

# Recognition of prenatal neglect

Whilst it is good practice that neglect should be seen through the experiences of the child, prenatal neglect can only be identified from observations of the experiences of the expectant mother and her family context, and so must be considered separately. Prenatal neglect may be associated with (but not exclusively):

## Drug use during pregnancy

- which has been linked to low birth weight, premature birth, increased risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), damage to the central nervous system and physical abnormalities. Babies may also experience neonatal abstinence syndrome at birth, which can cause irritability, tremors, respiratory distress and fluctuations in temperature.

## Alcohol consumption during pregnancy

- this can lead to foetal alcohol syndrome, which is an umbrella term to describe a spectrum of conditions caused by maternal alcohol use, including learning difficulties and an inability to connect emotionally with peers.
- Experiencing domestic violence (or other traumatic events) during pregnancy – prenatal effects of domestic violence are not limited to the consequences of physical injuries sustained through assault. Exposure to prenatal maternal stress or anxiety can affect the baby's development, as heightened maternal cortisol levels are shared through the placenta which can influence foetal brain development and have implications for the emotional, behavioural, cognitive and social functioning of children. Exposure to other traumatic events during pregnancy can also have the same, or similar effects.

## Failure to attend prenatal appointments and / or follow medical advice

- prenatal support and monitoring sessions offer opportunities for problems to be identified early, and the health of mother and baby to be monitored. Parents can also be supported to make appropriate arrangements for the birth, learn about how to care for new-borns, and ultrasounds offer early opportunities for bonding with their baby. Both drug use and alcohol use have been linked with failure to keep prenatal appointments and failure to seek medical attention should any concerns arise during the pregnancy.

## Smoking during pregnancy

- this falls within Horwath's working definition of prenatal neglect, as it restricts the baby's supply of oxygen and is linked to increased risks of premature birth and low birth weight.