

Cumulative Harm - Neglect

What is cumulative harm?

- Cumulative harm is the build-up of harm caused by episodes of abuse, neglect and other harmful or adverse circumstances or occurrences experienced by a child or young person over a short, medium or long time.
- This can include emotional, physical and psychological harm that is caused by the lack of care and or by the behaviour of parents, carers, other adults, children and young people. It can also be caused by accident and the loss of relationships and changes to primary carers.

The cumulative nature of neglect...

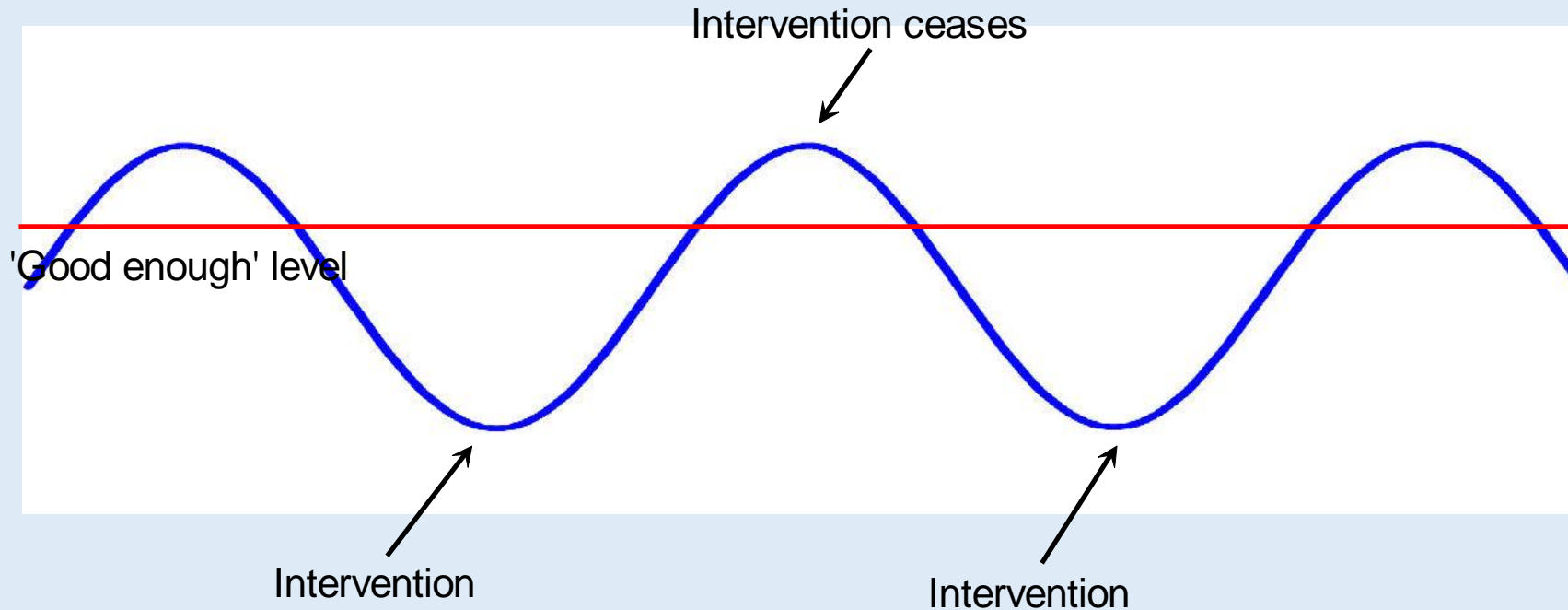
means that without the necessary support, the impact can build up slowly over time, little by little. There may be a presumption that this situation isn't escalating, but the impact on brain development is happening steadily and risk can change quickly. Rather than limiting support, children's services need the resources to support families for longer to prevent chronic neglect. Too little, too late: identifying and tackling neglect | NSPCC Learning A multi-agency response published August 2024.



