



The Calderdale Neglect Strategy

2024-2027



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Foreword

Neglect is the ongoing failure to meet a child's basic needs and is the most common form of child abuse. Apart from being potentially fatal, neglect harms children and leads to poor health, educational and social outcomes.

In Calderdale, The Calderdale Safeguarding Children Partnership (CSCP) and its partners recognise that children and young people have a right to live in an environment where they are loved, feel valued and are cared for so that they can reach their potential and have aspirations. In Calderdale, too many children and young people have childhoods that are damaged by neglect, very often because parents are struggling to deal with problems they face and often cannot solve alone.

The purpose of this document is to establish strategic aims, objectives and priorities for the Calderdale approach in tackling neglect. It was developed by the CSCP and as such applies to all agencies across all sectors working in Calderdale.

This document identifies both the current statutory definition of neglect and other factors to consider in assisting and further supporting practitioners in early identification, intervention and child protection.

The aim of this strategy is to tackle the causes and effects of neglect in Calderdale. In order to achieve this, the objectives of this strategy are:

- To strengthen local responses in line with current national and local guidance, policies and good practice.
- To adapt, rather than duplicate, existing guidance, policies or procedures to tackle neglect.
- To raise awareness and improve the safeguarding duty of all relevant agencies with regards to neglect.



1. Introduction

The [Working Together to Safeguarding Children 2023](#) definition of 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)**
- **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.

Neglect is dangerous and can cause serious, long-term damage - even death. Neglect in the first three years of life can seriously impact on brain development and have significant consequences through adolescence and into adulthood. Consequences of neglect can include an array of health and mental health problems, difficulties in forming attachment and relationships, lower educational achievements, an increased risk of substance misuse, higher risk of experiencing abuse as well as difficulties in assuming parenting responsibilities later on in life, thereby repeating the cycle of neglect and consequential abuse.

The degree to which children are affected during their childhood and later in adulthood depends on the type, severity and frequency of the neglect and on what support mechanisms, resilience strategies and protective factors were available to the child.

Neglect manifests differently depending on the age of the child and its impact may therefore vary. It can begin pre-birth and stretch through to adolescence. Teenage neglect has historically received less attention. However, research increasingly shows how reduced care during adolescence leads to increased risk-facing behaviours and vulnerability to extra-familial harm such as criminal or sexual exploitation. There is an additional risk that professionals may interpret teenage behaviours as a choice or “acting out” rather than considering the underlying emotional abuse or neglect that they may be experiencing and responding to¹.

It is important that practitioners recognise the role of poverty in neglect and that practitioners seek to understand families’ experiences of daily life. The cost of living has been estimated to have risen by around £100/week in the last 2 years². This includes rent, shopping, bills etc. Although some wages have also risen, some parents have zero-hour contracts and the numbers of people seeking credit to cover the basic costs of life has also risen in recent years. Poverty creates additional stresses for families which can be compounded over time. It can become a cycle that is extremely difficult to break out of and the shame and stigma of poverty may make families reluctant to seek support and may result in crisis-driven decision-making that then has further impact on children.

¹ <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/information/professionals/resources/troubled-teens-links-between-parenting-and-adolescent-neglect>

² Office for National Statistics
[Working together to safeguard children - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Long-term poverty can contribute to an increased risk of maltreatment of children, as a result of accumulating disadvantages and vulnerabilities.³ Poverty may make it harder for practitioners to identify and respond to neglect.

Educational neglect is an area of increased national focus since the covid pandemic. The Department for Education defines educational neglect as the 'persistent failure to send children to school'. The NSPCC has cited 'failure to ensure regular school attendance which prevents the child reaching their full potential academically' as one of their six forms of neglect. Education is a key protective factor for children, benefiting their social and emotional development as well as their learning. It can provide a safe space away from poverty or stresses within the home. It also reduces the risks of extra-familial harm. Practitioners need to pay attention to attendance information, patterns of absence and be curious about what may be going on for the child. Educational neglect will require close cooperation between agencies including the Education Welfare Service as well as realistic and creative approaches to addressing this.⁴

A child who is neglected will often suffer from other abuses as well. Neglect can be seen as differing from other forms of abuse because it is:

- Frequently passive
- Not always intentional
- More likely to be a chronic and cumulative form of harm rather than crisis or incident led and therefore impacts on how we respond as agencies
- Combined often with other forms of maltreatment
- Often a revolving door syndrome where families require long term support
- Often not clear-cut and may lack agreement between professionals on the threshold for intervention

Neglect remains the most common form of child abuse across the UK and is the most common category of child protection plan nationally and in Calderdale.

