

RESOURCE

The neglect and abuse of young people: A resource for secondary schools

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Guidance on using the neglect resource for CPD/CAT sessions in schools

The resource is intended for use during schools' CPD/CAT sessions, specifically:

- *Child abuse and neglect* – for primary schools
- *The abuse and neglect of young people* – for secondary schools.

Staff members at all levels can play an important role in recognising signs of neglect and abuse, from the janitor, playground supervisors, classroom assistants and teachers to senior managers, so consideration might be given to whole-school staff development.

The main messages about neglect are summarised on pages 3–6. Staff members can either read the information independently, or one of more staff members could take the lead in presenting the information to the wider group. Short films (such as *Neglect: Action for better futures* which is listed under 'Online resources' on page 7) might be useful in terms of providing insights into how practitioners from different agencies recognise and respond to neglect.

It is envisaged that the *Questions for reflection and discussion* will be discussed in small groups, with opportunities for feedback and wider whole group discussion, if time permits. The activity, using the resilience and vulnerability matrix, is also intended as a small group activity, to enable staff members to familiarise themselves with the matrix and use it as a tool to being to assess and analyse information about neglect. Focusing the discussion and activity on a child or young person who staff members are concerned might be at risk of neglect will enable this exercise to be real and relevant, and can lead to planning to improve outcomes for the child's well-being, at school and more widely.

You might wish to plan a follow-up session later in the school year, to revisit how neglect is being identified and supported in your setting, and with your multi-agency colleagues.

The Wellbeing Wheel, My World Triangle and Resilience Matrix can be downloaded from the Scottish Government's website:

www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright

What is neglect?

What is neglect?

The Scottish Government defines 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’¹. Categories of neglect² include:

- medical neglect
- nutritional neglect
- emotional neglect
- educational neglect
- physical neglect
- lack of supervision and guidance.

Recent research recommends that a broad definition of neglect based upon *unmet* need is helpful for practice and for the earliest intervention for young people at risk of neglect³. In Scotland, *Getting it right for every child* is a useful framework within which multi-agency discussions about unmet need(s) can be held. In particular, the safe indicator focuses on protecting every child from abuse, neglect or harm at home, at school and in the community.

Although the research on adolescent neglect is limited, the evidence contrasts with the professional view that the effects of neglect are not as severe for older young people than for younger children.⁶

Prevalence

Neglect is complex and often difficult to observe, which makes it difficult to measure accurately. A recent UK-wide NSPCC study⁴ revealed that:

- 1 in 5 (18.6%) young people aged 11-17 years had experienced severe maltreatment

- 1 in 4 (25.3%) young adults aged 18-24 had experienced severe maltreatment in childhood.

In Scotland, neglect remains the most common reason for child protection registration¹². From 2012, the new method of collecting statistics will enable more accurate identification of child neglect in Scotland.

Why is it important?

In the UK, child neglect is the most pervasive form of child abuse⁵. Neglect and abuse is correlated to a range of poor outcomes in later life including:

- mental health problems
- alcohol and substance misuse
- impaired social and cognitive skills
- poorer educational outcomes⁴.

Professionals must be alert to possible signs and symptoms that a young person is being neglected. Young people find it difficult to disclose neglect and abuse for a range of reasons, including anxiety about what might happen to themselves, their family and the abuser. In some cases, young people might not be aware that they are experiencing neglect, as they see their situation as ‘normal’. Research has shown that young people were most likely to approach a professional they already knew, who in most cases was a teacher^{6,7}.

The existence and effects of neglect in adolescence are often overlooked, possibly because of the tendency to view older children as *independent, resilient* or *coping*. The importance of intervening as early as possible when neglect is suspected – regardless of the age of the child or young person – is essential.

Signs and symptoms of neglect and abuse

Physical development

- Stunted growth
- Chronic medical problems
- Inadequate bone and muscle growth
- Lack of neurological development that impairs normal brain functioning and information processing.