Impact of Cumulative Harm

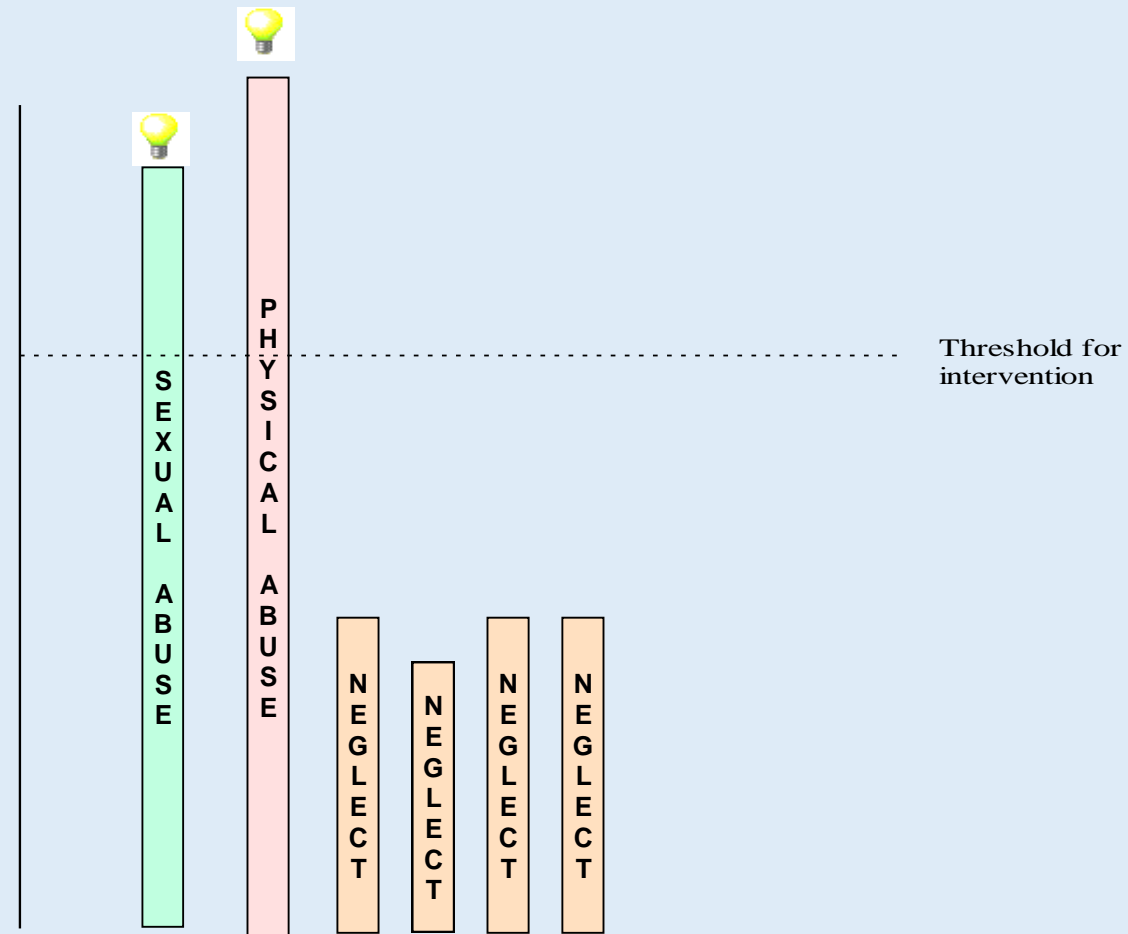
“Chronic neglect over a long period sometimes co-existing with physical, emotional and sexual abuse and that the impacts of neglect can interact with other factors and adversities in a number of ways to increase young people's vulnerability to harm.” (NSPCC)

