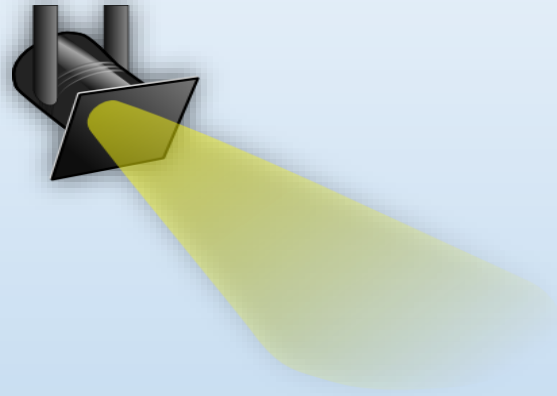


Swindon Safeguarding Partnership



Spotlight on Neglect

12th March 2024

Please put your name and role in the chat



09:30	Welcome and housekeeping	Andrew Freeman Assistant Director, NSPCC South West and Channel Islands and Chair of the SSP Neglect Sub Group.
09:35	Learning from reviews	Hannah Woloszczynska Strategic Safeguarding Partnership Manager
10:05	Workshops	
10:35	Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Response to Child Neglect	Andrew Freeman Assistant Director, NSPCC South West and Channel Islands and Chair of the SSP Neglect Sub Group.
10:55	Workshops	
11:25	Back to main group	
	Break	
11:35	Return to event	
11:35	Childrens Services Update	Debbie Owen, Service Manager, Family Safeguarding, Childrens Services, Swindon Borough Council
11:55	Workshops	
12:25	Experts by experience	Parvaneh (Pari) Shahrokni Participation Officer, Swindon Borough Council
12:55	The relationship between Poverty and Neglect	Andrew Freeman and Eavan McKay, NSPCC, Senior Policy & Public Affairs Officer
13:25	Closing remarks	Andrew Freeman



Workshops

Professional Curiosity

Facilitated by Natalie McLaren, Named Social Worker for Safeguarding Children, Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust and Charlotte Hinder, Named Nurse for Safeguarding 0-19, Child & Family Health Service, Swindon Borough Council

Having difficult conversations

Facilitated by Tracey Modica, Family Nurse Partnership, Swindon Borough Council

Education – links to neglect

Facilitated by Tanya Westall, Lead Safeguarding Adviser – Education, Childrens Services, Swindon Borough Council and Lesley O'Hagan, Service Lead, Education Welfare Service, Swindon Borough Council.



Learning from Reviews Child Neglect

Hannah Woloszczynska
Strategic Safeguarding Partnership Manager



Criteria and Process for Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

- Statutory reviews are carried out where abuse or neglect is known or suspected and either:
 - a child has died or;
 - a child has been seriously harmed and there are concerns about how organisations or professionals worked together to protect the child.
- Full criteria is specified in [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023](#). Chapter 5.
- The Local Authority has a duty to notify the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review panel of serious incidents and this initiates the Rapid Review process, this process has to be completed within 15 working days and is intended to identify learning as quickly as possible.
- The Rapid Review process will determine whether criteria has been met for a Local or National Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs) (previously known as Serious Case Reviews).
- Any agency can make a referral for consideration of a CSPR.
- Referrals should be made to the [Safeguarding Partnership](#) and will be considered by the Safeguarding Partnership, Practice Review Group
- Further information regarding the process and referral form can be found in the [Local child safeguarding practice review guidance - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership](#)
- Published reviews can be found on the SSP webpage [Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and Case Learning leaflets - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership](#)



Impact of Neglect on Children

- Neglect has far reaching and **long term effects** on children and young people.
- Children who are exposed to chronic neglect may **suffer from a wide range of difficulties** leading to poor physical health, underachievement in education and social and emotional difficulties.
- The effects can **extend into adult life** and lead to poor functioning and impact on an individual's own ability to parent.
- Neglect is often **difficult to recognise as the impact is cumulative** and the concerns may increase gradually over a long period of time.
- Neglect is a complex area of practice, presenting particular challenges. It requires **skilful use of assessment**, professional authority and **direct work with the child and parents to effect change**. Professionals need to be alert to the complexity of practice in this area.



National Context - Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel Annual report 2022 - 23

- National and local reviews in the CSPR report shed light on the lives of children and on safeguarding practice.
- Over half of the reviews observed that a child had experienced neglect and that a high proportion of school age children who died or were seriously harmed were either not in school (11%) or reported to be regularly absent (29%).
- Over half of rapid reviews (53%) noted that the child had experienced neglect prior to the incident. There were similar proportions reported between incidents where the child died (53%, and where the child suffered serious harm (52%).



