

Impact of Neglect

The impact and harm resulting from neglect can be wide-ranging, apparent in multiple domains of a child's life and can manifest across the life course. Living with neglect will have a significant impact on a child or young person, both physically and emotionally. These may differ for different children or young people, with some being more resilient than others, and some may be short term whilst others will have a longer-term impact.

Which children are more vulnerable to neglect:

- Parents own history of abuse and neglect
- A parent / carer who has mental health difficulties or learning disabilities such that impacts on their ability to meet the needs of any children
- Children exposed to domestic abuse, drug and alcohol misuse or parental mental illness
- families with limited routines/boundaries /rules/standards/environment which can include an absence of boundaries or routines
- Families with four or more children
- Babies under the age of one
- Child with a disability or complex needs
- Maternal illness following birth including post-natal depression
- Young isolated parents
- Children living in poverty
- Neglect may occur during or after pregnancy resulting in late bookings/not engaging
- Not ensuring access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

Experience of neglect at different ages

Children and young people experience the impact of neglect differently at different ages, it is important to remember that neglect should be seen in the context of each individual's experiences, and consideration should be given to whether the neglect began in this age group or has in fact been ongoing for several years. Identifying different main impacts at different stages of a child or young person's life, as shown below, will support a practitioner in assessing neglect and prioritising appropriate responses and support.

Infancy (birth to two years)

Babies' growth and development is linked to their interaction with the world and their caregivers. Emotional and cognitive development can come through play, e.g. games like 'peek-a-boo' where actions are repeated for social and emotional reinforcement from the reactions of caregivers, and neural connections are 'fixed' through stimulation. Disinterest or indifference to such actions and/ or failing to offer stimulation will limit the child's development and growth, and damage infant attachments. Reaches developmental

milestones late, such as learning to speak, with no medical reason. Children may not cry or respond to parent's presence or absence from an early age.

Pre-school (two to four years)

Most children of this age are mobile and curious, but lack understanding of danger; they need close supervision for their physical protection, which neglected children may not experience. Children may not be appropriately toilet trained if they are in neglectful families, as this process requires patient and persistent interaction and encouragement. Children's language development may be delayed if their caregivers are not interacting with them sufficiently, and physical care may be inadequate, e.g. dental decay. Significantly underweight but eats well when given food.

Primary age (five to eleven)

For some neglected children, school can be a place of sanctuary. However, if their cognitive development has been delayed and they are behind their peers at school, it can also be a source of frustration and distress. Signs of neglect, e.g. dirty or ill-fitting clothing, will be apparent to peers, teachers and to the children themselves, and may cause embarrassment and difficulties in their social interactions. Children without clear and consistent boundaries at home can struggle to follow school rules and get into trouble. Educational neglect can include failing to ensure that children attend school, and high levels of absence can further impair their academic achievement.

- Becomes secretive and reluctant to share information
- Reluctant to go home after school
- Unable to bring friends home or reluctant for professionals to visit the family home
- Poor school attendance and punctuality, or late being picked up late
- Parents show little interest in child's performance and behaviour at school
- Parents are dismissive and non-responsive to professional concerns
- Is reluctant to get changed for sports etc.
- Wets or soils the bed.

Any Age

Talks of being left home alone or with strangers

- Poor bond or relationship with a parent, also known as attachment
- Scavenge for food / overeating at mealtimes / hoarding and storing food
- Acts out excessive violence with other children
- Lacks social skills and has few if any friends
- Poor physical appearance
- Bad hygiene
- Lack of appropriate clothing

- The child being withdrawn or exhibiting self-harm, anti-social or sexualised behaviours
- The child not meeting physical or emotional development milestones.

Short term and long-term effects

Living within a neglectful environment may result in **short term** effects for a child or young person, many of which may reduce or disappear with support and care. This may include:

- Illness or infections
- Nappy rash
- Under / overweight
- Difficulty in establishing friendships / making friends
- Withdrawn
- Poor coping skills
- Low self-esteem lack of confidence
- Insecure attachments
- Lack of trust
- Bullying
- Acting out/aggression/impulsivity
- Poor problem-solving skills
- Low achievement in school.

Children who have been neglected may experience **long-term effects** that last throughout their life including, in some cases, emerging in later adolescence or adulthood. This may include:

- Emotional difficulties such as anger, anxiety, sadness or low self-esteem
- Mental health problems such as depression, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), self-harm, suicidal thoughts
- Substance misuse and addiction
- Disturbing thoughts, emotions and memories that cause distress or confusion
- Behavioural problems including anti-social behaviour, criminal behaviour
- Running away
- Poor physical health such as obesity, low weight, aches and pains
- Struggling with parenting or relationships
- Conflict and hostility in relationships
- Worrying that their abuser is still a threat to themselves or others
- Learning difficulties, lower educational attainment, difficulties in communicating.

In addition, children who don't get the love and care they need from their parents may find it difficult to maintain healthy relationships with other people later in life, including their own

children. They are more likely to experience mental health problems including depression and post-traumatic stress disorder and may also engage in risk taking behaviour such as running away from home, breaking the law, abusing drugs or alcohol, or getting involved in dangerous relationships.