

Cumbria Safeguarding
Children Partnership



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Cumbria CSCCP Neglect Strategy 2023 – 2026



Forward

This strategy builds on the previous Cumbria LSCB strategy which was published in 2017. The strategy sets out the Partnership's revised approach and provides a practical framework and tools that will support strong and effective multi-agency practice by understanding the lived experience of the child or young person.

The strategy is applicable to all professionals and sectors who work with unborn babies, children and their families across Cumbria. It is underpinned by a strengths-based, family focused approach to partnership work. It is our intention for this strategy to build on existing good practice, as well as identify and address gaps in service delivery and provision.



Introduction

Practitioners need a shared understanding about the complexity of neglect. Effective interventions must be supported by robust management oversight, supervision, training and tools to aid effective assessment. Neglect needs to be recognised early, and help and protection must be both timely and effective.

The NSPCC's report on Neglect: learning from case reviews, published December 2022 recognises that neglect is a serious form of harm. In summary, the report recognises that both families and professionals can become overwhelmed and demoralised by issues of neglect. Children may experience repeated attempts by professionals to try and improve the situation. Published case reviews highlight that professionals face a big challenge in identifying and taking timely action on neglect. The learning from these reviews highlights that professionals from all agencies working with children or their families must be able to:

- Recognise physical, emotional, medical, and educational neglect
- Understand the cumulative and long-term impact of neglect
- Take timely action to safeguard children.



Defining Neglect

For the purposes of this strategy, the national definition will apply:

‘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*
- *Provide suitable education.*

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

(Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to Interagency Working to Safeguard and Promote the Welfare of Children. December 2023).

As well as the statutory definition, it is important to have regard to the specific needs of children that are often subsumed under the term ‘failure to meet basic needs’ Professor Jan Horwath (2007) identified additional categories to consider.

These include:

Medical neglect – this involves carers minimising or denying children’s illness or health needs, and failing to seek appropriate medical attention or administer medication and treatments including dental treatment

Nutritional neglect – this typically involves a child being provided with inadequate calories for normal growth. This form of neglect is sometimes associated with faltering growth in which a child fails to develop physically as well as psychologically. However, failure to thrive can occur for other reasons, independent of neglect. More recently, childhood obesity resulting from an unhealthy diet and lack of exercise has been considered as a form of neglect, given its serious long-term consequences.

Emotional neglect – this involves a carer being unresponsive to a child’s basic emotional needs, including failing to interact or provide affection, and failing to develop a child’s self-esteem and sense of identity. Some authors distinguish it from emotional abuse by the intention of the parent.

Educational neglect – this involves a carer failing to provide a stimulating environment, show an interest in the child’s education at school, support their learning, or respond to any special needs, as well as failing to comply with state requirements regarding school attendance.

Physical neglect – this involves not providing appropriate clothing, food, cleanliness and living conditions. It can be difficult to assess due to the need to distinguish neglect from deprivation, and because of individual judgements about what constitutes standards of appropriate physical care.

Lack of supervision and guidance – this involves a failure to provide an adequate level of guidance and supervision to ensure a child is physically safe and protected from harm. It may involve leaving a child to cope alone, abandoning them, or leaving them with inappropriate carers, or failing to provide appropriate boundaries about behaviours such as under-age sexual activity or alcohol use. It can affect children of all ages. Parental supervision includes consideration for the child’s safety according to the child’s age and ability including the ability to anticipate potential dangers/risks and take appropriate action as well as the ability of parents to hold a child and their needs in mind, anticipating these needs and responding appropriately (being re-active and pro-active as required).

These observable factors relate to children’s developmental needs including health, education, emotional and behavioural development, identity, family and social relationships, social presentation, and self-care skills.

Neglect in Adolescence

Adolescents are the largest growing cohort in both child protection and care. A study of 841 cases in one local authority found that all cases referred due to serious youth violence or gang-related behaviour were closed without assessment (Lloyd & Firmin, 2020). Professionals is also often failing to identify or respond effectively to neglect in older children (Ofsted, 2018). (Josh MacAlister 2022)

Adolescence is a time when, developmentally young people are ‘individuating.’ This process involves separating from parents as young people begin to form their own identities, values, and perspectives. It is also a time when young people spend increasing amounts of time away from the home. However, it is also a time when young people require a more developmental style of parenting and careful supervision. For the neglected child, adolescence presents a range of increased risks including:

- Going missing from home or care
- Poor school attendance
- Risk of exclusion from school
- Getting into trouble with the police and anti-social behaviour
- Engaging in substance misuse, including peer abuse, online abuse
- Increased risk of becoming the victim of child exploitation
- Increased risk of exploitation by gangs and other criminal groups (e.g., violent extremists)
- Increased risk of low mood, depression, self-harm, suicidal ideation, eating disorders and poor mental health as a result of the cumulative emotional impact of neglect.



