



PSCCB

**Portsmouth
Safeguarding
Children Board**
Protecting Portsmouth's Children

Neglect Strategy

2018 - 2020

**A Partnership
Approach**

Why do we need a strategy?

The impact of neglect on children cannot be overestimated. Awareness of child neglect and its consequences on the future wellbeing and development of children has increased during the last two decades. Child neglect is the most common and pervasive type of abuse in the UK today and requires a coordinated and concerted professional response at all levels.

Within Portsmouth we know that of the 242 children on a Child Protection Plan in 2016-17, 67.8% of these were due to neglect. Yet we also know that the neglect of children and young people is one of the most difficult areas to identify, assess and intervene in.

The aim of this strategy is to improve the recognition and early identification of neglect in families across the entire children's workforce; and achieve an effective and coordinated response to these children and young people.

The impact of neglect is enormous; it causes great distress, leading to poor health, educational and social outcomes and is potentially fatal. Children's abilities to make secure attachments are affected and this impacts on their well-being in adulthood and their ability to parent in the future.

The findings of Ofsted's national thematic inspections of neglect present a mixed picture in respect of the quality of professional responses to neglect. The quality of assessments in neglect cases overall was found to be too variable. Almost half of assessments reviewed either did not take sufficient account of family history or did not sufficiently convey or consider the impact of neglect on the child. The local authorities providing the strongest evidence of the most comprehensive action to tackle neglect were more likely to have a neglect strategy and a systematic improvement programme addressing policy, thresholds for actions and professional practice.

Integral in the strategy is the identification and engagement of families at the earliest opportunity by preventative services including effective assessment and development of a clear action plan. We want all agencies to focus on building strength and resilience within families rather than promoting dependency and ultimately this will increase positive outcomes for children, young people and families.

This strategy underpins the shared commitment of all partner agencies to work collectively to effectively tackle neglect and improve the quality of children and young people's lives. As such the aim of this strategy is to tackle the causes and effects of neglect in Portsmouth. In order to achieve this, the objectives of this strategy are:

- To strengthen local responses in line with current national and local guidance, policies and good practice
- To ensure families receive a coordinated response from those who work with them and their children.
- To adapt, rather than duplicate, existing guidance, policies or procedures to tackle neglect.
- To raise awareness and improve the safeguarding duty of all relevant agencies with regards to neglect

The purpose of the strategy is to set out Portsmouth's approach to tackling neglect. Neglect often co-exists with other forms of abuse or risk factors so this strategy must link with other work streams; for example domestic abuse, substance misuse and adult mental health, child poverty and youth homelessness. This will help ensure that children and families are able to benefit from all developments as appropriate to their needs. Therefore this strategy should be considered alongside other key relevant strategies, policies and procedures, held by [Portsmouth's Childrens Trust](#), [Portsmouth Safeguarding Adults Board](#) and [Safer Portsmouth Partnership](#); and should be read in conjunction with the Portsmouth Thresholds Document and the Indicators of Need.

What is Neglect?

[Working Together 2015](#) (HM Government) describes 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 as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- provide adequate food, clothing and 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 care-givers);
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.’
- It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child’s basic emotional needs’.

However, specific needs which are often considered under the banner of failing to meet ‘basic needs’ include:

- Medical neglect
- Educational neglect
- Nutritional neglect
- Physical neglect
- Emotional neglect
- Lack of supervision and guidance

Determining what constitutes a ‘persistent failure’, or ‘adequate clothing’ or ‘adequate supervision’ remains a matter of professional judgement. Even when professionals have concerns about neglect, research indicates that they may be unlikely to consider how they can help or intervene, apart from referring to Children’s Social Care.

Action for Children (2012) presents neglect as differing from other forms of abuse because it is:

- Frequently passive
- Not always intentional
- More likely to be a chronic condition rather than crisis led and therefore impacts on how we respond as agencies
- Combined often with other forms of maltreatment
- Often a revolving door syndrome where families require long term support
- Often not clear-cut and may lack agreement between professionals on the threshold for intervention

There is an overlap between emotional abuse and many forms of child maltreatment. This is especially true of neglect; therefore, when working with children subject to neglectful situations an understanding of emotional abuse is also necessary.