National Context - Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel Annual report 2022 - 23

- Several practice learning points were identified within the reviews that were more prevalent in cases where neglect was recorded as a factor than in cases where it was not. This included issues around
 - perceived disguised compliance,
 - capturing the voice of the child,
 - poor escalation of concerns and
 - lack of professional curiosity/asking the second question.
- The panel noted that there were insufficiently robust risk assessments. Especially relating to babies under 1.
- Some reviews described how poor or incomplete information could result from tools or toolkits – notably ones for safe sleeping and neglect – being inadequate or not being utilised fully.
- CSPR Panel are undertaking two thematic analyses in 2024, one of these is on neglect.



Learning from Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

LCSPR Bella & Ben was published in December 2022

This case review was relating to two small children who were found to be living in a hazardous home environment. There were concerns about Bella's physical and emotional wellbeing and she was found to have been severely neglected by her mother. Ben had a diagnosis of autism. Bella had developmental delays but no formal diagnosis.

- [Bella and Ben full report](#)
- [Bella and Ben executive summary](#)
- [Bella and Ben practice learning brief](#) (*this sets out the learning for agencies and practitioners identified in this case review*)



Learning for the Safeguarding Partnership

- Professionals in universal and some specialist services were not routinely identifying and responding to the early signs of neglect, recognising parents seeking help and the need for early help support to stop neglect becoming pervasive.
- There was a lack of awareness of faltering growth, guidance and how to respond to this in older children
- Professionals attributed developmental delay as an inevitable part of a child's disability, rather than either caused by, or exacerbated by neglect and poor parenting. This led to a response, which focussed on the child and their need for services to bring about improvements, rather than focussing on parenting, positive attachments the child's environment and the parents need for support.
- It was unclear whether professionals across Swindon were equipped to respond effectively to the chronic signs of neglect and to confidently take action.



Learning from Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

LCSPR Alan was published in March 2023

Alan and his family have been well known to many of the agencies in Swindon for over 14 years. In March 2021, when Alan was 16yrs old, his school referred him to the Swindon MASH as it was considered that the current early help provision working with the family was not effectively meeting his needs nor reducing the risks he was experiencing. As a consequence, a social work visit was made and that revealed that Alan was:

Very thin and potentially malnourished, he had muscle wastage and his movements were very slow, his skin was in very poor condition – grey with acne, his hair was unkempt, he was spending nearly all his time in bed, rarely leaving his room or the house, His dietary intake was unclear but believed not to be very healthy , He was very self-deprecatory, believing he did not matter, that he was not important. There was evidence of some (superficial) cuts to his arm as a consequence of self-harming.

[Alan full report](#)

[Alan practice learning brief](#) *(this sets out the learning for agencies and practitioners identified in this review)*



Learning for the Safeguarding Partnership

- **Adolescent Neglect:** There was a need for professionals to consider the difficulties of working with young people who do not easily engage. Neglect was not considered so this did not elicit an appropriate response from some professionals and the effectiveness of support offered was limited.
- **Mental Capacity Act for under 18's:** Application of Gillick competencies and Mental Capacity Act only apply once social work intervention was tried.
- **Escalation:** The formal escalation process was underused.
- **Step up and Step down – threshold decisions:** Threshold decisions were applied too mechanistically - thresholds are to guide professional decision making not to replace it. Family needs are complex – covering different threshold categories at any one time and they change over time. Decisions made did not reflect the complexities of Alan and his family nor in recognition of the fact that little change was being effected by those involved.



SO WHAT?

- Neglect is a priority for the Safeguarding Partnership for 2023 - 24 continuing into 2024 – 25.
- SSP Neglect sub-group a more detailed update will be covered in the SSP Response to Child Neglect presentation.
- Previous escalation policy has been reviewed and updated. This now focuses on professional resolution and how we can work together to achieve the right outcomes for children where there is difference of professional opinions.
- Developing, in conjunction with B&NES and Wiltshire colleagues, Faltering Growth Guidance, which includes guidance around faltering growth in older children.



Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Response to Child Neglect

Andrew Freeman

Chair SSP Neglect Sub Group



What is Neglect?

