child sexual exploitation and radicalisation. Neglect can be intergenerational, and the cumulative effect of this can be substantial.**

Failure to effectively tackle neglect has a significant cost to the child in their development to adulthood, as well as to society as a whole. The psychological, physical, behavioural and societal impacts can be impossible to separate, as experience of neglect can manifest in a range of high risk behaviours, such as offending, domestic abuse, substance misuse, overeating and mental health issues.

The WSSCB is committed to tackling the roots and causes of neglect as well as the instances of neglect arising in individual families. This will be a considerable challenge and requires us to honestly reflect on the effectiveness of our work and commit to those changes and improvements that need to be made. The WSSCB acknowledges that the neglect of children with disabilities and neglect of adolescents, in particular, are less well understood nationally, and require additional awareness raising across the workforce.

The WSSCB agrees that in order to tackle neglect successfully we must ensure that all our decisions across the safeguarding system, from our commissioning, development and delivery of services, to our assessment and planning around children and families are underpinned by best practice approaches. This includes supporting our workforce through the use of a common language and common ways of working.

The WSSCB acknowledges the importance of reducing risk factors for neglect and supporting current and future parents to be resilient and to develop their skills in parenting. The provision of both universal messaging and preventative early help is essential in achieving this.

The purpose of this document is to set out the strategic objectives of the West Sussex approach to tackling neglect. This strategy also identifies key priority areas of work in order to improve the multi-agency response to neglect.

This strategy has been developed in conjunction with multi-agency partners through a task to finish group under the WSSCB. This strategy should be considered alongside other key strategies, policies and procedures.

# Identifying Neglect

## Working Together 2015 defines neglect 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 or 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'
- neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs

We also know that:

- Neglect often happens alongside other forms of abuse or adversity such as domestic abuse, substance misuse, mental illness and disability.
- Neglect is often marked by peaks and troughs in care giving which usually correspond with professional advance and retreat and this can make it difficult to take definitive action.
- As professionals we understand that neglect can be a product of acts of parental omission or commission but whatever the intent the impact on the child is likely to be significant.

## Neglect Risk Factors

A number of factors increase the likelihood of neglect in some families. Vulnerable families may have a combination of the following risk factors:

### Child risk factors

- Disability
- Behavioural problems
- Chronic ill health

### Parental risk factors

- Poor mental health, especially maternal mental health difficulties
- Drug and alcohol (substance misuse)
- Domestic abuse
- Parents' own exposure to maltreatment and experience of neglect
- Lack of experience of positive parenting in childhood
- Sustained parental discord

### Wider Risk Factors

- Poverty and living in area of deprivation
- Unemployment
- Poor social support

## Neglect of Disabled Children

Neglect of disabled children has specific features which may relate to their special needs, but also to their broader context. It is a fact that disabled children experience higher levels of neglect for many reasons, which vary according to the child's needs. Drivers for neglect can include communication difficulties, family isolation, dependency on a number of carers, impaired capacity to resist, and an inability to seek help.

## **Adolescent Neglect**

A recent study by The Childrens Society 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, did not offer warmth or encouragement, made no effort to monitor or protect them or failed to promote their health.

Neglected adolescents reported low well-being and a higher propensity than their peers to behaving in ways which may jeopardise their health or their prospects. If the adolescent has experienced unresponsive, unavailable or insensitive care from their parents/ caregivers they may detach from others and develop a negative internal view of themselves. They feel sad, depressed and lethargic, and over time they may see themselves as unlovable and view the world as a hostile place.

Adolescents who experience neglect can often alternate between clingy, demanding behaviour and being overly charming as they have been unable to predict the response of their parent/carer or trust that they would be there when they were needed. There is a high risk of aggressive problems and volatile relationships for adolescents who have been neglected, and more notably, an inability to regulate their emotions which can lead to substance misuse (escapism), being exploited and offending.

This Neglect Strategy is directly linked to the WSCSB's other top priority: Child Sexual Exploitation. Sexual abuse of children may take place in the context of neglect; and children and young people who have been neglected will also be vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

## **Impact of adolescent neglect**

Neglect is likely to have an impact on the young person's ability to form and maintain friendships and pro-social relationships, though the young person may be more reluctant to disclose their situation if they fear becoming looked after or being split up from their siblings.

Whilst adolescents can find sufficient food for themselves, they are likely to be drawn to the availability of high-fat, high-sugar convenience foods if they have never learned to prepare meals.

Adolescent risk-taking behaviour may be associated with, attributed to or exacerbated by a lack of parental supervision, which can expose neglected young people to the risk of harm through, for example, alcohol and substance misuse, risky sexual behaviour or criminal activity.