The age of the child is an important consideration in identifying risk of neglect and understanding its impact. Babies and very young children will have particular vulnerabilities as a result of their age and dependence. For adolescents, risk of harm through neglect can

more easily be overlooked and misunderstood and neglect may present itself in different ways.

Risk factors do aid understanding of the child's experience, and help agencies determine priorities for offering support; however, they should be used and interpreted with care. Vulnerable families may have a combination of the following risk factors:

- Family violence, modelling of inappropriate behaviour
- Multiple co-habitation and change of partner
- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Maternal low self-esteem and self-confidence
- Poor parental level of education and cognitive ability
- Parental personality characteristics inhibiting good parenting
- Social and emotional immaturity
- Poor experience of caring behaviour in parents own childhood
- Depriving physical and emotional environment in parents own childhood
- Experience of physical, sexual, emotional abuse in parents own childhood
- Health problems during pregnancy
- Pre-term or low birth weight baby
- Low family income
- Low employment status
- Single parenting
- Teenage pregnancy

Delayed development, emotional and behavioural problems and poor socialisation are also all well recognised as potential indicators of child neglect. Such indicators are particularly helpful and should be taken seriously since both the causes and consequences of such parent/child behaviour may have important implications for the child both now and in the future.

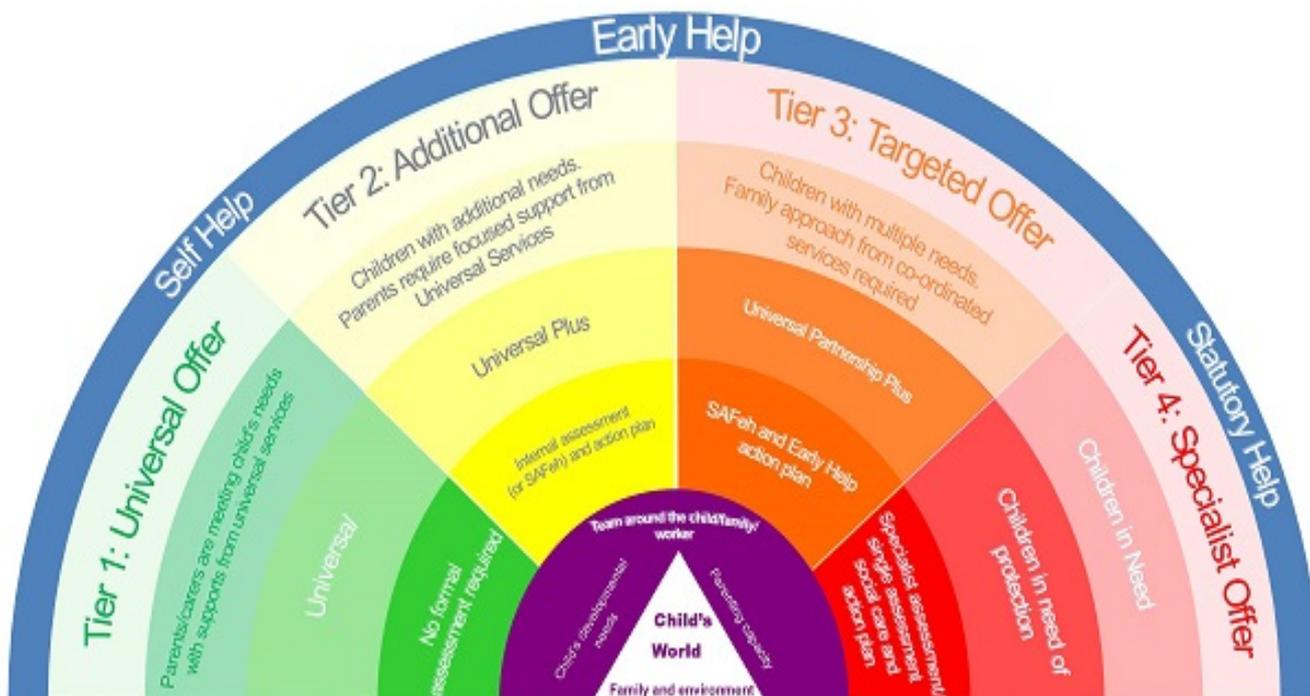
What are we going to do?

