



'A Day in the Life...'

Making sense of an individual's lived experience

For use with parent/carers, children and young people. This tool was developed by Jan Horwath www.sheffield.ac.uk to assist in assessing and intervening in cases of neglect.

A Day in the Life

Both national and local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews into child neglect have highlighted the need to gain an understanding of the child's lived experience. In order to meet the needs of the child it is necessary to understand what a day is like in their lives; how the day changes at weekends or holidays; and when different people care for them. It is only by understanding their daily lived experience that practitioners can appreciate how various aspects of neglect are affecting the child.

The Horwath 'Day in the Life of the child' model aims to help practitioners gain a better understanding of what is happening in families where neglect is an issue and what actions may lead to improved outcomes for children. There are six versions of the "day in my life" tool, each specifically written for the following cohorts of children:

- [Day in the Life - Unborn baby](#)
- [Day in the Life - Baby](#)
- [Day in the Life - Pre-school child](#)
- [Day in the Life - Primary school aged child](#)
- [Day in the Life - Adolescent](#)
- [Day in the Life - Child with disabilities](#)

The model requires practitioners to develop an understanding of what a full day is like in the life of each and every child and carer in the family. By comparing and contrasting the information from each family member, practitioners can begin to understand why neglect is taking place, what is likely to happen if things do not change within the home, and what actions are required and appropriate to improve outcomes for the children.

The model aims to:

- Gain a solid understanding of a child or young person's daily routine; this will help you focus on the child's lived experience
- Identify positives or strengths as well as highlighting areas of concern or risk in respect of neglect
- Look at parenting capacity in relation to daily life, especially thinking about expectations of the child from a developmental perspective

How would you use it?

The model requires practitioners to talk to children and parents about what a regular day is like in their life across a 24 hour cycle. By talking to each family member and cross-referencing their experiences of the same day, practitioners are able to make the experiences of each neglected children visible and begin to understand their daily lived experience.

The tools are designed to be used alongside parents or with children (where age and development appropriate). They consist of a list of questions, or prompts, to help shape the worker's understanding of the lived experience of the child. They specifically focus on different parts of a child's daily routine and care.

They can act as a starting point for direct work or as a useful list of questions or areas to explore, to help form a view of the day to day care of a child. They can highlight areas of strength in the parenting and also areas in need of development. It is important to work with parents in a strength-based approach in order to create good levels of engagement and the best possible way to achieve sustainable change.

It should be noted that:

