



Neglect Strategy

2025 - 2027



Foreword

“Nothing is more important than children’s welfare. Every child deserves to grow up in a safe, stable, and loving home. Children who need help and protection deserve high quality and effective support. This requires individuals, agencies, and organisations to be clear about their own and each other’s roles and responsibilities, and how they work together”.

Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2023

We know that children who are neglected can be at risk of immediate harm and that the experience of neglect in childhood can have significant and long-term consequences affecting many areas of their development and their lives into adulthood.

Neglect can be difficult to recognise and describe, but with the right knowledge and tools, it can be identified, and with the right support for children, young people and their families, its prevalence and impact can be reduced. The Stockport Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) is committed to this aim and is ambitious to ensure that we have a confident workforce who are equipped to work together to improve the lives of children who are at risk of or suffering neglect.

By working in partnership, we are committed to reducing the impact and improving the lives of children who experience neglect in Stockport. We will do this through a relentless focus on our three strategic priorities:

- To raise awareness and understanding of neglect in Stockport
- To support the identification of neglect at the earliest opportunity
- To ensure a timely and effective response to neglect across the partnership

Chris McLoughlin



- Executive Director People and Neighbourhoods, Director of Children’s Services, Adult Social Care
Chair of the Stockport Safeguarding Children’s Partnership

Practice Principles

The Stockport Safeguarding Children's Partnership has an agreed set of practice principles informed by *Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2023*. The Partnership is committed to adopting these principles in all its work and this includes our approach to Neglect.

Child centred approach

- Practitioners working with children should see and speak to the child, listen to what they say, observe their behaviour, take their views seriously.

Whole family culture

- Practitioners work in partnership with parents and carers as far as possible. Working collaboratively will mean parents and carers have the best chance of making changes.
- Practitioners approach families with empathy, respect, compassion, and creativity.

Flexible and responsive multi-agency working

- Protecting children from abuse, neglect and exploitation requires multi-agency join up and cooperation at all levels.
- Strong, effective multi-agency safeguarding arrangements are flexible and responsive to existing and emerging local need.

Strength based, trauma informed and intersectionality aware

- Practitioners use strength-based approaches, working with children, young people, their parents and carers.
- Practitioners work sensitively with parents, carers and children to identify and understand the impact of adversity and trauma in their lives.

A learning culture and data informed

- The SSCP promotes and embeds a learning culture that supports local services to become more reflective and implement changes to practice.
- The SSCP ensures the effective collection, sharing and analysis of data to enable early identification of new safeguarding risks

Feedback and co-production

- Practitioners value and seek the contributions, expertise and knowledge of children, parents, carers, family networks and local communities.

Introduction



National Picture

Neglect is the form of abuse most often recorded in official safeguarding data, regardless of the age of the children concerned. It is also consistently a significant factor in the lives of children who die or are seriously harmed because of child abuse. The 2022/23 national Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel Annual Report noted that of the 393 Rapid Reviews of Serious Incidents that had taken place, over 50% of the children considered had experienced harm because of neglect. The same figure is true of children who are cared for by Local Authorities in the UK.

In August 2024, the NSPCC published a neglect statistics briefing that highlights that neglect is the most common form of abuse in the UK - [Statistics briefing: neglect](#). It also tells us that:

1 in 10 children in the UK have been neglected

Concerns around neglect have been identified for half of the children who are the subject of a Child Protection Plan

Neglect is the most mentioned form of abuse by adults contacting the NSPCC helpline

Younger children are more likely to be the subject of a Child Protection Plan due to neglect and the neglect of older children is more likely to be overlooked

The number of police recorded child cruelty offences due to neglect is increasing

Less than 1% of Childline counselling sessions are about neglect, possibly because children do not recognise their experience as neglectful

Local picture

In the calendar year 2024, the following data was true for Stockport

1945 (53.9%) of all referrals involved neglect as a primary issue of concern

360 (26.8%) of child and family assessments involved neglect as a primary issue of concern

For 94 (49.7%) of all children who came into our care, neglect was a primary issue of concern

192 (33.6%) children became the subject of a child protection plan under the category of neglect

All of the children considered at a Rapid Review during 2024 had experienced neglect



WHAT IS NEGLECT?

Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2023 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 because 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.
- provide suitable education – this is in WT 2023 definition

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

Jan Howarth’s seminal work on neglect (2007) identifies the following categories of neglect:



Emotional neglect - when a child doesn't get the nurture or stimulation they need to form secure and positive attachments e.g. they are ignored, humiliated or isolated



Nutritional neglect - when a child is not provided with adequate calories "to thrive" or when childhood obesity occurs due to an unhealthy diet



Physical neglect - when a child's basic needs associated with food, clothing and shelter are not met



Lack of supervision and guidance - when a child is not offered appropriate supervision or guidance to keep them safe



Educational neglect - when a child is not given access to education in accordance with statutory requirements or when their learning is not supported or encouraged



Medical (including dental) neglect - when a child is not given access to medical or dental care to treat or prevent illness

In addition to Howarth’s categorisation, the SSCP encourages practitioners in Stockport to consider **affluent neglect**. Affluent neglect refers to the neglect experienced by children in wealthy families and is of particular significance in a borough where areas of deprivation and affluence sit alongside

one another. Affluent neglect can typically be more difficult to identify, as the kind of neglect experienced by children and young people in these circumstances is often emotional

[Safeguarding children in affluent families | Goldsmiths, University of London](#)

THE IMPACT OF NEGLECT

Children can experience neglect at any age – from before birth to adolescence and this experience can cause a range of short and long-term effects. The potential impact of neglect for children cannot be underestimated and research shows that persistent neglect in the first years of childhood can have a significant effect on brain development. Neglect can disrupt the ability to form secure attachments which negatively impacts emotional health and wellbeing, as well as the capacity to establish successful relationships in adulthood. Children who are neglected are more likely to experience poor health, educational and social outcomes than those who are not.

If a child is aged 0-2 years old, their health visitor will be completing an ages and stages questionnaire, to assess if the child is meeting their expected developmental milestones.

Some of the potential consequences of the experience of neglect are described both thematically and by age group in the information below:

BRAIN DEVELOPMENT	If a baby is malnourished, neural cells can become weak or damaged and this can cause lowered brain function. If a child has little interaction with their caregiver, it can impact their emotional and verbal development with consequent impacts on their ability to learn.
PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT	Parents and carers need to help young children to develop gross motor skills. If they are being neglected, or if parents do not know how to stimulate their child, this process may not happen effectively, and the child's development may be delayed (Howarth, 2013).
COMMUNICATION	Early childhood neglect may cause a delay in speech and language development. This may also include not having the independence skills to start school ready to learn.
PHYSICAL HEALTH	If a child is not given enough food, they will immediately experience hunger and discomfort and may have trouble concentrating. Longer-term malnourishment may affect physical health and development. Having an unhealthy diet and lack of physical exercise can also lead to obesity related health problems. Not receiving appropriate medical care can result in poor health, dental decay and in some circumstances, death.
MENTAL HEALTH	Children who have experienced neglect are more likely to experience poor mental health including: • Depression • Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) • Dissociative disorders • Memory impairments • Anxiety
RELATIONSHIPS & ATTACHMENTS	Relationships and attachment - Children who do receive the love and care they need may develop problems with attachment – they may struggle to form a

	strong relationship or bond with their caregiver. This can lead to a child becoming isolated and affect their ability to maintain healthy relationships with others later in life (including their own children).
RISK-FACING BEHAVIOUR	Young people who have experienced neglect may face more risks, such as: • Running away from home. • Breaking the law. • Abusing drugs or alcohol. • Becoming involved in unhealthy and/or abusive relationships. • Becoming more at risk of Child Sexual or Criminal Exploitation.



PRE- BIRTH	• Low birth weight • Premature birth • Higher risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) • Impaired cognitive and social functioning.
0-5 YEARS	• Failure to thrive • Poor height and weight gain • Developmental delay, not meeting milestones e.g. not sitting, crawling • Pale skin, poor hair and skin condition • Under stimulation resulting in head banging and rocking • Language delay • Emotional, social and behavioural difficulties e.g. frequent tantrums; persistent attention seeking or demanding • Impulsivity or watchful and withdrawn • Frequent attendances at A&E • Persistent minor infections
5- 11 YEARS	• Poor concentration and achievement at school • Speech and language delay • Aggressive/withdrawn • Emotional, social and behavioural difficulties as above • Frequent attendances/admission to A&E • Isolated or struggle to make and keep friendships • Problems with taking turns and negotiation • Poor physical co-ordination/dexterity • Is bullied or bullies others
11- 18 YEARS	11-18 years • Struggle to learn • Poor motivation • Socially isolated/poor peer relationships • Increasingly high risk anti-social behaviour • Potential for self-harm/substance use • Feelings of low self-worth and alienation • Poor self-esteem and confidence