Neglect is a multi-faceted issue and demands a systematic response from the entire children's workforce. The following guiding principles should underpin the work of all of the Board's partner agencies in supporting children and young people experiencing neglect:

- There should be a shared understanding of neglect and the impact on the safety, wellbeing and development of children
- Causal factors and early indicators of neglect should be recognised so support can be arranged as early as possible
- There should be collaboration amongst agencies to ensure effective identification, assessment and support within families; timely response to all expressions of concern about neglect
- A confident and robust workforce to work with resistant families to gain access to vulnerable children; challenging intimidation; able to identify sustained change and recognise disguised compliance
- A prompt, sensitive and graduated response to support and protect children, which reflects the Levels of Need Model (as described below). So that practitioners working across universal, additional, targeted and specialist services secure the right support at the right time to improve outcomes for the child

- Early assessment and intervention will be promoted and supported in the first instance; genuine efforts to engage both parents and other significant adults so that adequacy of child care is addressed as the priority
- Early help and support should improve and sustain children’s well-being and safety into the future. It should also build strength and resilience within families rather than promoting dependency
- All those working with the child or young person should understand the impact neglect is having on their child’s day-to-day experiences
- Children and young people should expect consistency from practitioners, including the level and type of support offered
- Children with special needs and disabilities have equal rights to protection from neglect and agencies must ensure that practitioners are trained to recognise and tackle neglect for this vulnerable group of children
- Any learning and future developments should involve families’ own feedback and their own personal experiences
- There needs to be appropriate information-sharing and recording of concerns about children experiencing neglect; clarity on confidentiality that allows for high quality information exchange to allow for robust tracking of families
- Provision of good quality information for children, parents and concerned others, with identified contact points

Portsmouth has an established [Thresholds Document](#) that supports the children's workforce in ensuring that families have access to the right support at the right time. All concerns of a child or young person experiencing neglect should be considered within the Levels of Need Model:



Restorative practice

In Portsmouth we work with children and families using a restorative approach. When thinking about working with parents, it is easy to assume that helping is simply about doing something for them, providing them with the correct solution, the right answer or appropriate advice, in order to remove the problem. When working with neglect, practitioners will be focusing on parents making some changes to their behaviour so the child/ren receives better care. Restorative principles such as respect, positive regard and empowerment create the type of relationship in which change is more likely to take place.

Working restoratively means that practitioners have a responsibility to offer both 'high support' and 'high challenge' to families and to each other in order to respond robustly to neglect. The use of restorative communication techniques such as the '5 questions' in our assessments and plans can help with hearing the child and families stories, provide an accurate understanding of the effect of neglect whilst appropriately drawing on the strengths and solutions within the family to make things better for the child.

How are we going to make a difference?

Partners agreed the following priorities to achieve the aims and objectives of this strategy:

1. Early Help and Prevention - to improve the awareness, understanding and recognition of neglect across Portsmouth.

- A common understanding of neglect between and within agencies, to allow effective identification and a common language amongst the workforce to allow for shared understanding of the risks to the child. This aim will be supported by a clear strategy, effective guidance and the development of a skilled workforce through the provision of high quality single and multi-agency training.
- Understanding of Thresholds of Need and the appropriate response for intervention will help to ensure that the right help from the right agency (or agencies) at the right time is given to children, young people and families.
- There is a strong focus on addressing causes not symptoms.
- Practitioners are confident enough to identify early indications that sustained change in families cannot be achieved.
- Team leaders, managers and/or safeguarding leads are able to support and challenge practitioners through conversation and/or supervision to recognise neglect and implements effective interventions within families.
- Members of the community are better equipped to recognise neglect in all its forms and how to report it.

2. Working with families - to enhance the effectiveness of our work with families to tackle neglect, including the use of appropriate assessment tools.