Neglect is defined 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:

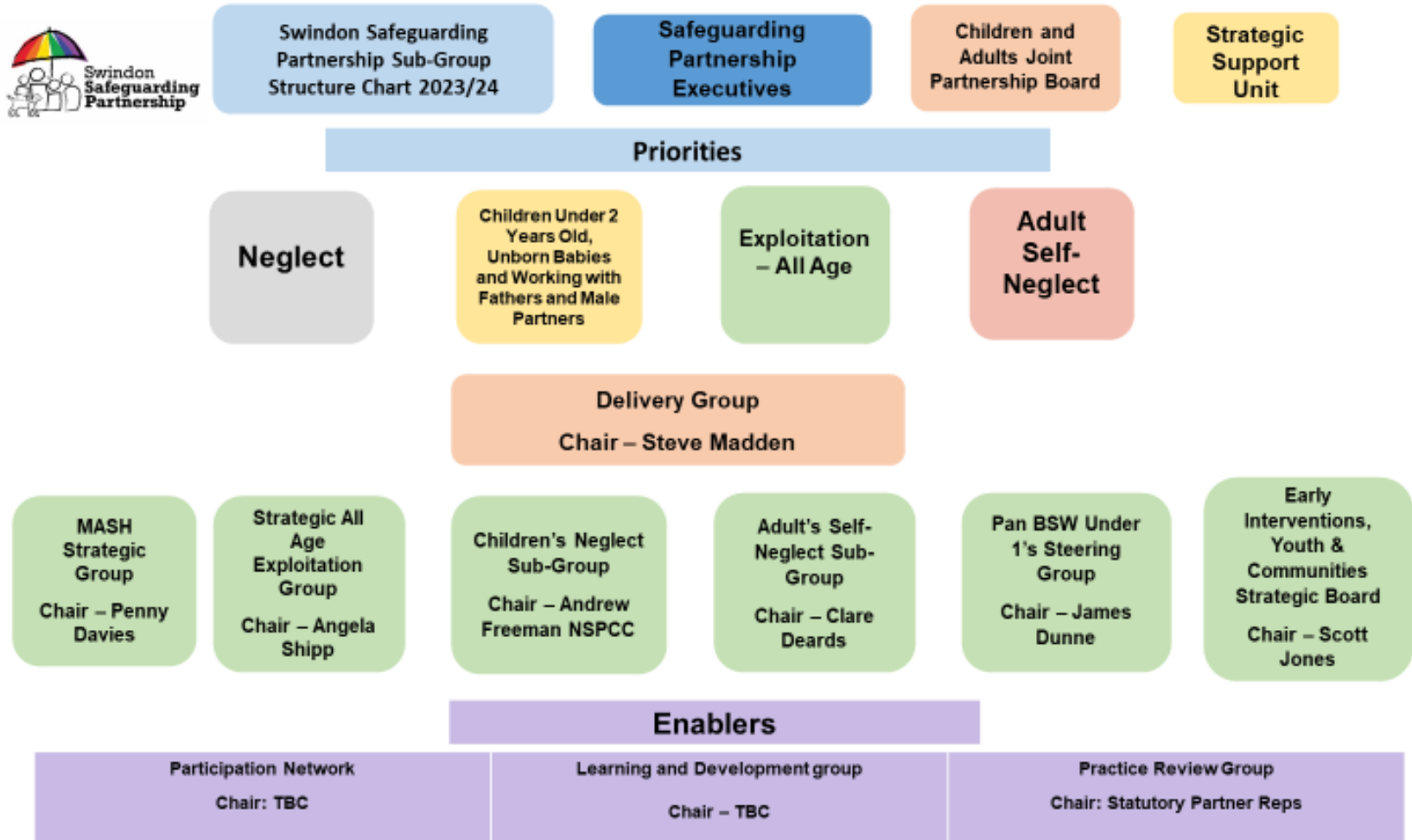
- provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment);
- protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger;
- ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers); or
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

***Swindon Safeguarding Partnership recognise that neglect does not need to be persistent to negatively impact children and young people.**



Swindon Safeguarding Partnership - Neglect



Aims and purpose of the SSP Neglect Sub-group

Purpose:

- The purpose of the neglect sub-group is to focus on the issue of neglect and to support the reduction of child neglect in Swindon.

Aims:

- The group will review and update the SSP Neglect Strategy for the period of 2023-2026.
- The group will look to review and update the Neglect Framework and Practice Guidance and improve the awareness of neglect, the harm it causes, how to identify it, understand, assess and prevent neglect.
- The group will also review recommendations from recent LCSPRs where neglect has been an identified factor in harm.
- Promote the use of the neglect screening tool to support early identification.
- To understand the number and experiences of children known to services where neglect is the primary referral reason.
- The group will explore how to overcome questions and dilemmas commonly encountered in practice and look at how research and learning can inform best practice. It will also look at reviewing the reach and effectiveness of neglect training across the partnership.
- The group will create and promote an agreed Neglect toolkit and ensure that supported training is available and consider developing a neglect forum/neglect champions.