2.Strategic Aims

The CSCP aims to ensure that the early recognition of neglect and improved response by all agencies reduces the number of children who experience significant harm and improves children's lives.

This strategy aims to reduce the prevalence and impact of neglect through the following four key areas of focus:

- 1. Voice of the Child: To maintain focus on the child and understand the impact of neglect**
 - a. Continue embedding the use of 'A Day In The Life Of A Child' tool in Calderdale
 - b. Children to collectively influence procedure and practice
 - c. Children to influence their individual outcomes
 - d. Consultation and engagement with service users to understand impact of neglect and of interventions and their outcomes

³ https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/media/z5gmmbc4/frontlinebriefing-neglectmay19_web-2.pdf

⁴ [Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance)

- 2. Awareness: To improve awareness, understanding and recognition of neglect**
 - a. To have a common understanding of neglect and the impacts across Calderdale professionals, volunteers, community and parents
 - b. Increase the child's own awareness of neglect and their confidence and ability to seek support
 - c. Ensure there is regular multi-agency Neglect training available through the Partnership and increase uptake of this by professionals and volunteers
- 3. Effective Practice: To improve the effectiveness of interventions to tackle neglect**
 - a. Improved assessment of neglect through the use of tools such as the CSCP Neglect Toolkit, the CSCP Child Development Tool and Multi-Agency Chronology Guidance
 - b. To have easy to read and accessible guidance, toolkits and protocols on how to protect children experiencing neglect within their families
 - c. Effective early help and prevention through child-focussed risk assessments and excellent multi-agency working
 - d. Comprehensively agreed thresholds across all agencies
 - e. Clear Policies and Procedures
 - f. Improved quality of robust and reflective Safeguarding Supervision
- 4. Assurance: To monitor progress in reducing the risk of neglect in the population**
 - a. Multi-agency audits show the effectiveness of interventions and how services and responses can be improved
 - b. Outcomes for children suffering from neglect monitored through the CSCP dataset across the continuum of need
 - c. Feedback and engagement with practitioners demonstrate levels of knowledge, skills and understanding and identify areas for further improvement
 - d. Other quality assurance, including the Organisational Safeguarding Assessment, methods identify areas of good practice and areas for improvement

The CSCP and its partners share a responsibility for implementation of this Strategy.

Together, agencies, professionals, volunteers and communities in Calderdale can tackle Neglect to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children.



3. Tackling Neglect

3.1. Common contributory factors and causes of neglect

Families may be made more vulnerable by a number of factors or wider circumstances and these, in turn can contribute to children experiencing neglect. These factors do not inevitably lead to neglect and are not necessarily indicators of neglect. Instead they should support agencies to understand the wider context for the child and the challenges that parents face in meeting their children's needs. Identification and understanding of these circumstances will also help agencies to understand what support families need and how to prioritise this.

- Domestic abuse
- Conflict within family relationships
- Parental learning difficulties or disabilities
- Alcohol and substance misuse
- Poverty
- Homelessness, insecure or poor quality housing
- Experiences of trauma and abuse in parents' own childhood
- Racism or other forms of discrimination
- Poor mental health or mental illness
- Poor physical health
- Isolation and lack of support networks

Environmental factors increasing the risk of neglect are not difficult to recognise although the extent to which they impact on parenting and family functioning can be under-estimated. These factors relate to interactions between the family and their immediate environment and other significant factors in the immediate environment outside of the family. Some of these factors may relate to the wider social context within which the family sits and may be outside of their control.

Poverty often brings social isolation, feelings of shame, limited educational and employment prospects and high levels of stress which can in turn make coping with the psychological, physical

and material demands of parenting much harder. Poverty does not necessarily lead to neglect and neglect can also occur within materially comfortable or wealthy families, due to the presence of other factors or difficulties.

It is important to take time to understand families' wider financial and housing situations in order to know whether environmental concerns, such as unhygienic or unsafe living conditions relate to parental neglect or poverty and social deprivation. Examples might include a home in a serious state of disrepair without lightbulbs, with mould or leaks, where a parent may not have the money or may be at the mercy of an uncaring landlord. Overcrowding may not be a choice but a result of limited social housing, poverty or wider family moving in together to support one another. Likewise, frequent house moves may relate to adult difficulties or avoiding the authorities but equally could be the result of experiences of racism or discrimination, the nature of temporary housing or come from escaping domestic abuse.

