

Self-Neglect & Neglect Themes & Learning from Reviews

Jackie Chipping & Amber Webster

Purpose of the session



- To reflect on the learning from Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews regarding child neglect and parental self neglect in Swindon
- To provide information to practitioners on how to recognise self neglect and appropriate responses to support parents/care givers and their children
- To consider a Think Family approach in our safeguarding work to support the holistic needs of families
- To provide resources to support safeguarding practice and professional development

Local Children Safeguarding Practice Reviews(LCSPR)

- Between June and August 2025 two of the referrals for Safeguarding Practice Reviews were received with themes of child neglect and self-neglect for parents.
- The National Panel highlighted the below in respect of the Willow Sisters:

“We thought that the mother’s identified self-neglect particularly in relation to her ability to engage with services offered was a key issue to explore in assessing her parenting capacity and it merits further consideration. We also agree that child neglect and the role of the children as young carers seemed to have become normalised over time, without consideration of the impact of this upon their daily lives and experiences.”

- The two LCSPR’s are named ‘Lola’ and ‘The Willow Sisters’ published 29th June 2026.
- A thematic review has also been undertaken with a strong focus on child neglect and parental capacity.

Lola

- Is a child under 6yrs who was found by Children's Social Care and the Police to be living in very poor and unhygienic home conditions, having been notified by the Housing Service.
- Her living space had ants and flies everywhere, mouldy food, and broken glass on the floor.
- Lola was observed to be unkempt, she had bruising on her feet and face, was inappropriately dressed, and had unsatisfactory sleeping arrangements; she could not walk down the stairs unaided.
- There were concerns that Lola may not have been outside her home for a long time, she was overwhelmed by lots of people and pointed to birds and bicycles not knowing what they were.
- Lola shared that she had not eaten all day and asked for a bath.
- Lola was not registered with a GP surgery or dentist and had not had her immunisations.
- She had never been to nursery or school; her mother, who was living with her, reported that she was home educated.
- Electricity and water had been cut off by the property owner to expedite the family vacating the property. It transpired and we now know that Lola and her mother had moved at least four times, often hotel hopping, in the preceding months.
- As a result of Children's Social Care and the Police intervention that day, Lola is now safe, no longer living with her mother, and embarking on a new chapter in her childhood.

Willow Siblings

- This review examined a sibling group being removed from the care of their mother in 2025 due to persisting concerns about neglect and significant harm.
- The removal to alternative care arrangements was preceded by many years of services being involved with the family and included periods of being subject to Child in Need and Child Protection Plans.
- The oldest child in the sibling group has described professional involvement by commenting:
- ***‘Why doesn’t anything change? ...’*** she shared that they have been involved loads of times and she has never found it to be any help or support and there have never been any changes.
- In the immediate weeks prior to being removed, there had been a legal planning meeting, and considerable input from the professional network.
- Despite this, on the day that legal protection was used, the children were found to be living with broken glass, human and animal faeces around the house, living in dirty, cluttered, and unhygienic conditions including bugs in toothpaste and flies on unwashed crockery, having no clean clothes, and the older children taking on significant caring responsibilities for their younger siblings and mother.

Willow Siblings Learning

- The professional network did not effectively assess or understand the mother's needs in terms of parenting capacity and capacity to change.
- When concerns arise about the possibility of a child taking on caring responsibilities, either for siblings or a parent, early assessment and taking a whole family approach is important.
- Being a young carer can lead to a child:
 - taking on adult responsibilities too early,
 - neglecting their own needs,
 - having unmet needs,
 - a lack of adult supervision,
 - and combined have a cumulative impact on the child's overall health, development and safety.
- There was:
 - a normalisation of neglect.
 - adultification of the children in terms of their caring responsibilities.
 - a lack of support to mother re self neglect issues



Panel Member Ian Critchley introduces the key themes from our new thematic analysis on child neglect, **"Why did it take so long to respond?"** Duration 3:47 minutes.

Link: [An introduction to our thematic analysis on child neglect – Ian Critchley, Panel member - YouTube](#)

Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel

Child neglect: A thematic analysis (2026) noted:

Assessments have focused on children's behaviour rather than exploring the parenting context that shapes it ie children are "consistently late for school " or " out of control" without consideration of parental responsibility or the emotional environment of the home – leading to inadvertently blaming the child for the consequences of neglect and obscures the need for support to parents.