What have we achieved so far?

[Neglect - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership](#)

Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Neglect Screening Tool

This screening tool should be completed to assist in evidencing neglect concerns and used in line with [The right help at right time guidance](#) and [SSP neglect framework and practice guidance](#)

Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Neglect Strategy 2024-2027



Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Children's Neglect Framework and Practice Guidance



Date:	August 2023
Review Date:	August 2025
Document Author:	Swindon Safeguarding Partnership
Document Owner:	Swindon Safeguarding Partnership



Issued by: Swindon Safeguarding Partnership;
Revised: January 2024
Review Date: January 2027
Author: Swindon Safeguarding Partnership



Keeping Swindon **Safe**

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Neglect

The experience of neglect during childhood can have significant, long-lasting and pervasive consequences, affecting all aspects of a child's development. These effects include cognitive and other physical development, educational achievement, children and young people's emotional wellbeing, and behavioural difficulties.

It can also result in children and young people having difficulties making and keeping relationships, which can affect how they parent their own children and can perpetuate inter-generational cycles of neglect. Consideration needs to be taken into individual development and context, including social and economic factors such as poverty and deprivation, family environment and community resources. In addition, practitioners should be aware that neglect is an area which can be open to personal and moral judgements.

Neglect is the most common type of abuse experienced by children and young people in England.

Neglect is a serious form of harm. Both families and professionals can become overwhelmed and demoralised by reviews of neglect. Children may experience repeated attempts by professionals to try and improve the situation.

Published case reviews highlight that professionals face a big challenge in identifying and taking timely action on neglect.

Source: [Neglect: learning from case reviews](#) | NSPCC Learning (December 2022)

Please view this short recording from Andrew Freeman, Assistant Director, NSPCC South (West and Channel Islands) and Chair of the SSP Neglect Sub Group, which outlines what we are doing in Swindon to help reduce the impact of neglect on children.



The [Swindon Neglect Strategy 2024-2027](#) sets out the strategic aims and objectives of Swindon's approach to reducing the number of children who are experiencing neglect.

The information and resources included below will assist you in identifying, assessing and responding to neglect.

- What is neglect? ✓
- What to look for? ✓
- Why is this important? ✓
- What to do? ✓
- Responding to Neglect ✓
- The cycle of change ✓
- Courageous conversations with parents/carers ✓
- Adolescent neglect ✓
- Disabled children and neglect ✓
- A day in the life of the child ✓
- Useful resources ✓

We would really like your feedback on the information and resources on this page and would appreciate you taking a couple of moments to let us know your views via this [feedback form](#).

QR code for Neglect webpage



Our priorities for 2024-25

Neglect will continue to be an SSP priority for 2024-25

- Implementation of the Neglect Toolkit across the SSP
- June 2024 – SSP ‘focus on Neglect’ month
- Supporting **all** partners and frontline practitioners across Swindon through:
 - Sharing best practice and learning through audit
 - Understanding practitioner experiences in identifying and assessing neglect
 - Development of a community of practitioners
- Understanding and measuring impact and outcomes
 - Scorecard approach
 - Reporting directly into the SSP Delivery Group and Board

Above all else, we will be placing children and young people front and centre of our work







Swindon Borough Council

OFSTED UPDATES

Debbie Owen – Service Manager Family Safeguarding

Ofsted Outcome - Neglect

- Brief Summary & Key Issues/Recommendations for SSP:
- Ofsted Inspection 17 – 28 July 2023 found Swindon Borough Council Children’s Services Inadequate overall and highlighted: ‘too many children are left with unassessed needs and risks and plans that drift...’; ‘ children’s welfare is not consistently promoted as well as it should be and some children are left in situations where they are at risk of harm or, for a few, suffer harm that could have been avoided’
- ‘Recognition of the impact of long term neglect and domestic abuse is variable. The resulting plans for children are often weak. This leads to concerns not being properly addressed and a pattern of re-referrals’

- Feedback during Ofsted indicated recognising the impact of neglect on children was inconsistent and missed unless there was a trigger incident, once triggered action is taken with plans put in place.
- Repeat Child Protection plans – the impact of repeated incidents and concerns for children is not always outlined which gave little reassurance that the wider concerns about cumulative neglect/harm had been fully thought out.
- Issues – lack of recognition of long term neglect, cumulative evidence and use of history. Some issues also linked to non school attendance and lack of intervention to tackle the effects of neglect on children.

