

Refocus^S on Practi^{Ce}

NEGLECT AND YOUNG PEOPLE



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Are teenagers neglected?

Analysis of serious case reviews (2002-2009)

A quarter of the all children who died or who were seriously injured were over 11 years old, including nine per cent who were over 16 years of age. (Brandon *et al.* 2012)

- What is adolescent neglect – how is neglect defined and described?
- What are the causes and consequences of neglect?
- Whose business is it?
- What can professionals do about it?

Judgements

- Why is this young person dirty?
- Can't be bothered to wash?
- Never been taught or shown how to take care of themselves?
- No hot water, soap or towels in the house?
- At what age do we think that a young person is responsible for their own care?

Neglect is usually seen as an act of omission

For adolescents, in particular, acts of commission should also be considered, for example, being abandoned by parents or being forced to leave home. (Stein *et al.* 2009)

There may be differences between viewpoints, for example between the views of social workers, other professionals and young people themselves. Awareness of these different viewpoints is a starting point for establishing a working consensus. (Hicks and Stein 2010)

Rochester Youth Development Study (US)

Longitudinal study of community-based sample of young people aged 14-31 suggests that persistent adolescent maltreatment has stronger and more consistent negative consequences during adolescence than maltreatment experienced in childhood only.

Older young people are more likely to be blamed, less likely to be seen at risk of harm, and less likely to be referred to children services. (Rees *et al.* 2010)

'Neglect is when parents ignore you...when parents leave you and you get hurt.... if you are bullied at school and you have no one to turn to neglect is scary.' *Young person's view*



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‘When is it that an adolescent is just not taking care of themselves because they can’t be bothered, or when is it because they have been neglected and not been taught those basic skills at an early age?’ *Professional’s view* (Hicks and Stein 2010)

Young people may underestimate neglect -this may be related to young people’s acceptance of their parents’ behaviour, young people’s sense of privacy, or their loyalty to their families.

Neglect is often seen as a persistent state - it is necessary to look at patterns of neglect over time and recognise the impact of both acute and chronic neglect. (Hicks and Stein 2010)

There is a difficulty in making a distinction between emotional abuse and neglect -these are associated, especially when neglect is seen as an omission of care. What matters is not the label but the consequences for the young person’s health and development.

Neglect is often seen as culturally specific -the concept of neglect will vary according to contextually acceptable standards of care. However, caution is required in placing too much emphasis on cultural factors. (Polnay and Polnay 2007)

Neglect from different viewpoints

Older young people less likely to be seen as at risk of long-term negative outcomes.

Young people aged 11 to 17 often seen by professionals as:

- more competent to deal with maltreatment
- more resilient
- more likely to be contributing to and exacerbating situations through own behaviour
- more likely to be putting themselves at risk of harm.

Referral and assessment

Assessing risk of harm and referrals – young people at risk of significant harm were as likely to be referred by professionals as with young children but professional perceptions of the initial risk of harm was affected by age.

Process – child protection process seen as less relevant for young people (more geared towards children and young people), does not allow young people enough involvement/control and plans not as effective if parents not committed to keeping people at home. (Rees et al. 2010)



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Vulnerable young people

Disabled young people

- Experience higher rates of neglect.
- Communication impairments may make it difficult to tell others what is happening and may be more isolated.
- Not receiving regular services can increase likelihood of neglect.
- Need to distinguish between symptoms of disability and signs of neglect.

Looked after young people

- Likely neglect prior to being looked after –
- physical health
- education
- emotional needs.

Important to promote stability and secure attachments through high quality of care.

Impact of parental difficulties

Parental mental health problems, learning disability, domestic violence, substance and alcohol misuse increase likelihood of neglect.

These problems often increase parents' emotional unavailability.

Young people more likely to be left alone, lack parental supervision and positive role modelling.

Young carers

Older children and adolescents may be drawn into caring, to the detriment of their own care.

Young people may not receive support at key developmental stages, such as puberty, early and later adolescence.