Themes from LCSPRs

- Failure to recognise and understand parent's behaviour and capacity including consideration of history of domestic abuse and parental mental health.
- Intersectionality of risk factors e.g. self neglect on parenting capacity.
- A Lack of:
 - consideration of how self neglect impacts on children
 - information sharing between partner agencies to gain a holistic picture of the children's lived experience.
 - professional curiosity
- Voice of the child and their lived experience.
- Both reviews highlight the lack of liaison between children's and adult services to provide support to meet the holistic needs of the family.

Themes on Self-Neglect and Child Neglect from LCSPRs

- In both reviews the parental self–neglect **was not** explored in terms of the parent’s ability to engage with appropriate support and in the assessment of parental capacity to change.
- In **the Willow review** it was found that the Early Intervention service had referred to Adult Social Care but threshold was not met for their intervention. There was a lack of exploration of home conditions and consideration of the impact on the children due to their caring responsibilities.
- There were missed opportunities between Adult and Children’s Services to assess and meet the holistic needs of the family and to offer appropriate support to safeguard the children.
- There was a lack of :
 - a whole family and trauma informed approach in safeguarding practice.
 - analysis of the parent’s experience of Adverse Childhood Experiences and the impact on parenting capacity.

Think Family

- The LCSPRS have highlighted the need to **Be Curious and Think Family** to Safeguard Children.
- Practitioners should ask:
 - Are there children living within the household and being cared by a parent who self-neglects?
 - What is it like to be a child in this family or household on a daily basis ?
 - Do I routinely consider how parental vulnerabilities e.g. parental self neglect ,mental health , domestic abuse and substance misuse impact parenting capacity?
- The [National Panel Neglect thematic report \(2026\)](#) highlighted many families experiencing neglect and also facing other complex challenges, but interventions rarely adopted a Think Family approach which addressed both children's and adult's needs.
- There was limited collaboration between children's and adult services and little consideration of how parental vulnerabilities affected parenting capacity

Parental self-neglect and child neglect

- If a parent struggles with personal care, hygiene and daily living it impacts on their capacity to provide a safe nurturing environment for their children.
- A parent's self-neglect often is a warning sign for issues that impact on a child's welfare.
- **Shared Environmental Risks** – parents who neglect their own living conditions e.g. hoarding, poor hygiene expose children to physical hazards
- **Capacity and Mental Health** – unmanaged mental health struggles, trauma or substance dependency can lead a parent to withdraw leading to an inability to care for themselves and failure to provide adequate food , supervision and medical care for the child
- **Cycle of Emotional Neglect** – When a parent is emotionally depleted or lacking self worth, they may become misattuned to their child's emotional needs
- **Role Reversal** - Children in these environments often are forced to take on adult responsibilities - acting as carers for their parents or younger siblings-adultification.

Recognising different types of child neglect

A quick reference guide for practitioners

Physical neglect



Failure to meet a child's basic physical needs.

- Poor hygiene, dirty or inappropriate clothing, persistent nappy rash
- Underweight or always hungry
- Lack of essential items such as bedding or heating

Environmental neglect



Unsafe, unhygienic, or harmful living conditions.

- Serious hoarding or clutter
- Vermin infestations, no safe food storage
- Broken or unsafe appliances

Medical neglect



Failure to seek medical treatment or follow advice.

- Missed medical appointments
- Medication not collected or treatment plans not followed
- Untreated injuries or medical conditions

Emotional neglect



Failure to provide emotional warmth, stability, or responsiveness.

- Child withdrawn, anxious, overly compliant
- Harsh, unpredictable or unavailable parenting
- Child taking on adult roles (parentification)

Educational neglect



Failure to ensure educational needs, including SEND, are met.

- Lack of support for child's attendance at their registered school
- Inadequate, inappropriate or unstimulating home education provision
- Lack of support for child's educational progress or SEND provision

Supervisory neglect



Lack of supervision or exposure to unsafe situations.

- Young children left alone or with unsafe caregivers
- Inadequate sleep routines, absence of boundaries
- Adolescents frequently unsupervised late at night

Red flags for identifying neglect



- Repeated short interventions with no sustained change
- Multiple agencies providing food and clothes (compensatory care)
- Parents repeatedly declining support
- Child not seen alone, barriers to the child's environment being seen
- Concerns recorded as isolated incidents but build up over time

Frequently missed forms of neglect



- Dental neglect: untreated pain, decay, missed check-ups
- Mental health neglect: missed appointments, distress not explored, self-harm indicators
- Sleep neglect: unsafe or inconsistent sleeping arrangements, particularly for babies
- Disability or SEN neglect: missed therapy, lack of communication support, specialist equipment not used or maintained

What practitioners should do



- ✓ Name neglect explicitly in records and discussions
- ✓ See the child - in person and alone where appropriate
- ✓ Observe the home environment
- ✓ Use multi-agency chronologies
- ✓ Proactively share information, especially around compensatory care
- ✓ Consider cultural and disability contexts
- ✓ Be mindful of the difference between poverty and neglect
- ✓ Use structured assessment tools

This graphic is available as a poster and can be downloaded for free on the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel Learning Hub [click on this link to download](#) a copy.