Improvement Plan

- Ensure threshold decisions are robust by taking into consideration all agency checks, family history and previous involvement and changes in circumstance. This will allow for better signposting to the right service at the right time for children AND Multi agency arrangements with the Swindon Safeguarding Partnership to be strengthened by reviewing threshold document and ensuring thresholds are clearly shared and understood and are appropriately responsive to need/risk.
- Develop and implement a multi-agency Neglect strategy to improve the response to our children suffering from Neglect, including introduction of effective screening tools to support identification of longer-term, cumulative impact of neglect on children and young people (Swindon Safeguarding Partnership by March 2024) – we will have a workforce that identifies neglect in all forms and is aware of the offer to support; staff will be aware of impact regarding neglect for children of all ages.

- All staff to recognise the impact of long-term neglect and create effective plans to address.
- Training on neglect and the cumulative effects of neglect delivered to all partners. (June 24 - Director of Safeguarding and Support SBC and Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Executive).
- Outcome - all children and young people in need of our services have a plan setting out the help that is offered.
- All children who need our protection are subject to a child protection plan that clearly identifies the work that will be offered to their family and the necessary changes to be achieved within appropriate timescales for our child or young person.

SSP Neglect Strategy alignment

- Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Neglect strategy 2024 – 2027 now produced and aligns with improvement plan.
- Neglect screening tool embedded
- Promotion and use of evidence based models including Family Safeguarding
- Guiding principles in Neglect Strategy: Child focused practice; outcome focused and relationship based practice; participation of parents/carers; effective, early support; think family; culture of challenge and escalation

Progress/Updates

- **Launch of the new Integrated Front Door “Contact Swindon”** – that we can already see is making a difference to the number of children being subject to statutory checks and assessments – instead more are getting the help they need at the lowest level possible
- **Launch of the locality panels with Early Help colleagues** – we are seeing some really positive feedback from partners about working out in locality areas and some real enthusiasm from families for this approach
- **The Early Intervention, Youth and Communities Board** -strengthened and helping to shape our Early Intervention Strategy and Early Help Offer
- **New Homelessness Strategy** for vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds and working in partnership with Housing colleagues to address needs

- Worked with partners to develop the **Neglect, and the Domestic Abuse: Violence Against Women and Girls strategies** leading to more joined up working and services
- **Sufficiency Strategy** that evidences our plan for improving choice for our children who need homes and those who benefit from short breaks, and we know that more children will be able to be found homes locally as this embeds
- **Increased our recruitment of permanent staff** – we still have some roles to cover but now have permanent team managers, senior managers and Directors
- **Right Help at the Right Time** guidance now produced and explains levels of need
- **Pre birth panel** – to look at the needs of those unborn babies who may be in need of support/protection
- **Assessments and 13 week rules** – not looking at incidents/events in isolation
- **Training in respect of planning and content of plans for children and their families**
- **Family Safeguarding Model more embedded** – psychologists now also in post



Experts by Experience - Neglect

12th March 2024

Pari Shahrokni – Participation Officer
Practice and Development



SWINDON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

What will be covered?

- What the Participation Network is and the work that was carried out
- Overview of survey results
- Next steps
- Reflection – what can each of you do to act on this feedback?

What is the Participation Network?

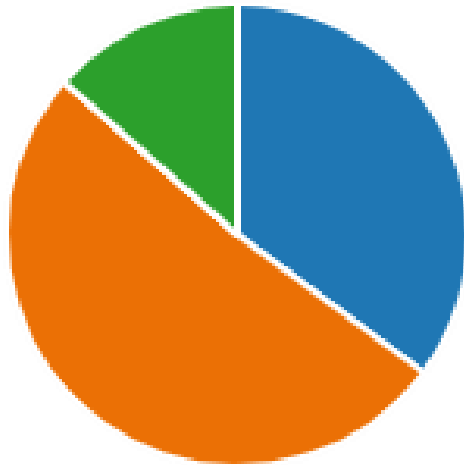
- The Network is a group of professionals both internal and external to Swindon Borough Council who come together to share the voice of the community, particularly children, young people and their families.
- It reports into the Swindon Safeguarding Partnership's Delivery Group.
- Supports hearing the voice in terms of the SSP's strategic priorities.