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS



Neglect in adolescence

Adolescents are often viewed as being naturally more resilient than younger children. However, they still need dedicated care to meet their physical and emotional needs, to support their education and to keep them safe. A report of a study completed by the Children's Society 'Understanding Adolescent Neglect – Troubled Teens' suggests that the scale of adolescent neglect is significant and that more than 1 in 7 (15%) 14–15-year-olds are living with adult caregivers who neglect them in one or more ways.

The Children's Society study that found that neglected young people reported low well-being, and a greater dissatisfaction with life than their peers. They were more likely to truant and experiment with alcohol and/or drugs and they had a higher propensity to behaving in ways which may jeopardise their health or their prospects. The report concludes that these findings “underline the need to take adolescent neglect seriously, because young people who experience it are likely to suffer a pernicious undermining of their well-being”.

Neglect and children and young people with complex needs

Children and young people with complex needs refers to children who might have mental health needs; emotional needs; behavioural needs that are connected to learning difficulties and/or neurodiversity, as well as physical health needs. A child may be born with complex needs or develop them during childhood. Complexity is assessed according to the frequency and combination of presenting needs (Ofsted 2024).

Evidence tells us that children with complex needs are more at risk of neglect than those without them (Buha et al, 2023; NSPCC, 2021). Children with complex needs have increased vulnerability to neglect due to a number of possible factors including a reduced capacity to resist/avoid abuse; communication difficulties and an inability to understand what is happening or to seek help. High-risk groups are children with behaviour/conduct disorders; children with speech and language difficulties and those with complex health related conditions. Sullivan and Knutson's landmark study found that children with communication difficulties and behavioural disorders were between 5 and 7 times as likely to experience abuse as non-disabled children (2000). In order to minimise this vulnerability, particular efforts are needed to ensure that the voice of children and young people with complex needs are heard and well understood.

Poverty and Neglect

The Nuffield Foundation's 2022 report - *The Relationship Between Poverty and Child Abuse and Neglect: New Evidence* - concludes that there is an increased evidence base to affirm that "family poverty and inequality are key drivers of harm to children". The report's review of over 90 relevant research papers found that changes in the economic conditions of a family's life – without any other factors – impact on rates of abuse and neglect and that increases in income reduced rates significantly. The report concludes that there is "substantial evidence for a contributory causal relationship between the economic circumstances of families and child abuse and neglect".

The relationship between poverty and neglect is complex and should not be understood as entirely binary. Inevitably, multiple other factors intersect with the likelihood of child abuse and neglect occurring in a family. However, in the context of rising poverty in the UK, practitioners working with children and families where neglect is present should give weight to the impact of structural disadvantage and **"engage much more effectively with children's and families' basic material needs as a key factor for child protection. Too often families feel misunderstood, blamed, mistrusted and threatened rather than helped"** (Nuffield Foundation).

Co-existence of neglect with other indicators of harm

Neglect is often not found in isolation, and we know, for example, that children who are neglected are five times more likely to be sexually abused by a member of their family than those who are not. However, the relationship between neglect and other forms of harm to children is complex and should be approached with "care and compassion". It is important that practitioners hold in mind that difficulties in life can make it harder for parents to meet their children's basic care needs and that work to address issues such as mental health, unemployment, domestic abuse, substance misuse can make a positive impact on the reduction on neglect (NSPCC).

Criminal neglect

Neglect of children can be a prosecutable crime. The Serious Crime Act 2015 states that the criminal act of neglect has occurred when someone over the age of 16 who has responsibility for a child wilfully neglects them "in a manner likely to cause unnecessary suffering or injury to health (whether the suffering or injury is of a physical or psychological nature).

Agreed Response- Neglect Toolkit

It is important that professionals in universal settings, early help services, social care and specialist services have a shared understanding and common language when considering whether a child may be experiencing neglect and deciding how to respond to these concerns in a timely and proportionate way. Often the picture of a child who is being neglected is an emerging one and it is important that practitioners are observant and professionally curious about a child's presentation and their daily lived experience.