Self-Neglect: Why It Matters in Children's Services

UNDERSTANDING THE
IMPACT OF SELF-NEGLECT
ON CHILD WELFARE



Learning Objectives

What is self-neglect?

Why does it matter in children's services?

Recognising indicators and risks

Working effectively with adults who self-neglect

Understanding pathways, referrals and support available



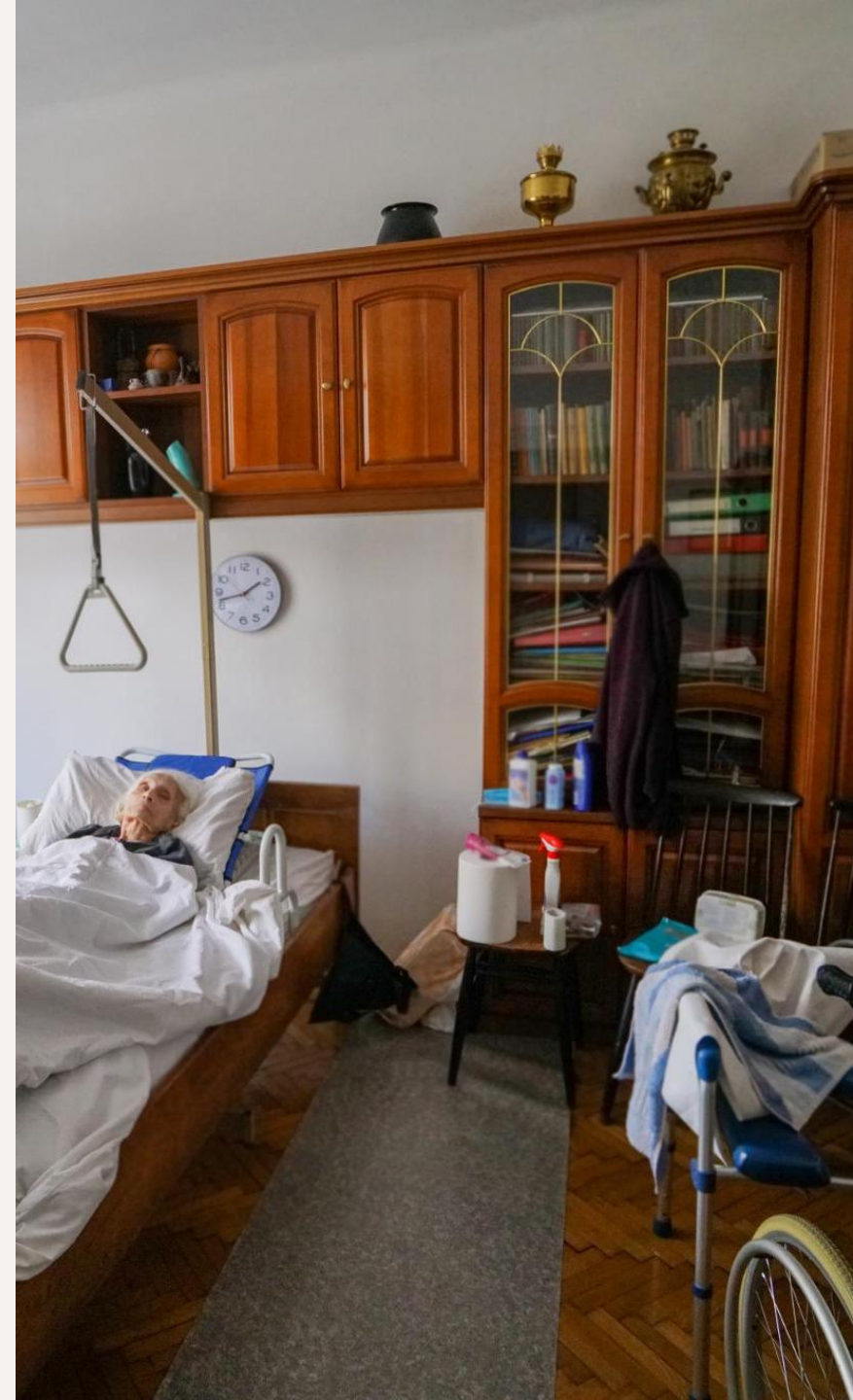
Defining Self-Neglect

Self Neglect (Care Act 2014)

“Self-neglect covers a wide range of behaviour, neglecting to care for one’s personal hygiene, health or surroundings, and includes behaviour such as hoarding.”