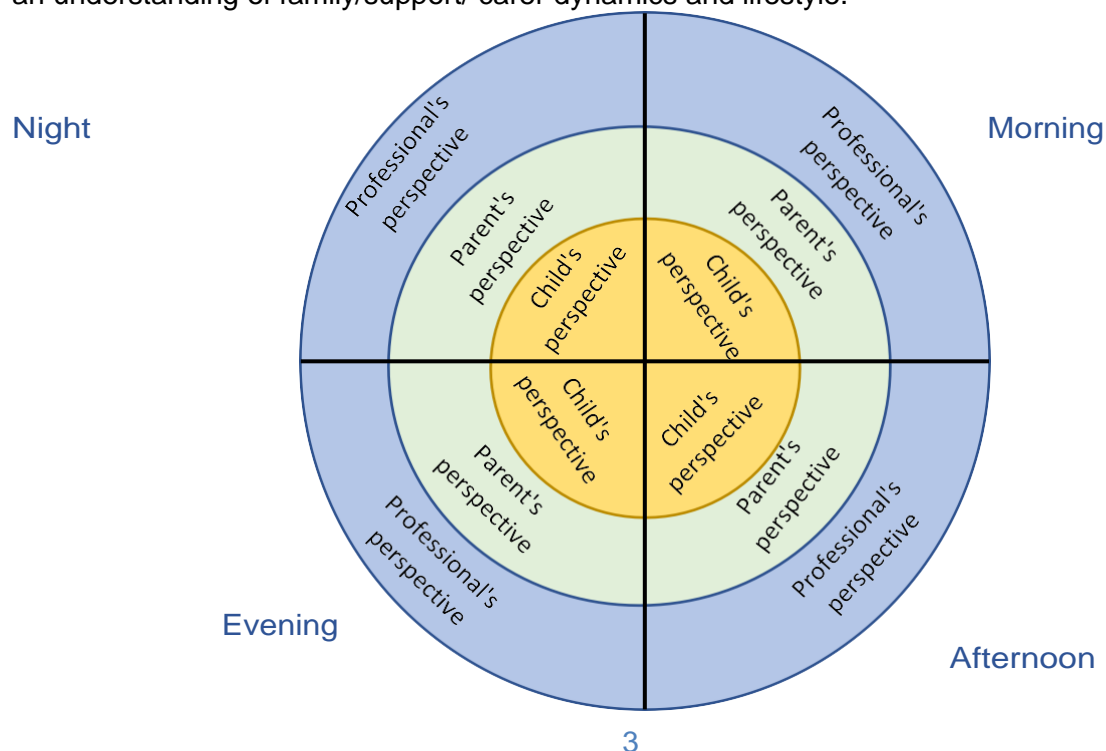
- These tools should not be used alone but should be used to underpin the assessment
- These tools should not be used as a tick-box but as a framework to prompt discussion and exploration of the child and family's unique circumstances; they are a tool to engage and enable a conversation to take place
- Practitioners can and should be creative about how they use or adapt these tools to make them appropriate to the individual, circumstance or situation
- Practitioners need to be open and honest with children and families about why the tool is being used and what will happen with the information. This will allow the child or family to make a decision about what they choose to share
- Practitioners need to take care not to seek false reassurance from tools/ self- reports when their observations are telling them something else; it is essential to triangulate all sources of information to inform analysis and challenge your own assumptions as needed

A template has been created to capture the outcome of discussions with children and their parents. This is a helpful way to capture information and also to review a family's progress. When using the model with families, consider the following guidance:

- Children should only be asked to describe their lived experience periodically (no more than every 3 months). This will allow you to develop a picture of how things may have changed for the child but prevents family members feeling fatigued by the process
- Family life for neglected children can be chaotic. When trying to understand their lived experience, aim to ask open questions, do not take anything for granted and do not presume any degree of routine occurs in the household.

The model: perceptions of the daily lived experience of the child

The child and the parent/carer(s) should be invited to describe a day in their own life over a 24 hour period so that the clocks can be compared, and similarly with any professionals who have an understanding of family/support/ carer dynamics and lifestyle.



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The Model has four elements:

1. The child's perception of a day in their life
2. Parent/carers perception of a day for the parent/carer
3. A parent/carer's perspective on the impact of their lived experience on that of the child
4. What practitioners know about a day in the life of the child and the parent and the impact of this experience on the developmental needs of the child that are or are not being met.

Element 1 - the child's perception of a day in their life:

Ideally, one should start by asking a child to describe a day in their life. A variety of different tools can be used to elicit this information;

- Presenting the child with a clock and asking them to indicate what happens at different times
- Doing the same but with a timeline
- Setting out a day as a comic strip and getting the child and or young person to fill in the different sections
- Using props such as a dolls house with family members, soft toys etc
- Drawing the 'clock' on a large sheet of flipchart paper and encouraging the child to plot their day by writing, using cut outs from magazines etc.

Element 2 - a day for the parent/carer(s):

In order to begin to appreciate why parents are failing to meet the needs of the child it is important to get insight into their lived experience. The following points should be considered:

- As with children, parents may well have limited routines so suggest they describe a specific day.
- Do not make any presumptions about the content of the day: be led by the parents.
- When a basic outline has been provided questions can be asked regarding:
 - o Differences in the day, e.g. benefits day, week-ends etc
 - o Variations depending on who is in the home
 - o Extended family and support networks.

Element 3 - A parent/carer's perspective on the lived experience of the child:

In some cases of neglect the parent themselves have so many unmet needs that they are unable put the needs of the child before their own (Horwath, 2013). In addition, some parents have for so many years behaved in certain ways that their behaviours have become entrenched and they no longer appreciate the impact of these behaviours on their child.