Children and Young People – Neglect Survey Responses



- The Participation Network discussed the neglect strategic priority on behalf of the SSP, exploring how we could hear the voice of our children and young people.
- A task and finish group of partners was formed to write a survey to share and gain young people's understanding of neglect.
- The survey was sent out to partners across Swindon; children and young people who are being supported or working with agencies were asked to complete the survey.
- The survey looked to find out from children and young people what they know about neglect and if they felt they could spot others who might be experiencing neglect. It also asked if they might know who to go to for help if they were worried about someone they might know.
- 37 children and young people completed the questionnaire.

Have you had experience of neglect?



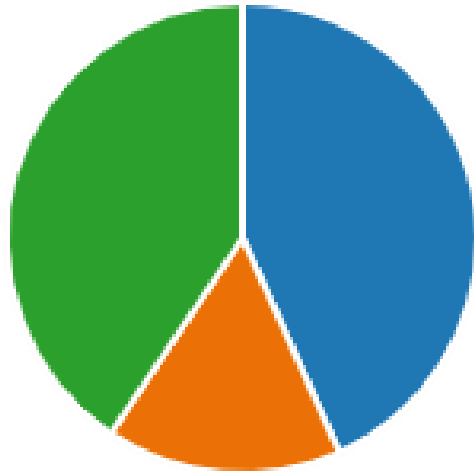
Yes 13 – 35%

No 19 – 51%

Not sure 5 – 14%

- We have been very fortunate not to have seen any.
- When I was younger, my dad wasn't the best person and I experienced this quite often. But he's changed now.
- I unfortunately have a lot of this in my life.
- no one [young kids] payed attention to me and kinda put me to the side for it.
- Not within my family but I have within friends.
- It wasn't quite neglect but it was close and there was hitting involved.

Do you think you could tell if someone was experiencing neglect?



Yes 16 - 43%

No 6 – 16%

Not sure 15 – 41%

- We are always looking out for signs
- It depends on the situation I think a lot of people hide neglect but sometimes you can't hide it
- There's a lot of signs you can look out for however not a lot of people understand what it is or what signs to look out for
- It depends how clear it is or what signs they are showing.
- Depends on the child and the signs they exhibit. Not all children know they are being neglected.
- By their body language and how they talk
- Neglect can be so much more than what you generally think of
- It depends on who and how well I know them. Also how clear the signs are.

These are the recognised signs of neglect. Do you think any are missing?

- being smelly or dirty;
- being hungry or not given money for food;
- having the wrong clothing, such as no warm clothes in winter;
- are tired a lot;
- left at home alone a lot;
- they miss lots of school;
- they might get quite angry;
- they might find it tricky to concentrate.



Yes 14 – 38%

No 10 – 27%

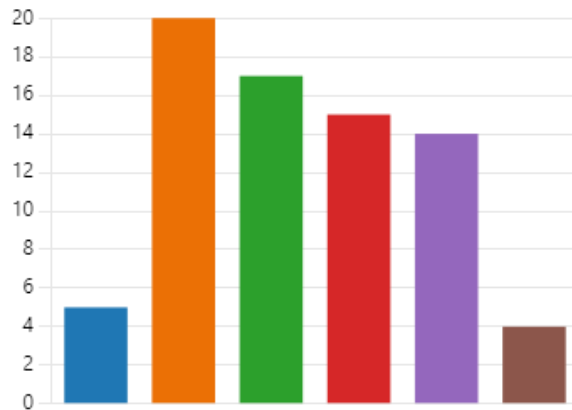
Not sure 13 – 35%

If you answered yes to question 5, what signs of neglect do you think are missing?



- Things which they tell us - which we would find disturbing
 - Signs of abuse - Another parent may not be noticing bullying or a family member assaulting them
- Parents having to work all of the time to pay bills so they are not there at home to cook and clean and look after the kids.
 - Parents that don't care that their kids are getting high or drunk
- Fidgety
- Poor mental health, going missing
- They can be left out on a lot of things for example at school or even at home, they are isolated
- When a child is constantly allowed to do things that might seem dangerous and their guardian know they do it and not care
- Difference in attitude could either be more caring to people or less caring/distancing , putting other people's needs before theirs
- Low self esteem and can get defensive or agitated easily. Sometimes are too mature for their age
- Isolate themselves
- Parent capacity
 - basic needs not being met
 - peer groups and accessing the community
- Very quiet and jumpy
- They show signs of being very self dependent and/or struggle to ask for help due to it being turned down in the past

Who would you tell if you thought someone was being neglected?