- Agencies should ensure their workforce is appropriately skilled to be able to identify and act on indicators of neglect in the families they work with. This includes an understanding of the pathway:
 - into targeted services for early help via the Early Help Assessment and the coordination of multi-agency support through the Team around the Family (TAF); or
 - into statutory services via the Inter Agency Contact Form into the MASH when it's suspected the child is suffering significant harm and needs a child protection response
- Practitioners working collaboratively with colleagues and the family to address the concerns
- Proactive, multi-disciplinary assessment processes are in place and routinely used
- Interventions match the identified/assessed needs with clear achievable targets in realistic timescales
- Practitioners understand the importance of using family histories in identifying patterns of neglect
- Practitioners are confident in making judgments and decisions that they can share with other agencies
- Relevant developments in service provision are promoted and clear for practitioners on a multi-agency basis
- Agencies to hold responsibility for ensuring their workforce has access to relevant training and development opportunities and to support practitioners by signposting them to relevant PSCB multiagency training for neglect and how to use the NIMT
- Providing practitioners with effective skills and tools to work with families experiencing neglect.
- Supporting practitioners to resolve common problems when working with families experiencing neglect

3. Governance - to provide a robust strategic framework for the delivery of an effective range of interventions to tackle neglect in Portsmouth

- The delivery of the strategy is effectively governed through PSCB and its partners.
- For partner agencies to have robust operational processes to support staff in identifying and responding appropriately to children experiencing neglect
- Recording systems to support the understanding of the cumulative effect of neglect
- Training available that supports the workforce in the early identification to neglect

4. Evaluation - to monitor progress and impact in reducing the risk of neglect in the population

- There is a robust, shared and jointly owned evaluation framework in place to measure success and impact of the strategy
- There is a system in place to gain feedback from children and families on their views of the service they received, that is fed back to agencies and used to continually improve practice
- Findings from the monitoring of this strategy will be presented to the PSCB for dissemination to inform future development of the strategy

How will we know if the strategy is working?

Success should be directly measured against the outcomes experienced by children, young people and their families. The PSCB Monitoring, Evaluation and Scrutiny Committee (MESC) will develop a set of indicators to capture aspects of a child's health and well-being that are likely to be impacted by neglect. By asking the Board's partner agencies to report on these indicators on a quarterly basis the MESC will have a measure of the impact of the strategy upon these indicators, which could include:

1. percentage of children subject to a child protection plan due to neglect
2. number of repeat referrals to children's services where neglect is a feature.
3. poor school attendance
4. percentage of early help assessments where neglect has been identified as a factor.
5. percentage of referrals to children's services for reasons of neglect.
6. number of children not brought (<16 years) or not attending (16-17 years) medical, including dental, appointments
7. average length of child protection plan for neglect at point of closure (in months).
8. number of crimes recorded for neglect

We will make quality the centre of our approach and will strive to ensure every child, young person and family receives a high quality service; we will use outcome measures to demonstrate that quality and look at distance travelled for families as a measure. We will also use person centred stories to bring meaning to the work we are relaying.

The statutory guidance for Local Safeguarding Children Boards requires them to maintain a local learning and improvement framework. This framework should enable organisations to be clear about their responsibilities, to learn from experience and improve services as a result. The local frameworks in Portsmouth references different types of reviews that the LSCB will undertake:

- a. Serious Case Review - where abuse or neglect is believed to be a factor (statutory requirement)
- b. Child death review - a review of all child deaths up to the age of 18 (statutory requirement)
- c. Review of a child protection incident which falls below the threshold for a serious case review;
- d. Review or audit of practice in one or more agencies.

In addition to this, auditing is a key element of the PSCB quality and performance framework. Case and thematic audits are completed quarterly by a multi-agency group of practitioners.

Progress against this strategy will be reviewed on a twice-yearly basis by the PSCB Case Review Committee, and where escalation is required support will be sought from the Board.

Review

This strategy will be reviewed on a two-yearly basis by the LSCBs. Delivery plans and performance frameworks will be reviewed annually and monitored through the performance and quality assurance subgroups.

Note

It has to be acknowledged that the impact of effective recognition and intervention in respect of neglect is long term, sometimes spanning generations rather than short term or immediate.

Useful Resources

[4LSCB Neglect Practice Guidance](#)

[Action for Children - Action on Neglect: A Resource Pack](#)

[British Dental Association: Recognising Dental Neglect](#)

[NSPCC - resources for recognising and responding to neglect](#)

[NSPCC - Realising the Potential: Tackling Child Neglect in Universal Services \(October 2015\)](#)

[PSCB - Neglect Toolkit and Practice Guidance](#)

[The Children's Society - Understanding Adolescent Neglect \(November 2016\)](#)