In Stockport our view is that getting a good understanding of a child's lived experience in the context of the systems surrounding them is the best way to understand and implement plans to support and improve their wellbeing and safety. We believe that a sound, restorative relationship forms the basis for curiosity and the developing of a shared understanding of what is happening for a family within their community and how this impacts on a child or young person.

The basis of any assessment starts with the integration of evidence-based practice aids and tools and professional judgement. Through this combination we can work more accurately, accountably and with less unconscious bias to understand a child's experience.

There are multiple practice aids that can support practitioners to assess and analyse neglect, and the available evidence suggests that neglect is best considered through the use of a variety of tools including structured assessments, observations, developmental screening and input from multi-agency professionals. Rather than focussing on a singular tool, in Stockport we encourage the use of a "toolkit" of practice aids to support thinking and understanding of neglect.

At whatever part of the system we are working, these tools and practice aids will help us think about what we know and what we need to find out to help us understand the lived experience of children and young people, their immediate and extended family and support network, the strengths and vulnerabilities within the family, what needs to change, whether the family can make these changes in the children's timescale and what the plan needs to look like to effect sustainable change.

Neglect Toolkit

If you are reading a hard copy of this strategy, the links are available via the online version of the report on the SSCP website. Please visit <https://www.stockport.gov.uk/neglect>

Assessment of type, frequency, severity and chronicity of neglect and impact on child/young person	Graded Care Profile (GCP2) A Day in the Life Tool - with children/young people and parents Child Impact Chronology Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) completed by health visitors for child up to 2 years old.
Assessment of family circumstances, risk and protective factors	Practice Guidance for Children's Social Care Early Help Assessment link to Stockport Systemic Genogram
Assessment of the risk of further neglect and prospects of change	Capacity to Change Assessment/Tool (<i>Research in Practice</i>) Assessing risk of further child maltreatment Tool (<i>Research in Practice</i>)
What does our plan look like to address the child/young person's needs?	Reflective supervision Reflective discussions and appreciative enquiry Partnership supervision



A **better understanding** of the child/young person's lived experiences, the network around them, risks and protective factors and the parents' capacity to change and improve things for the children.



Priorities in Practice

The following table outlines how the Stockport Safeguarding Children Partnership intends to deliver its agreed priorities in relation to neglect. The proposed actions are informed and underpinned by our practice principles.

Raise awareness and understanding of neglect in Stockport

- Refresh the SSCP neglect training offer
- Agree and circulate a 7 minute neglect briefing
- Share learning from local and national reviews where neglect has been a feature

Support the identification of neglect at the earliest opportunity

- Promote the use of an agreed Neglect Toolkit across the partnership
- Consult with children, families, extended networks and communities

Ensure a timely and effective response to neglect across the partnership

- Develop a neglect dataset
- Review neglect practice through multi-agency audit activity

GOVERNANCE

This strategy belongs to all agencies who work with children and families and should be overseen by the relevant leaders within those organisations. Each individual agency is responsible for reviewing the effectiveness of their response to neglect within their own quality assurance frameworks.

The implementation and monitoring of this strategy will be monitored by the Practice Improvement and Assurance Partnership (PIAP). The PIAP will report to the SSCP Executive Board on an annual basis.

REFERENCES

Bernard C (2018) Safeguarding children in affluent families, Goldsmiths, University of London

Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel Annual Report 2022-2023

The Children's Society (2016) Understanding Adolescent Neglect – Troubled Teens

DfE (2023) Working Together to Safeguard Children

Howarth J (2007) The Neglected Child: Identification and Assessment

NSPCC (2024) Neglect: statistics briefing

Nuffield Foundation (2022) The Relationship Between Poverty and Child Abuse and Neglect: New Evidence

Appendix

Neglect Toolkit Site - <https://www.stockport.gov.uk/neglect> alternatively scan the QR code:



GCP Profile 2 Assessment Tool:



GCP2-Assessment-Tool-1.pdf

Stockport Family Practice Guidance



Practice Guidance - April 2025.pdf

Research in Practice Assessing Parents Capacity to Change



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Research in Practice Assessing risk of further child maltreatment – a research-based approach:
Practice Tool



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