No one 5

Tutor/Adult at school 20

Parent/Carer/family member 17

Another Trusted Adult 15

A Social Worker 14

Other 4

- MASH
- The police
- Swindon Borough Council
- just speak to them
- Friends
- Parent or teacher first then another trusted adult if those two aren't possible
- Police - depends on the severity and who is probably responsible for the abuse. For example if the parents are responsible.
- The person who is going through it to see the problem and find a cause of solution
- I would RF1 to MASH and speak to my co-ordinator
- I would try to talk to the person first to see if I could help them get help for themselves first before doing it without them knowing

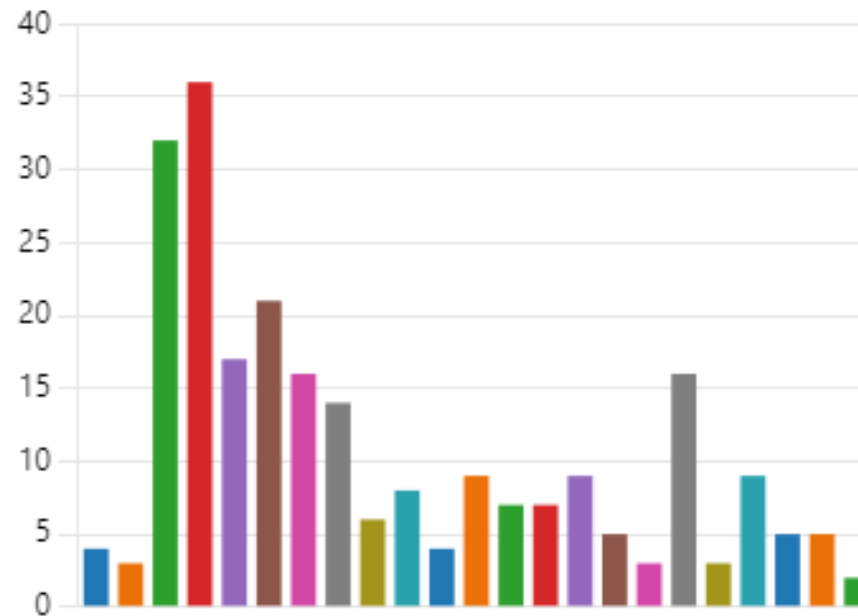
Practice and Development



Which of these organisations have you heard of? (tick all the organisations you have heard of)



Kooth	4
FearLess	3
NSPCC - Childline	32
The Police	36
Mind	17
The Samaritans	21
Swindon Borough Council	16
Social Care/Social Services (e.g. MASH)	14
Early Help Teams	6
Church/Faith Group	8
IPSUM	4
Inner Flame	9
SMASH	7
STEP	7
Parish Council Youth Workers	9
Project Me - Mental Health Trailblazer	5
Starting Point	3
CAMHS	16
Iprufit	3
TAMHS	9
BEST	5
Out of the Can	5
Other	2



Practice and Development

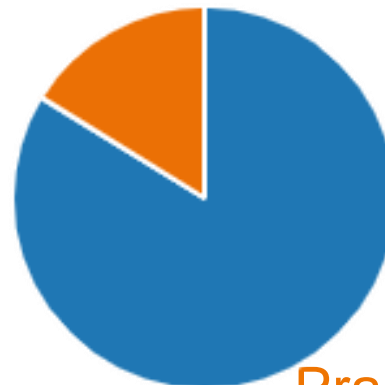
If you chose other, please add their name here.



- UTURN
- The Kelly Foundation (mental health support)

Did you know you could go to these organisations if you were worried for yourself or someone else?

Yes 31 – 84 %
No 6 – 16%
Not Sure 0



Practice and Development

Is there anything else you think we should be doing when you think of young people experiencing neglect?



- More social workers. There are not enough to protect the children in Swindon.
- Give them a support system like talking and making sure they have everything they might need.
- Early education of young people to identify signs.
- Make it more obvious how young people can access help and advice if they're concerned about themselves or others.
- Off topic but I find CAMHS to be not very supportive as I was ignored and felt to form of confidentiality.

Next steps

- Working with schools to develop wellbeing ambassadors to raise awareness of neglect and what to do/who to go to if they feel they or someone they know may be suffering neglect.
- Then utilising this channel as a regular voice into the Partnership.

What could you and your service/organisation do to support hearing the voice of our children and young people and their experiences of neglect or to support them to seek help if they need it?