The Pattern of Neglect

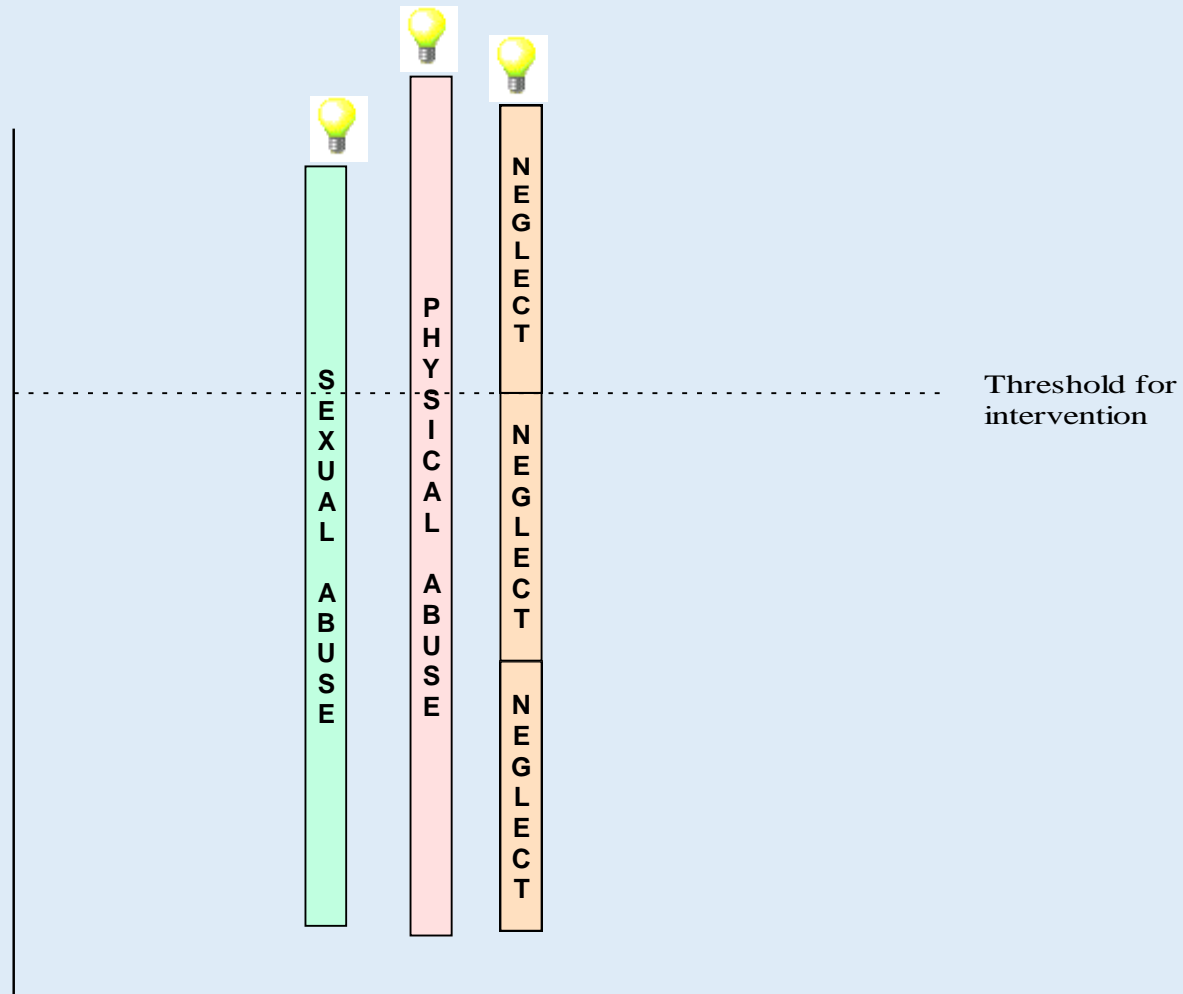


This reflects the professional response to concerns of neglect when support/intervention is offered. A 'good enough' level of care is achieved but when support is withdrawn by agencies this may result in a reoccurrence of the neglect concerns and cumulative harm to the child. This results in further intervention being needed.

Failure of Cumulativeness



Cumulativeness



Build up a picture of cumulative experiences of neglect and assess parental capability to change

- Neglect is a cumulative process, not an isolated incident, so it's important that professionals build up a picture of a family's situation over time.
- Professionals should compile and maintain a multi-agency chronology of key events. The full history of the family should be considered when new concerns arise, including patterns of previous episodes of neglect. Emotional neglect is particularly difficult to evidence, so individual observations should be systematically collated.
- [Neglect: learning from case reviews | NSPCC Learning \(December 2022\)](#)

Risk Factors for Professionals

Consider the following:

- Practitioners often react to risks that are immediate
- Signals which should alert practitioners to dangers within families can be ignored due to optimistic assumptions
- Children in need, or children on the fringe of interventions are generally more at risk of serious harm than those on a child protection plan.
- The *impact* of poverty creates an additional complexity alongside cumulative harm.



Identifying Cumulative Harm	Impact
Read the child's file.	If the harm is caused by the person who is the child/young person's primary care giver or is trusted and loved, the level of trauma increases and is more complex.
Take time to understand the child's history and develop a chronology.	Repeated harm compounds and reinforces the impact of the different types of harm for the child/young person.
Be focused on the child's whole childhood not just the presenting issues – understand their past and present lived experiences from their perspective	Lower levels of harm can become significant if frequent
Work directly with the child/young person to understand their experiences and capture their voice.	Children and young people often communicate the harm they have suffered through their behaviour.
Identify patterns of abuse, impact and harm. Consider any Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Find out more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)	Increased self-blame, self-hatred and negative thoughts "it's my fault, this is all I deserve, it keeps happening so it must be me".
Identify the harm that occurs when children yo-yo in and out of services, what harm are they likely to have suffered from when they were without support?	Repeated harm leads to loss of trust and becoming harder to reach.