Lack of supervision and boundaries may result in young people being exposed to greater likelihood of harm and experiencing more problems

Consequences of neglect

On the following areas of a young person's life:

- Health
- Education

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- Emotional and behavioural development
- Identity
- Family and social relationships
- Social presentation
- Self care skills

Understanding family and environmental factors

Assessment, Analysis and Planning

Importance of Housing

- Social workers and other practitioners often overlook the importance of housing; but it is important to families and often has a greater impact than is acknowledged by practitioners. (Jack and Gill 2003)



Social housing has been reserved increasingly to accommodate disadvantaged groups including:

- people on very low incomes
- a disproportionate number of elderly people
- low-income families with young children. (Jack and Gill

2003)

- Many houses were sold through 'right to buy' policies resulting in an imbalance of flats to houses.
- More recent changes may result in more limitations in access to social housing.

Impact of housing

- The provision of housing and its location will impact on a family's social networks and integration.
- Many vulnerable families experience a period of homelessness which can often result in a move to homes and neighbourhoods away from their current networks, schools and access to services.
- Families with disabled children are often especially disadvantaged.
- Children may need adaptations or equipment.
- Children may need more space or particular configurations of space.
- There may be a need for easy access in and out of the accommodation – working lifts, no stairs.
- A marked parking space may be required.

'Promoting improved housing policies for children and families with limited financial means will promote child, family and community wellbeing.' (Leslie 2004)



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Housing and neglect

In a study of 712 children under eight from 555 families referred because of concerns about neglect or emotional abuse Thoburn et al. (2000) found that:

- 59% lived in over-crowded housing conditions.
- 10% had had 5 or more house moves in the previous five years.

Links between social integration and child protection

Research overview in mid-90s, suggested that a possible link between social isolation/disorganisation and child protection concerns can be attributed to:

- the disengagement of the family from the community
- less sharing of resources
- little awareness of local services
- limited social capital
- children's more limited social networks.

Neglect and isolation

Parents of neglected children:

- often lack social support
- tend to be isolated
- feel lonely
- have less access to emotionally supportive relationships. (Horwath 2007)
- Neglected children have some of the most pressing needs for access to wider resources.
- Resilience is associated with connections in the community and with access to resources beyond the home.
- Plans for neglected children should consider ways in which resilience can be nurtured by building on community resources.

The role of schools

Outside the home, school is the environment where children spend most of their time.

Teachers and schools can do much in synergy with others to promote the health and wellbeing of all children.



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The school setting represents a significant potential source of health among children; enjoying school is associated with positive self-esteem, lower levels of risk-taking behaviour and higher levels of self-related health. (Brooks 2010 p10)

Schools have a statutory responsibility to improve the well being of pupils. (Ofsted 2009)

The neglected child in school may have:

- gaps in their education
- general learning disabilities
- poor problem solving abilities
- poor reading, writing and maths skills
- few friends
- little confidence. disruptive or overactive in class
- desperate for attention or
- desperate to keep out of the 'limelight'
- try too hard
- blame themselves for a wide range of issues. (Adapted from Aggleton, Dennison and Warwick 2010)

Professional judgement

Teachers use professional judgement in noticing changes in children through:

- learning disabilities
- peer and friendship groups
- clothing and appearance
- attendance and responses to school activities
- home support.

An engaged school picks up early signs of distress and works with other agencies to address concerns.

Which agency?

'My teeth hurt a lot and the other kids say that I have smelly breath... my dad jokes that if I don't stop complaining, he will pull them all out for me!'

A lady that came to our school to do a check said that my mum needs to take me to the dentist but I haven't been yet...' Susan Miller



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- School and the dentist have identified the issue and recommended action but Susan is still coming to school with sore teeth. School staff need to be proactive.
- They could, for example, involve Susan's class in a health project with free dental samples i.e. a toothbrush and toothpaste.
- If this is not something her class would do, involve Susan in a group supporting younger children with their work on dental health.

'I am late for school most days, but I get away with it ... I think my teacher expects it now and he doesn't say much.' Troy Miller

- Use school connections with local health promotion activities and workers to work together towards a solution.
- What systems are in place to 'welcome' latecomers like Troy to school?
- Can he be welcomed in and supported to get to the next class?
- Is there a pattern to how and when he comes in?
- Which lessons does he miss?
- Does he go straight into class or have an identified base to go to before joining the next lesson?
- Who and where does he work to 'catch up' on what he misses?
- Can the school work with him to change the pattern through focusing on subjects he enjoys?