How will you act on the feedback you have heard?

Thank you

www.swindon.gov.uk



NSPCC

The relationship between Poverty and Neglect

Andrew Freeman – Assistant Director SWCI
**Eavan Mckay - Senior Policy & Public Affairs
Officer**

Defining neglect

Neglect is defined 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); or
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Defining neglect

The normalisation of neglect:

- Difficult to define as it does not typically involve an abusive act, but omissions in care .
- Including the word 'persistent' sets an expectation for long standing maltreatment – this is problematic
- Professionals must decide when omissions in care reach the threshold deemed 'persistent'.
- 60% of social workers reported pressure to 'downgrade' neglect and emotional abuse cases
- 'Normalisation and desensitisation to warning signs of neglect'
- Neglect can be 'smokescreen' where are less likely to be believed or investigated for other abuse

Risk factors for neglect

Individual-level risk factors

- Evidence indicates significant crossover with the risk factors for all other forms of maltreatment, but that some children are more vulnerable to neglect. This includes babies and infants, children who live with siblings or other children are at increased risk and children with disabilities
- There is also evidence that older teenagers (aged 16-17) are at a higher risk of neglect
- Several parental and familial characteristics can increase the risk of child neglect. This includes parents who have experienced neglect and abuse themselves as children, young parents, single parents, parents with physical and learning disabilities and parents who suffer from loneliness or social isolation

Risk factors for neglect

Structural risk factors

- Evidence shows the likelihood of neglect increases when parental problems occur within the context of societal risk factors such as **poverty**, which are beyond the parent's control and reflect failures in economic, social, health and education systems
- The relationship between poverty and neglect is both nuanced and sensitive. Many parents living in poverty make astonishing sacrifices to ensure that their children are not adversely impacted by material hardship. While we must be clear that not all children living in poverty experience neglect, nor does neglect only happen in families living in poverty, emerging evidence does draw out the link between poverty and all forms of harm. The link is most prevalent between poverty and neglect.
- Families from the poorest neighbourhoods are 14 times more likely to be referred to children's social care than those from the richest areas.
- Poverty interacts with psychological and social factors, acting directly through material hardship and indirectly through things like parental stress, feelings of stigma and social isolation. Research shows that parents with a low income, or living in poorer neighbourhoods, are more likely to feel chronically stressed than other parents.
- While children in affluent families can also suffer neglect, they may be less visible to social services and have material and social resources to hide evidence or challenge professional decisions. They may be less likely to present with physical indicators of neglect such as poor hygiene, diet or living conditions, but still suffer from emotional or psychological neglect, which are harder to identify or assess.

Risk factors for neglect

“I’m worried about getting through the school holidays. I usually get free school meals and my form teacher always has extra fruit and biscuits she gives out. Dad’s not used to having to do lunch for us as well, and he’s really stressed about work at the moment so I’m worried about reminding him to get stuff in. He hasn’t said it to me, but I don’t think he’s making much money with the cost-of-living crisis at the moment” (Childline caller, girl, aged 13)

Poverty masking neglect

- Researchers have noted ‘whether poverty contributes to neglect is not widely disputed; what remains contentious is whether what is often reported or labelled as neglect simply is poverty’.
- Analysis of Serious Case Reviews shows that poverty can inhibit professionals being assertive in their interactions with parents, and so not responding adequately to risk. The increasingly normalisation of poverty means social workers may focus on providing practical support, such as help with budgeting and rehousing applications, rather than tackling the neglect itself. Professionals may miss the signs of neglect by confusing them with the signs of poverty and may fail to tackle neglect by focussing their attention on material aspects.

Reluctance to acknowledge impact of poverty on neglect

Reluctance to acknowledge impact of poverty on neglect

- The independent reviews of children's social care in both Scotland and England argued for a recognition of the impact of poverty on children's social care and there is international evidence that addressing poverty leads to a reduction in child neglect. However, for practitioners acknowledging the presence and impact of poverty can be difficult in circumstances where it feels insurmountable.
- There is also evidence of a well-meaning, but unhelpful, reluctance to discuss or pass judgement on patterns of parental behaviour when deemed to be associated with poverty.
- To provide direction and confidence for practitioners to address this, national guidance on neglect across the UK needs to explicitly recognise the relationship between structural factors and neglect. Alongside building practitioner confidence to respond to neglect in the context of poverty, the underlying problem that in 2021-22 4.2 million children were living in poverty must also be comprehensively addressed.

Thank you!

Any questions?

So what now...

Andrew Freeman



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