Identifying Cumulative Harm	Impact
Start with the first, worst, most recent, frequency and duration of the abuse and identify the likely impact of each. When the abuse is repeated remember this means the impact of harm multiplies.	When a child/young person has managed to tell someone about the harm they have/are suffering and are disbelieved or no safety action is taken, this adds to the harm suffered
Find out and understand the likely impact of different types of abuse and neglect, including all types of exploitation.	Increased vulnerability and risk of other types of harm including exploitation.
Identify experiences of loss and separation, being removed from parents/carers or losing loving relationships causes trauma.	Long standing consequence
Has the child been subject to prejudice abuse based on ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion etc?	Internalise and externalise harm
Include less obvious harm, such as bullying, broken/lost friendships, isolation and poverty.	Adapted behaviour can be mistaken for resilience.
Take into account resilience factors, but make sure this is not just the child adapting or internalizing.	Problems later in childhood can be seen out of context of the harm the child/young person has suffered and they are viewed as the problem or perpetrator only and not as a victim.
Accidental harm can also add to harm	

What can you do?

Showing your workings out....

- Each episode of abuse and/or neglect may not be deemed to be significantly detrimental. However when considered cumulatively, the unremitting daily impact on the child can be profound and exponential, covering all dimensions of a child's life; developmental, social, psychological, relational and educational.
- Practitioners need to be alert to the possibility of multiple adverse circumstances and events, and to consider, not just the current information, but the past history of the child that may be indicative of cumulative harm.
- The cumulative effect of 'minor' harm over time can be just as, or more detrimental, than a single major event of harm.



What can you do?

- Consider harm from the view of the child – by ‘standing in their shoes’ as well as from what research and practice wisdom tells us.
- Be trauma informed in your work with children and families.
- Use plain language that is kind, respectful and not blaming.
- Be professionally curious
- Use the resources - *A day in the life of the child* – see also the guide
 - ✓ Day in my life – Unborn baby
 - ✓ Day in my life – Baby
 - ✓ Day in my life – Pre-school child
 - ✓ Day in my life – Primary school aged child
 - ✓ Day in my life – Adolescent Day in my life – Child with disabilities
- Use other local SSP resources to help you recognise and respond to neglect including:
 - SSP neglect framework and practice guidance - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership
 - Neglect screening tool - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership
 - SSP chronology documents - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership
 - SSP webpages:
 - Neglect - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership
 - Information sharing and consent - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership
 - Professional curiosity - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership



Be AWARE

Capturing the Voice
of the Child

See also Practice
Brief

[Capturing the voice
of the child in
records - Swindon
Safeguarding
Partnership](#)



THE VOICE OF A CHILD



A PPEARANCE

Describe the child's Physical appearance; do they appear thin, pale, dark shadow under their eyes, listless? Or do they appear curious, and 'Smiley'. Have you noticed any patterns Consider factors such as are they appropriately dressed? Are they withdrawn? Have there been any changes.....if so what?



W ORDS

Be professionally curious: take the time to fully understand what has happened and consider what you are being told. Capture and record the child's own words if you can. Look at a child's verbal and non-verbal behaviour: avoid interrupting them and take the time to listen to their feelings about what has happened.

USE
YOUR
VOICE

A CTIVITY & BEHAVIOUR

How is the child/young person interacting with professionals and other children? Are they acting out or being aggressive? What is the context? Does the child/Young person respond as you would expect a child/Young person to respond in that situation?



Be aware of how misconceptions and stereotypes can affect our practice: previous experiences and/or biases can affect our ability to recognise harm or abuse.



R ELATIONSHIPS & DYNAMICS

Is parental interaction appropriate between parents/guardian and child? Who is with the child? Consider social relationships- are they isolated, who are their friends? Who do they live with? Who cares for them (consider other names they mention, who are they?) Do you have any concerns? Use your professional knowledge and be curious



E NVIRONMENT

Think about the environment you are speaking to children in: can they speak freely? Is it somewhere they feel comfortable? Be aware of sensory triggers. Would moving elsewhere help them to express their views e.g. going for a walk

SAFE
ZONE