Emotional development

- *disorganised* neglect is characterised by chaos and crisis, such that parents' preoccupations with their own needs result in inconsistent interactions with the child, who can then demonstrate demanding, anxious behaviours
- *depressed, passive* and *physical* neglect can result in listless behaviours, as the child has learned that s/he does not receive attention when s/he seeks it from the parent⁸.

Social, emotional and behavioural issues

Research from the United States showed that children who were physically abused and neglected displayed more social and behavioural problems at school and were described as having the greatest academic delay, according to teachers⁸.

The cumulative effects of neglect and abuse can result in increasingly challenging behaviour, for several reasons:

- 'falling behind' peers can result in lower self esteem, anxiety, embarrassment or disaffection
- for many children and young people who have not had appropriate models of 'good behaviour', knowing how to 'just behave' can be a very challenging, confusing command
- a pattern of challenging behaviour can deny children and young people the sympathetic, kind and nurturing adult responses they crave; this parallels their experiences at home and can compound problems.
- In Scotland 1 in 9 children under 16 run away or are forced to leave home due to problems in their lives. Nearly 1 in 5 said they ran away because of emotional and physical abuse and feelings of neglect and rejection.¹¹

Causes of neglect

Several factors are linked with the likelihood of neglect:

- Parental problems (such as substance misuse, mental health)
- Family structure (such as parent's involvement in unstable/abusive relationships)
- Economic factors (unemployment, poverty)
- Social support factors
- Characteristics of the local community and environment⁸.

Young people particularly vulnerable to neglect include:

- Young carers
- Disabled young people
- Runaways
- Looked after children and young people
- Refugees or asylum seekers
- Young people from black and ethnic minority communities⁹.

Young people's perceptions

Young people have suggested that professionals should be alert to the following possible signs of neglect⁶:

- might not trust adults
- may be lonely or isolated
- can't talk about their home life
- might not want parents to come into school
- might hide themselves
- are withdrawn, shy and shaky
- have dirty clothes or are unkempt
- might be too thin or too fat
- self-harm.

Older children and young people who are neglected will often approach friends or family, or someone whom they trust, initially. A recent study found that young people were uncertain about where they could access information about neglect, and the role that different professionals have in protecting children⁶. This lack of awareness meant that young people did not know who to contact for help, or where they could find out about support.

Interventions and strategies

Even if interventions are perfected, young people will still have experienced neglect, which is a key reason to aim to prevent neglect through policy and practice⁸. Research into effective interventions and strategies for cases of neglect is limited, and few interventions specifically target neglect¹⁰; however commonly identified principles of intervention focus on the importance of:

- Relationship building and attachment
- Long-term not episodic interventions
- Multi-faceted approaches (ensuring that every child has access to education, health care, social and emotional support)
- Early intervention for every child and young person (neglect can occur in adolescence as well as in early childhood)
- Considering both protective and risk factors
- Involving fathers or male caregivers as well as female caregivers⁸.

Primary

Universal services should promote the wellbeing of families and good quality attachments to prevent neglect of young people. In schools and youth services, enhancing the wellbeing of children and young people and involving them in positive activities is key. The health and wellbeing indicators in Curriculum for Excellence and *Getting it right for every child* put the child at the centre of decision making, planning and procedures to support children and young people at risk of neglect and abuse⁶.

Secondary

A supportive person who is a constant presence in the child or young person's life is very important, whether that is a friend, or a trusted adult such as a teacher⁶. When neglected young people turn to a friend for advice, access to information about what neglect is and how to help – including which services to involve and how those services can help – is key. Resources such as *Neglect Matters* are helpful, and schools and services might also consider the kind of information which is made available to young people about neglect, and in which formats (leaflets, booklets, videos or podcasts on websites, etc.).