'I used to love school... it was great in the juniors and my teacher was really kind to me but it is not the same now that I have gone to High School.' Troy Miller

- The school building and staff can provide the connections to welcome the neglected child into school.
- All schools have a system for late-comers.
- It is easier in junior school for children to focus on the support of one person: their teacher, the head, the janitor or one of the dinner staff.
- Every school can establish a support systems for late-comers: so they not only register but are supported to start their school day:
- use bases/ support rooms/study areas/libraries
- identify a place to collect work/equipment/wait for the start of the next lesson
- provide a specific task/role for child to integrate them directly into the school day.

Anyway it is embarrassing if I have to go in without the proper uniform on, and I only have one set - I'm not going if I look mucky...sometimes my mum forgets to put it in the wash.'

Shireen Evans

- School staff can offer support, without drawing attention to the child, by enabling access to pieces of uniform and school facilities.
- What are the key parts of the uniform?



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- What do children need to wear to feel part of the school?
- Are there spares in school?
- Enable children to use school facilities; for example, washing machines, showers in secondary schools

'... you see my mum doesn't like writing the letters when I have been off, so I get all the questions.' Shireen Evans

Place less emphasis across the school on the responsibility of the child to provide letters from their parent/carer.

- School staff record attendance, who takes dinners, work completed, passes, fails, marks, issues raised with parents, names for school trips.
- Much of it is now on automated systems but responses are needed from parents / carers.
- Work with the child and parent to provide the data needed.
- Contact the parent by phone, accept statements from the child, work with general permissions for the school year.
- Make systems flexible to adapt to individual families.
- Ensure all school staff are aware of the flexibility.

'I want to do the homework but I get in trouble 'cos I don't get it in on time. I can never find my stuff and there is nowhere quiet in our house to do it – if I put it down anywhere it get's thrown out or screwed up for fire lighting.' Troy Miller

- Homework is an activity to embed learning and practice skills. Teachers need to be aware in planning lessons that some children will be unable to do that at home or school.
- Homework clubs, at lunchtime or after school, provide support for all children to complete work in school.
- But for some, attending lessons takes all the energy they have for learning whatever supports are available for homework.
- Schools can be creative with cupboards or lockers and provide neglected pupils with space to keep their books in school.
- Every school collects a large amount of lost property every year, keep it.
- Have spare equipment for each curricular area.
- Have an unchallenged system for everyone, that children can access as they need to.
- Sometimes the simple provision of a small piece of equipment can ensure that a child takes part in something they are really keen on; for example, rubber feet to cover verrucas during swimming lessons.



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'My favourite lesson is food tech because we get to cook and then take the stuff home, but it's got really embarrassing because I never have the ingredients that I am supposed to take in so I use my mates stuff and we share.' Troy Miller

- Creating space for a child to attend after school activities often needs work with other agencies; sometimes flexibility can provide the answer.
- For example: they could take a sibling home and come back, join in the second half of the session.
- Use part of school fundraising to provide bursaries for children to attend trips.
- Extra-curricular activities often provide time and space to develop skills in activities the child is really keen on.
- Build links with local clubs to support all children to access activities they are interested in.

Class and subject teachers need to work with support teachers to ensure that:

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- gaps in their education
- general learning disabilities
- poor problem solving abilities
- poor reading, writing and maths skills
- few friends
- little confidence.
- disruptive or overactive in class
- desperate for attention or
- desperate to keep out of the 'limelight'
- try too hard
- blame themselves for a wide range of issues.
- Class and subject teachers need to know that children are neglected to understand the responses and behaviour of children to:

Schools can support neglected children:

- ensure their inclusion in learning activities
- balance the effort the children put or don't put into their lessons
- recognise and reward the work children do.
- school systems for disruptive behaviour may need adapted to support neglected children.
- gaps are identified and ways found to meet learning needs
- learning disabilities are recognised in the work children are given
- children experience success across the curriculum
- positive teacher/ child and child/ child relationships are promoted



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- a mixture of learning experiences exist through activities and groups.
- the way they are welcomed into school.
- with equipment from pencil and paper to PE clothes.
- providing opportunities for success in the classroom.
- in the way they arrange the teaching activities and groups.
- through health and wellbeing in the curriculum.
- by addressing learning disabilities.
- working closely with other services

Understand that some interventions may need to be long term.

Reference and further reading

Research and links

Publications

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Tools and resources

The Adolescent Wellbeing Scale

<http://bit.ly/H7OLzY>

<http://bit.ly/H5ppU2>