Systematic reviews and other studies of neglect have found that parents who neglect their children have had fewer individuals in their social networks and received less support, or have perceived that they received less support than others. Isolation and limited networks may mean that parents have little social interaction and by implication fewer opportunities to feel supported themselves and little help with the day to day responsibility of caring for small children.

3.2 Indicators of neglect

The indicators of neglect may manifest differently in different children, depending on their age. Neglect of a toddler will look very different and also have very different consequences in comparison with a teenager, for example. Teenagers experiencing neglect may not be given the same consideration as much younger children as the impact on them may be less evident and they are less receptive to professional intervention as they are older. However, we do know that childhood neglect can increase a child's vulnerability to risks outside the home as they enter puberty and their teens. Parents may be less resilient and able to respond to these risks and young people less receptive to increased parenting and boundaries at this stage, because the patterns of attachment and emotional connection have been disrupted earlier on.

Additional advice may be needed to understand the impact of children with disabilities and also the role of discrimination and racism in neglect.

Fuller details of indicators of neglect for different ages and stages can be found with the Toolkit.

The child's voice and gaining an understanding of their lived experience can help in identifying neglect and its impact – see the Toolkit for tools for undertaking direct work.

3.3 The overarching principles to be adopted in tackling neglect in Calderdale

3.3.1 Develop a 'Think Family' approach and ensure it is owned by all stakeholders.

This should ensure the approach is child focussed as the safety, well-being and development of children is the overriding priority. The approach should be inclusive of children with additional needs such as disability or special educational needs as they are potentially more vulnerable. All agencies need to consider historical information to inform the present position and identify families at risk of inter-generational neglect. This 'Think Family' approach will include absent and new partners and include the use of chronologies to identify and evidence patterns of neglect.

3.3.2 Be outcome focussed

Work with children and young people needs to be measured by its impact on outcomes, which will be monitored in accordance with section 4 of the Strategic Aims above. This will require good quality assessments and plans as these are key to getting it right for children and young people so use of the CSCP neglect guidance and tools will assist with monitoring, assessing and intervening. The principles below in relation to workforce development and quality supervision will support practitioners to remain focussed on the outcomes for children.

3.3.3 Develop a shared understanding

Significant regard needs to be given to the overlap between neglect and other forms of child maltreatment such as domestic abuse and substance misuse. As such collaboration and partnership arrangements will be central to ensuring effective identification, assessment and support and promote escalation procedures where agencies need to challenge each other about improvement made by families and its sustainability. This will require effective information sharing to inform assessments and evaluations of risk.

Multi-agency expectations for direct practice are as follows:

- **Collaborate:** practitioners working with the same child and family share information to get a complete picture of what life is like for the child. Collectively, they ensure the child's voice is at the centre and the right support is provided
- **Learn:** practitioners learn together by drawing on the best available evidence from their individual fields and sharing their diverse perspectives during regular shared reflection on a child's development, experiences, and outcomes
- **Resource:** practitioners build strong relationships across agencies and disciplines to ensure they support and protect the children with whom they work
- **Include:** practitioners recognise the differences between, and are confident to respond to, circumstances where children experience adversity due to economic and social circumstances and acute family stress, and situations where children face harm due to parental abuse and neglect
- **Mutual challenge:** practitioners challenge themselves and each other, question each other's assumptions, and seek to resolve differences of opinion in a restorative and respectful way.

3.3.4 Building resilience

Help needs to be of a kind and of a duration that improves and sustains the safety of children and young people into the future. As such early help will play a key role in ensuring the early recognition and identification of the signs and symptoms of neglect and the importance of effective collaboration amongst agencies coordinated through early help assessments.

3.3.5 Risk management

Due to the nature of neglect, professionals can become de-sensitized to the indicators over time and lack of progress may then go unchallenged. This can lead to over-optimism around parental capacity for change. Suitable statutory action needs to be taken if insufficient progress is achieved within the child's timescale and methods have been unsuccessful in addressing levels of risk present or when improvements are not made. Agencies should use the CSCP Multi-agency Professional Dispute and Escalation Policy or their own escalation processes if they feel their concerns are not being heard by another agency. In such situations, a multi-agency chronology may assist with risk assessment and decision-making.

3.3.6 Workforce development

Professionals may have concerns about a neglected child but these concerns do not necessarily lead to effective action. Potential obstacles to effective action may relate to a lack of professional knowledge or confidence to recognise the extent of the impact of neglect; resource constraints or what practitioners perceive can be achieved when they have concerns about neglect.

In terms of access to relevant knowledge, it is important that professionals with safeguarding responsibilities have access to continuing professional development to ensure they are up to date with practice, research and local developments around working with neglect. This is key to ensuring appropriate and timely interventions.