Resources to support discussions about neglect and abuse

Online resources

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: A guide for children and young people.

www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/304066/0095408.pdf

For Every Child – UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in pictures and words (UNICEF and Red Fox publishing)

www.unicef.org/rightsite/files/rightsforeverychild.pdf

Neglect Matters – a guide for young people about neglect

www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/publications/neglect_matters_wda70741.html

Crush – Resource Pack

Secondary 3-6 – an exploration of the issues of teen abuse, gender stereotyping and bullying

www.vawpreventionscotland.org.uk/resources/education-resources-children-young-people/crush-screenplay-resource-pack

Spotting Signs of Abuse and Neglect in Secondary School

www.tes.co.uk/teaching-resource/Spotting-Signs-of-Abuse-and-Neglect-6084453/

Neglect: Action for better futures – Devon county council conference video.

<http://vimeo.com/23911186>

Print resources

Katherine Paterson *The Great Gilly Hopkins* (1981), Puffin

Cathy Cassidy *Indigo Blue* (2011), Puffin

Sharon Creech *Ruby Holler* (2007), Bloomsbury

Carolyn Coman *What Jamie Saw* (1997), Puffin

Kimberly Willis Holt *When Zachary Beaver Came to Town* (2001), Yearling Books

Jennifer Richard Jacobson *Small as an Elephant* (2011), Candlewick Press

Leslie Connor *Waiting for Normal* (2010), Katherine Tegen Books

References

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- ³ Daniel, B. (2005) 'Introduction to Issues for Health and Social Care in Neglect'. In J. Taylor and B. Daniel (Eds.) *Neglect: Practice Issues for Health and Social Care*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- ⁴ Radford, L. et al. (2011) *Child Abuse and Neglect in the UK Today*. www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/findings/child_abuse_neglect_research_wda84173.html
- ⁵ Action for Children (2010) *Seen and Now Heard: Taking Action on Child Neglect*. London: Action for Children.
- ⁶ Rees, G., Stein, M. Hicks, L. and Gorin, S. (2011) *Adolescent Neglect: Research, Policy and Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- ⁷ Woolfson, R., Heffernan, E., Paul, M and Brown, M. (2010) Young People's Views of the Child Protection System in Scotland. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40 (7), pp. 2069-2085.
- ⁸ Daniel, B., Taylor, J. and Scott, J. (2011) *Recognizing and Helping the Neglected Child: Evidence-Based Practice for Assessment and Intervention*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- ⁹ NSPCC (2007) *Child Protection Research Briefing: Child Neglect*. www.nspcc.org.uk/inform
- ¹⁰ Moran, P. (2009) *Neglect: Research Evidence to Inform Practice*. London: Action for Children.
- ¹¹ Wade, J. (2001) *Missing Out: Young Runaways in Scotland*. York: University of York.
- ¹² Daniel, B., Burgess, C., and Scott, J. (2012) *Review of Child Neglect in Scotland*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

Questions for reflection and discussion

These questions can be used for small group discussions in your school or workplace. They have been based on current research on child abuse and neglect. The Wellbeing Wheel and My World Triangle should be to hand during this exercise.

Having shared understandings of concepts, definitions and terminology is important in the process of identifying, planning and taking steps to support children who experience neglect.

- In your setting, how is neglect defined?
- Are there opportunities for discussing issues around neglect and abuse with children and young people? How do you think this is best done (prompting discussion through media reports, children's literature, films, television programs, etc.)?

Information for children and young people needs to be concise and convey key messages about what neglect is and how they can get help.

- Are children and young people you work with aware of where they can access information about neglect and abuse, and how to help friend(s) who might be neglected? (Neglect Matters can be downloaded free from the internet, for example.)
- Is information made available to children and young people about neglect in formats which are accessible to them (leaflets, booklets, videos, podcasts, websites, etc.)?

Using the Wellbeing Wheel to reflect on and discuss these five key questions might also support you in getting it right for children and young people at risk of neglect:

- What is getting in the way of this child or young person's wellbeing?
- Do I have all of the information I need to help this child or young person?
- What can I do now to help this child or young person?
- What can my agency do to help this child or young person?
- What additional help, if any, may be needed from others?