Poverty and neglect

Poverty affects every aspect of family life. Poverty is inextricably implicated in other factors which increase the risk of harm: including domestic violence, poor mental health and substance use. Children’s age and ethnicity interact with poverty in ways that increase inequalities.

Deep and persistent poverty are more damaging for children’s safety and development than a low income or temporary difficulties. Insecurity and unpredictability of income, housing and employment, often the result of benefits administration practices or a lack of rights, compound the problems of parenting on an inadequate income

Children who live in the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods are ten times more likely to be looked after or on a child protection plan, than children in the least deprived 10% of areas (Bywaters et al., 2020). Deprivation is a contributory causal factor in child abuse and neglect and a growing body of research is strengthening the evidence of this relationship, including poverty being closely interconnected with wider factors associated with child abuse and neglect, such as poor parental mental health and domestic abuse (Bywaters & Skinner, 2022; Bywaters et al., 2016).

Our Strategic Objectives

Our Partnership aims to quantify the extent of neglect in Cumbria, ensure that all agencies can recognise neglect at the earliest opportunity and respond appropriately, in a timely manner. We aim to achieve best-practice, which is evidence based by evaluating the effectiveness and impact of our practice with children, young people and families. This is to assure good quality interventions and continuous practice improvement.

There are 4 strategic objectives that underpin our approach:

Recognise Front line staff in all agencies will be able to recognise the signs of neglect and ensure that families get the support they need at the point of first contact.	Respond Each agency will provide robust and timely responses to children, young people and their families to meet their needs and prevent neglect from escalating.
Quantify The extent and range of neglect in the county will be identified through the agreed Impact Framework.	Evaluate The scrutiny and evaluation of progress will be undertaken through individual agency quality assurance mechanisms, to track and evidence progress against action plans. Progress will also be monitored by the CSCP

Leadership drives forward the appropriate systems, culture and practice changes to sustain robust local arrangements to tackle neglect.

Each agency has formulated a plan structured around the 4 strategic objectives. The emphasis in each plan is the impact of actions on children and families and the evidence to demonstrate how this has been achieved.

Our tools to help us to understand neglect

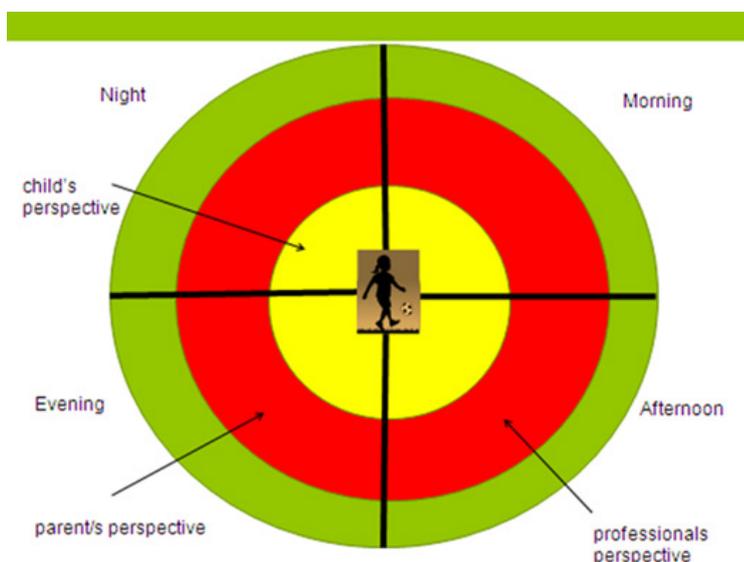
Horwath outlines that in order to fully understand how various experiences (including neglect) impacts on an individual, it is necessary to identify the associated risks, unmet needs and areas of resilience. To do this it is critical understand what life is like for the child or young person on a daily basis; in the evening, during the night, at weekends, during public holidays and when different people are involved in their care.

In order to understand how the behaviours and parenting/caring style of the parent or carer contributes to the risks or unmet needs, it is also necessary to understand a day in their life. It is only by understanding the lives of both parent/s and each individual child in a family that one can begin to understand why the needs of the child are not being met and what would need to change in order for those needs to be met. (Horwath)

The CSCP 'Day in my life' neglect toolkit will assist those working with children, to reflect on whether a child is experiencing neglect and what type of neglect the child or children may be experiencing.