The accompanying tools and resources and guidance offered by the CSCP are intended to support workforce skills and confidence and to sit alongside the training on offer, in order to enable the workforce to identify and intervene in cases of neglect.

Good quality and timely supervision also has a crucial role to play in ensuring that practitioners are supported to reflect on and analyse information gathered that indicates neglect and consider what action is needed ensuring that the voice of the child and their outcomes remain at the forefront. Effective supervision requires a shared responsibility to be offered and to be sought and will also take account of the emotional demands of the role. The current economic climate of austerity is undoubtedly challenging for both families and professionals. Encountering neglect in your professional role and the work involved in working with families to try to reduce the risk to children can be distressing and, at times, anxiety-provoking.

“We are guilty of many errors and many faults but the worst of our crimes is abandoning our children, neglecting the fountain of life. Many of the things we need can wait. The child cannot. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made, and his senses are being developed. To him we cannot answer 'Tomorrow.' His name is 'Today.'”

Gabriela Mistral (Chilean poet, 1889-1957)

3.4 Good practice principles in tackling neglect

The following are good practice principles in tackling neglect:

- Genuine, respectful and persistent efforts to engage both parents and other significant adults for the child
- Ensure families are not lost when moving across borders (either internally in one local authority, or out of area);
- Agencies to ensure staff understand the importance of seeking consent to share information or make referrals as well as when consent may not be required in relation to a safeguarding concern;
- High quality information exchange;
- The importance of professionals being able to see and talk to vulnerable children in understanding their experiences and views;
- Agencies to ensure staff have the confidence and skills to have difficult conversations and respond to resistance;
- Good understanding of safeguarding processes to ensure prompt action to support & protect children in situations posing risk to health, wellbeing or safety;
- Timely response to all expressions of concern about neglect;
- An understanding of the child’s day-to-day experiences ;
- Clarity on parental responsibility and expectations;
- Full assessment of the child’s health and development needs;
- Agencies to ensure they have ways of recording and therefore understanding/identifying patterns of neglect and change over time, including the use of multi-agency chronologies;
- A non-judgmental, curious and culturally competent approach, avoiding assumptions and stereotypes
- Maintaining accurate basic information records and sharing changes of details with relevant partner agencies;
- Recognition that neglect links to other issues such as children who go missing, sexual exploitation, self- harm and others;
- Importance of early intervention and a whole family approach;
- Use of and action taken as a result of using the Calderdale Neglect Toolkit;



4. Governance and accountability

Accountability for children suffering from or at risk of suffering from neglect sits with the individual statutory, voluntary and community organisations in Calderdale, however the Safeguarding Partnership will monitor progress against the strategic aims set out in this Neglect Strategy and challenge multi agency partners where appropriate.

Measuring the impact of effective practice in relation to neglect is long-term. It can sometimes span generations. Therefore the continuous and rigorous monitoring of this performance data will be needed, alongside quality assurance systems to establish what impact the Neglect Strategy and the corresponding CSCP tools and resources have had on children, families and on front line practice.

Examples of indicators, standards and performance measures which can give the Safeguarding Partnership and other stakeholders assurance of how well children are safeguarded include the number of early help assessments, number but also effectiveness of child protection plans, school attendance levels and attendance at health appointments.

Other ways in which the Safeguarding Partnership will seek assurance will include data collation, audit, listening to children, young people and families and front line practitioners.

This strategy will be reviewed on a three-yearly basis by the CSCP. Delivery plans and performance frameworks will be reviewed annually and monitored through the performance management and quality assurance subgroups.

Useful Resources

The following resources can be found on the Calderdale Safeguarding Children Partnership Website:

[Safeguarding Calderdale – Safeguarding children and adults in Calderdale](#)

- ✓ [Calderdale Multi-agency Assessment Tools for Working with Neglect](#)
- ✓ [Neglect safeguard guide](#)
- ✓ [Guidance for Practitioner](#)
- ✓ [Thresholds Document – Calderdale Continuum of Need and Response](#)
- ✓ [How to report concerns and make a referral to Multi-Agency Screening Team \(MAST\)](#)
- ✓ [Multi-Agency Chronology Guidance](#)
- ✓ [Resolving Professional Disagreements and Escalation](#)
- ✓ [Pathway Working with Non-Engaged Families-2024](#)
- ✓ [Obesity Pathway](#)
- ✓ [A Day in the life of a Child tools and guidance](#)
- ✓ [West Yorkshire Procedures](#) for how to Safeguard Children and work with Neglect