Social, emotional and behavioural issues are linked with child abuse and neglect. *Safe and Well* states:

Children who have suffered abuse or are under considerable stress, may communicate their hurt in different ways, for example by disrupting their classes, damaging property, outbursts and fights or bullying, or by becoming uncooperative or withdrawn. Teachers need to provide a balance between responding to challenging behaviour in a way that provides consistency for the class, whilst understanding that a troubled child may require support as much as discipline. Managing such situations requires schools to think creatively about how best to progress the interests of the majority of their pupils whilst meeting the needs of individuals. (Scottish Executive, 2005)

- How have you responded to such situations in your school or workplace?
- In your school, are there alternatives to exclusion for children and young people who are at risk of neglect and abuse, to keep them safe and well?
- What support do you have, and what support do you require, in managing such situations?

Activity

The Resilience and Vulnerability Matrix should be to hand during this exercise.

Resilience can be seen as a process rather than a character trait and has three fundamental building blocks:

1. A secure base whereby the child feels a sense of belonging and security (expressed in statements such as 'I have')
2. Good self-esteem ('I am')
3. A sense of self-efficacy, with an accurate understanding of personal strengths and limitations ('I can').

Using the Resilience and Vulnerability Matrix is recommended for more complex cases of child neglect. The matrix can be used to record risk factors (adversity) and protective factors (the protective environment) for children and young people who are at risk of neglect. Once the process of assessment and analysis of a child's risk and protective factors has been undertaken, this information can be used to plan next steps toward desired outcomes for the child's wellbeing.

In your group, select a child or young person in your school or setting who you are concerned might be at risk of neglect

- Discuss the risk and protective factors for that child or young person, using the Resilience and Vulnerability Matrix.
- Record risk factors (under vulnerability and adversity) and protective factors (under resilience and protective environment) on the matrix. You might not have sufficient knowledge of the child or young person's wider life to enable you to record factors under every domain. Multi-agency meetings are good opportunities to gain wider understandings of the child or young person's life. For the purpose of the activity, record what is known about the child or young person.

Curriculum for Excellence – Experiences and Outcomes

Curriculum for Excellence: Health and wellbeing principles and practice states that:

Children and young people should feel happy, safe, respected and included in the school environment and all staff should be proactive in promoting positive behaviour in the classroom, playground and the wider school community. Robust policies and practices which ensure the safety and wellbeing of children should already be in place.

The following experiences and outcomes are relevant in terms of identifying unmet need(s), and planning to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people at risk of neglect and abuse.

Mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing

I understand that there are people I can talk to and that there are a number of ways which I can gain access to practical and emotional support to help me and others in a range of circumstances. *HWB 0-03a/ HWB 1-03a/ HWB 2-03a/ HWB 3-03a/ HWB 4-03a*

I understand the importance of mental wellbeing and that this can be fostered and strengthened through personal coping skills and positive relationships. I know that it is not always possible to enjoy good mental health and that if this happens there is support available. *HWB 0-06a/ HWB 1-06a/ HWB 2-06a/ HWB 3-03a/ HWB 4-04a*

I am learning skills and strategies which will support me in challenging times, particularly in relation to change and loss. *HWB 0-08a/ HWB 1-08a/ HWB 2-02a/ HWB 3-03a/ HWB 4-08a*

Physical wellbeing

I am learning to assess and manage risk, to protect myself and others, and to reduce the potential for harm when possible. *HWB 0-16a/ HWB 1-16a/ HWB 2-16a/ HWB 3-16a/ HWB 4-16a*

Substance misuse

I understand there are things I should not touch or eat and how to keep myself safe, and I am learning what is meant by medicines and harmful substances. *HWB 0-38a*

I know that there are medicines and some other substances that can be used in a safe way to improve health and I am becoming aware of how choices I make can affect my health and wellbeing. *HWB 1-38a*

I understand the effect that a range of substances including tobacco and alcohol can have on the body. *HWB 2-38a*