## WSSCB Strategic Objectives

- SO 1: The WSSCB actively monitors, promotes, coordinates and evaluates the work of its statutory partners and stakeholders that help and protect children at risk of neglect
- SO 2: Children experiencing neglect are identified, supported and have improved outcomes
- SO 3: Partnership Leaders understand the experiences of children living with neglect who live in West Sussex and take effective action to ensure help and support is available to them

# Achieving our Strategic Objectives

## **1. The WSSCB actively monitors, promotes, coordinates and evaluates the work of its statutory partners and stakeholders that help and protect children at risk of neglect**

- ⇒ Developing a robust dataset which helps us understand the prevalence of neglect in West Sussex and the impact of our work on children's outcomes
- ⇒ Delivering a programme of single and multi-agency quality assurance, that includes hearing the voices of practitioners and the children and families we are working with
- ⇒ Scrutinising the application of thresholds in relation to neglect

## **2. Children experiencing neglect are identified, supported and have improved outcomes**

- ⇒ Promoting the use of tools, approaches and resources to further develop a common way of working
- ⇒ Embedding a common language around neglect across the workforce, through the promotion of Howe's four forms of neglect
- ⇒ Delivering learning opportunities which build the confidence and skill of the workforce in identifying and responding to neglect
- ⇒ Delivering multi-agency training and informing the workforce of best practice in identifying and responding to neglect in adolescents and children with disabilities
- ⇒ Promoting understanding of neglect across the broader workforce who come into contact with children, such as housing officers

## **3. Partnership Leaders understand the experiences of children living with neglect who live in West Sussex and take effective action to ensure help and support is available to them**

- ⇒ Providing strong scrutiny and challenge, at Board level, in order to improve the outcomes for children experiencing neglect
- ⇒ Ensuring Partner leaders across agencies working with parents understand their responsibilities in tackling child neglect

# Best practice approaches

1. **Taking a long term view**; acknowledging that there is rarely a short fix. Neglectful parenting can be a result of deeply ingrained behaviour following generations of neglect or a result of complex multifaceted circumstances.
2. **Addressing underlying causes**; taking a more sophisticated approach to neglect, including understanding the impact of neglect on adolescents and how this can be taken forward into adulthood
3. **Holding children at the centre**; being willing to challenge and change our existing processes and preferred ways of doing things to ensure we don't perpetuate impediments
4. **Hearing the child**; so that our understanding of the child's lived experience informs all our work
5. **Knowing our children**; so that we can understand prevalence of neglect and the lives of our children experiencing it across our diverse community
6. **Access to a range of interventions**; understanding that as the roots and manifestations of neglect in families will vary from family to family and child to child, so should our response
7. **Whole systems approach**; acknowledging the impact of parental issues on children
8. **Promoting best practice across all our work**; Acknowledging the negative impact of mediocre or poor practice on children's outcomes, in particular drift, delay and reluctance to challenge
9. **Early Help**; ensuring early recognition and identification of signs and symptoms and the importance of multi-agency working coordinated through early support and interventions
10. **Collaboration**; to allow joined-up creative approaches to working with families and ensure best practice in information sharing
11. **Escalation**; championing the child's best interest and challenging decisions that won't lead to improved outcomes

# Common tools and approaches

## Signs of Safety

The WSSCB supports the Signs of Safety approach across West Sussex. Signs of Safety is a strengths-based approach through which we work in partnership with families to identify what we are worried about, what's working well, the family's best hopes and next steps. Signs of Safety underpins all work delivered by Children's Social Care and the County Council Early Help workforce and is being rolled-out across WSSCB partner agencies

## Recommended tools

The WSSCB recommends the use of two tools in the work to tackle neglect

- **Neglect Identification and Measurement Tool** (NIMT)

This is a universal tool to understand neglect. It aims to help workers across the partnership, for example in health, education, and early years centres, to think in more detail about a family where they are concerned a child is experiencing neglect. It poses a series of statements that may indicate neglectful behaviour is occurring.

- **The Graded Care Profile (GCP)**

This is a tool used by children's social care when a child under the age of 11 has a Child in Need or Child Protection Plan to address neglect. The lead social worker will work with core group members to complete the tool and agree a plan, which will be regularly reviewed.

# Using a common language

The WSSCB agrees to use the Howe four forms of neglect and to promote their use across the children's workforce in order to build a common understanding, language and approach to working with neglect

## Emotional neglect

- This ranges from the child being ignored to being completely rejected
- There is persistent ill treatment of the child
- The child feels worthless and inadequate
- Families may keep the child silent, scapegoat the child, withhold affection or emotion, and may not do things with or for the child

## Disorganised neglect

- This ranges from inconsistent parenting to chaotic parenting
- Families are frequently coming into contact with services and are often characterised as 'problem families' or 'crisis ridden' families
- There is often little hostility towards professionals and a willingness to engage
- Frequent change in family life

## Depressed / Passive neglect

- Parents or carers are unmotivated or do not understand the child's needs
- Parents or carers do not believe that anything can change and feel passive or helpless
- Frequently there is a failure to meet the child's emotional or physical needs
- This may sometimes be due to parental mental health issues

## Severe deprivation neglect

- This can range from a child being left to cry to a child being left to die
- The children and their home can be dirty and smelly
- Children can be deprived of love, stimulation, emotional warmth, or completely ignored
- Children may be left unattended or let out inappropriately by themselves
- In the most extreme cases the prognosis for change is usually poor