Horwath outlines the four elements:

1. The child's perception of a day in their life
2. Parent/s perception of a day for the parent/s
3. A parent's perspective on the impact of their lived experience on that of the child
4. What professionals know about a day in the life of the child and the parent and the impact of this experience on the developmental needs of the child.



This approach complements the agreed practice framework Signs of Safety and the range of tools that have been agreed to measure children's experience of day-to-day care.

It has been identified that a shared language and understanding of neglect across partners working with children, young people and their families is paramount to ensure an effective, unified and consistent approach to tackling child neglect.

One of the key principles of Signs of Safety practice is to use simple language that everyone understands, therefore moving away from professional jargon and abbreviations that can be confusing for children and families. The simple, descriptive language we use is important to help families to have a good understanding of why professionals are involved and what goals we are working towards.

CSCP ‘Day in my life’ Neglect Toolkit

Improving outcomes for neglected children means we need to know how, when, where and why neglect is occurring for each child in the household. The original ‘Day in the Life of the child’ tools devised by Jan Horwath aim to help practitioners gain a better understanding of what is happening in families where neglect is an issue and what actions may lead to improved outcomes for children.

Practitioners should use the tools with the parent/carer separately to the child. Go through each stage of the day to try to gain an understanding of what the daily lived experience of each child is. Include anything that is different for weekends and school holidays.

Wider Children’s workforce

- Age/need specific “day in my life”
- Chronology
- Signs of wellbeing mapping and analysis

Childrens Social Care Mandatory use of:

- Age/need specific “day in my life”
- Impact chronology
- Signs of Safety mapping and analysis
- Genogram

Application of the Toolkit by the Wider Children’s Workforce

The Toolkit has a range of tools that can be used by any professionals that have an ongoing involvement with children and their families. The agreed age and need specific “day in my life” tools and the chronology template are tools that should be used by all professionals working with children. The Neglect Toolkit contains the age specific “day in my life” templates for the following range of children:

- Pre-birth
- Baby
- Pre school
- Primary School aged
- Teenager
- A Disabled Child

The Neglect Toolkit also contains a chronology template for Children’s Social Care and the Wider Children’s Workforce. The harm arising from neglect is rarely the result of a significant incident and is normally a case of accumulative concern, for example gradually deteriorating home conditions, repeated incidents of children attending school tired or repeat injuries as a result of poor parental supervision. A clear succinct chronology in neglect cases allows for an emerging pattern of concern to be identified quickly, as well as identifying areas of strength. In turn, chronologies enable levels of engagement, including capacity to change, to be identified. It also prevents “start again” decision making where individual situations of concern are looked at in isolation. Chronologies can often be the first vital step in identifying and responding to neglectful parenting.

To capture the information and to support a robust analysis and assessment the Signs of Wellbeing Assessment Mapping tool should be used. By following the process and working through the case mapping a robust solution focused assessment will be achieved.



Application of the Toolkit by Social Workers and Social Work Managers

Good social work practice is based on the principles of completing timely, proportionate and analytical assessments, outcome focused planning, relationship-based practice, recognising and working with family's strengths, delivering evidence-based interventions, and strongly hearing the voice of the child. The Neglect Toolkit supports these practice standards with a focus on eliciting the right information to understand the lived experience of the child. The expectation for social workers is that the following tools will be used in all children's cases where there are concerns around neglect:

- The appropriate age/need specific "day in my life" template
- Impact chronology
- Signs of Safety mapping and analysis
- Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
- Genogram

In addition, where there are concerns about the child's emotional/behavioural presentation social workers will complete a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire.

Impact and Governance

This strategy will be underpinned by a detailed action plan to monitor progress against the objectives, including key milestones. As a CSCP priority, mechanisms are in place to ensure that the strategy implementation is timely and monitored for impact. Quantitative and qualitative measures are included against this priority are in the CSCP Business Plan.

The CSCP Board will hold partner agencies to account to ensure the new strategy and approach are embedded within each agency and they are demonstrating impact on practice and improved outcomes for children and young people at risk of neglect.

It is the responsibility of each partner agency to ensure that the toolkit becomes embedded into practice where neglect is a feature.

Each individual agency will be responsible for regularly reviewing progress against their action plans. This should take place in the organisation's existing quality assurance infrastructure.

References

The Relationship Between Poverty and Child Abuse and Neglect: New Evidence Paul Bywaters and Guy Skinner (March 2022)

Horwath, J. and Morrison, M. (2000) 'Assessment of Parental Motivation to Change.' In J. Horwath(ed) *The Child's World: Assessing Children in Need and Their Families*, pp.77-90. London: Department of Health, NSPCC and University of Sheffield.

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