I understand the positive effects that some substances can have on the mind and body but I am also aware of the negative and serious physical, mental, emotional, social and legal consequences of the misuse of substances. *HWB 3-38a/ HWB 4-38a*

I know that popular culture, the media and peer groups as well as my own attitudes and values can influence how I feel about substance use and recognise the impact this may have on my actions. *HWB 2-39a/ HWB 3-39a*

Through investigation, I can explain how images of substance use and misuse can influence people's behaviour. *HWB 4-39a*

I know that alcohol and drugs can affect people's ability to make decisions. *HWB 2-40a*

I am developing a range of skills which can support decision making about substance use. I can demonstrate strategies for making informed choices to maintain and improve my health and wellbeing and can apply these in situations that may be stressful or challenging, or involve peer pressure. *HWB 3-40a/HWB 4-40a*

I know how to access information and support for substance-related issues. *HWB 3-40b/HWB 4-40b*

I can identify the different kinds of risks associated with the use and misuse of a range of substances. *HWB 2-41a*

After assessing options and the consequences of my decisions, I can identify safe and unsafe behaviours and actions. *HWB 3-41a/HWB 4-41a*

I know that the use of alcohol and drugs can affect behaviour and the decisions that people make about relationships and sexual health. *HWB 3-41b/HWB 4-41b*

I can show ways of getting help in unsafe situations and emergencies. *HWB 0-42a*

I know how to react in unsafe situations and emergencies. *HWB 1-42a*

I know of actions I can take to help someone in an emergency. *HWB 2-42a*

I know the action I should take in the management of incidents and emergencies related to substance misuse. *HWB 3-42a/HWB 4-42a*

I understand the impact that misuse of substances can have on individuals, their families and friends. *HWB 2-43a*

I understand the impact that ongoing misuse of substances can have on a person's health, future life choices and options. *HWB 3-43a/HWB 4-43a*

Through investigating substance misuse in my local community I can reflect on specific issues, and discuss how they are being addressed. *HWB 3-43b*

By researching the impact of substance misuse nationally and internationally I can explain similarities and differences among communities. *HWB 4-43b*

I understand the local, national and international impact of substance misuse. *HWB 4-43c*

Relationships, sexual health and parenthood

I know that there are people in our lives who care for and look after us and I am aware that people may be cared for by parents, carers or other adults.

HWB 0-45a/HWB 1-45a

I am identifying and practising skills to manage changing relationships and I understand the positive impact this can have on my emotional wellbeing.

HWB 2-45a

I recognise that power can exist within relationships and can be used positively as well as negatively.

HWB 3-45a/HWB 4-45a

I am developing skills for making decisions about my relationships and sexual behaviour. I am able to apply these to situations that may be challenging or difficult.

HWB 3-46c/HWB 4-46c

I know how to access services, information and support if my sexual health and wellbeing are at risk. I am aware of my rights in relation to sexual health including my right to confidentiality, and my responsibilities, including those under the law.

HWB 3-48a/HWB 4-48a

I am learning about respect for my body and what behaviour is right and wrong. I know who I should talk to if I am worried about this.

HWB 0-49a/

HWB 1-49a

I know that all forms of abuse are wrong and I am developing the skills to keep myself safe and get help if I need it.

HWB 2-49a

I know how to manage situations concerning my sexual health and wellbeing and am learning to understand what is appropriate sexual behaviour.

HWB 3-49a/HWB 4-49a

I know where to get support and help with situations involving abuse and I understand that there are laws which protect me from different kinds of abuse.

HWB 3-49b/HWB 4-49b

About this resource

This resource was written by Kelly Stone , Research Fellow/ Co-ordinator at WithScotland, kelly.stone@stir.ac.uk. It was developed for education professionals on the subject of neglect to support the implementation of *Getting it Right for Every Child* and *Curriculum for Excellence* and was peer-reviewed by multi-agency colleagues.

connecting · exchanging · protecting

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