Alternatively, many of these neglectful parents will have experienced abuse and neglect themselves and will therefore fail to understand why practitioners may be concerned about parenting behaviours that they think 'never did me any harm'.

By drawing parents' attention to the lived experience of the child parents are given an opportunity to gain insights into the impact of neglect in a manner that is likely to be more meaningful to them than being told a child is failing to attend school and must attend. This is because the impact for their child is being made specific.

By bringing together the child's daily lived experience with that of the parent, practitioners can begin to identify and discuss with parents what needs to change in terms of their daily lives to ensure the needs of the child are met. It is also a good way to identify any barriers to meeting the needs of the child and the support professionals and family can provide to break down those barriers.

Links to Model of Change

Drawing on practitioner and family experience of compiling the Daily Lived Experience Model this is an ideal way of assessing parental motivation and ability to change. If the parent does not recognise the impact of their parenting behaviour on the child they are at the pre-contemplation stage. As part of the assessment process practitioners should try and engage parents in contemplating change by establishing:

- Their reflections on the child's lived experience
- What the parent wants for their child and how they think life can be made better for the child
- Parent/s awareness of the steps they would need to take to make life better and their motivation to take these steps
- What the parent/s think will happen to the child if things do not start to change
How professionals can support the parent/s and child to make the necessary changes

If despite practitioners efforts to specify what needs to change to improve the quality of this experience parents fail to engage this raises questions about their capacity to change. The Model also provides an evidence-based method that draws on the lived experience of the child to measure progress in terms of taking action to change and maintaining change.

See also: [SSP Practice Brief The Cycle of Change Stages of Change](#)

Element 4 - what professionals knows about a day in the life of the child and the parent and the impact of this experience on the developmental needs of the child that are or are not being met:

Your assessment will of course include consultation with other practitioners about their perception and observations of the family. Note these and align the information to what you have learnt from the various family members.

The quality of attachment between the child/adult and the parent/carer should be observed along with analysis of the parent/carer and individual's relationship.

The experience of a pre-verbal child, a child or adult with limited language skills or levels of understanding may need to be explored in different ways, for example, via, a pictorial timetable of their day (PECS –Pictorial Exchange Communication System), observations, specific questions with the carer about routine, mealtimes, bedtimes etc
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Open-ended questions will facilitate greater insight:

Whilst the tools contain a list of prompts and areas to consider, it is **not** expected that you will go through them as a set of questions. Instead you should frame these as open questions in

your conversation with the child and parent/carer. For example:

- Tell me what usually happens on a school day?
- Can you tell me what the mornings are like? What happens when you wake up?
- What happens in the evenings in your house? etc.

Asking if and how the child/adult would like their daily lived experience to change will provide additional information about their views and feelings.

Analysing and making sense of the information:

- What do we know about a day in the life of this child: the positives and the concerns?
- Are there good and bad days, differences at weekends, school holidays etc?
- What do we know about a day in the life of the parent/s that is influencing parenting capacity: the positives and concerns?
- Are there extended family and significant others who are positively and negatively influencing the daily lived experience of the child and the parent/s?
- Are there factors such as employment, housing, community resources positively and negatively impacting on the lived experience of the child and their family?
- Are there aspects of past history that are influencing the lived experience of the child and their family?
- Parent/s awareness of the steps they would need to take to make life better and their motivation to take these steps.
- What the parent/s think will happen to the child if things do not start to change.
- The interaction between the individual's strengths and difficulties.
- The impact of the style and quality of parenting/caring on the individual's health and development in terms of resilience and protective factors and vulnerability and risk factors.

The analysis should include:

- Identifying and exploring patterns within the individual and family's life;
- Assessing the extent to which the parent/carer's ability/capacity to change is linked with the individual's developmental needs, pace of development and/or promotion of the individual's health and well-being;
- Consideration of alternative explanations for what is happening;
- Consideration of what a day in the life of this person would look like if their needs were being met and risks removed;
- Making professional judgements based on research, specialist knowledge and theory in order to arrive at a conclusion.