

Responding to neglect

Signs of Safety is a practice model that seeks always to place families, children and everyone naturally connected to the child at the heart of any work undertaken with the family whether that is the assessment, the planning or the decision making. Signs of Safety seeks us to recognise the issue of neglect at the earliest opportunity and wants us to look at the impact of the neglectful behaviour on the child while understanding the causes. Signs of Safety also recognises the importance of supporting the parents care of the children and develop their parental responsibility in the long term in families where children are neglected.

A number of the values and practices that are involved in the model of change when working with neglect sit well with the values and practices of the Signs of Safety such as good honest and respectful working relationships, creating a vision for the family in order to help that motivation to change, not shying away from the worries but balancing these worries with things the strengths, always believing that change is achievable. Involving parents and outside influences in the change and the vision, creating a plan both short and long term and amending any changes needed. Clear goals which parents understand and are clear with regards to what needs to happen in order for us to no longer be concerned

Situations of neglect can also be heightened as a result of the parent / carer's response to those who recognise it, raise it with them and offer support. The way in which concerns about neglect are raised is vital. The term 'neglect' itself is not very restorative and when parent carers hear this, it may lead to them not wanting to work with the person raising concerns. **When raising concerns, it is better to not use the term 'neglect' but to be specific and use language that directly describes what the practitioner has observed.** In addition to the language used, the approach is important. **When working restoratively with parent carers, a key feature will be to try to engage them in a conversation about what has been observed and aim to work with them to identify things that will help to form a plan.**

Practitioners should seek the views of the parent/carer and the children (if appropriate to age and communication) to gain a clearer understanding of the context in which the 'neglect' is occurring, enabling a wider view than just about individual parenting.

When plans like this are agreed, the parent / carer is likely to be more engaged in making the changes to improve outcomes for the child because actions are likely to be ones that are most relevant to them and achievable. When plans are presented to parent / carers as a 'fait accompli', engagement may be reduced and success diminished. We need to move away from terms such as 'disguised compliance' (families seeming to 'comply' with others' plans but not really believing in the plan) and 'non-engagement'. As stated above, engagement relies on being truly involved in restorative conversations with families to help them identify the things that will make the most difference. This engagement work lies with the practitioner and their skills in working 'with' families not solely relying on families to 'engage' with whatever we present to them. The following model outlines key areas to be addressed to ensure that positive outcomes for children and families.