In practice, this may include:

- Poor personal care or hygiene
- Living in unsafe or hazardous conditions
- Not seeking or engaging with support
- Behaviours such as hoarding



Understanding Self Neglect

Often misunderstood as 'choice'

- Self-neglect is rarely a conscious decision.
- It often develops in response to complex life experiences

What may sit underneath

- Trauma, mental ill-health, loss, poverty or stress
- Reduced motivation and difficulty making decisions

Impact on engagement

- People may feel judged or misunderstood
- May struggle to accept support, even when risks are clear

Why this matters for practice

- Requires empathy and professional curiosity
- Parents may self-neglect while still caring about their children



Why Self-Neglect Matters in Children's Services: Think Family

Impact on Parenting Capacity

Self-neglect can reduce parents' ability to meet children's basic needs and maintain safe home environments.

Risks to Child Wellbeing

Children may experience poor hygiene, lack of food, and unstable routines that impact development

Holistic and Integrated Approach

Adult and child safeguarding are interconnected and must be addressed together.

What this means for practice

Understanding self-neglect strengthens safeguarding responses for children.



What to Look For

Area	Indicators	Risk / Impact
Home environment	Clutter, hoarding, lack of basic facilities or utilities	Fire risk, falls, unsafe conditions for children; impact on neighbours
Self-care and health	Poor hygiene, untreated medical needs, poor nutrition	Health deterioration; reduced ability to meet children's needs
Engagement and behaviour	Not engaging with services, refusing support, difficulty managing daily tasks	Risks remain unmanaged; increasing vulnerability
Daily living and support	Financial difficulties, isolation, limited support networks	Reduced resilience; risks escalate without support

Knowing, Being, and Doing



Knowing: Understanding the Person

Understanding the person

Look beyond behaviour – consider history, trauma and context

Recognise patterns, risks and underlying needs



Being: How you engage

Be respectful, consistent and non-judgemental

Build trust and remain professionally curious

Stay alongside, even when engagement is difficult



Doing: Taking action

Take a proportionate approach

Start small – focus on achievable changes

Work with others as risk increases

When to Consider Adult Safeguarding

Referral should be considered when:

- The adult has care and support needs
- Is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect
- And is unable to protect themselves

Using the Decision Support:

The [Decision Support Tool](#) contains lists of examples to support professionals in their decision-making on the best course of action

When to Refer:

- Significant health deterioration or risk to life
- Unsafe / hazardous environment (e.g. fire risk, squalor)
- Risks impacting others (children, neighbours)
- Repeated concerns or risks not being managed
- Concerns such as cuckooing, exploitation or severe neglect



When to Consider Adult Social Care

Consider a referral when:

- There are possible care and support needs
- The adult is struggling to manage daily living
- There are concerns about health, self-care or safety
- The person may benefit from a Care Act assessment

Examples may include:

- Difficulty managing personal care, nutrition or medication
- Struggling to maintain a safe home environment
- Increasing vulnerability or loss of independence
- Limited support network or risk of isolation

Key message

- Does not need to meet safeguarding threshold
- Early referral can prevent escalation and reduce risk



Key Messages and Reflection



- Self-neglect is often complex and rarely a lifestyle choice
- Early signs can be subtle – look for patterns, impact and increasing risk
- Adult self-neglect can directly affect children, parenting capacity and family life
- Understanding pathways and working collaboratively supports earlier intervention
- Recognising self-neglect strengthens safeguarding responses for children

Questions



Useful Resources





Neglect Webpage and Resources

The screenshot shows the Swindon Safeguarding Partnership website. At the top left is the logo, which includes a rainbow umbrella and the text 'Swindon Safeguarding Partnership'. To the right of the logo is a search bar with the text 'Search this site' and a 'Search' button. Below the search bar is a navigation menu with links for 'Home', 'About', 'Adults', 'Children and young people', 'Policies and publications', 'Learning Hub', and 'Subscribe to our newsletter'. Below the navigation menu is a breadcrumb trail: 'You are here: Home | Children and young people | Neglect'. The main heading is 'Neglect'. Below this is a paragraph of text explaining the experience of neglect during childhood. This is followed by another paragraph about the impact of neglect on children and young people. Below that is a paragraph about the most common type of abuse experienced by children and young people in England. This is followed by a paragraph about neglect as a serious form of harm. Below that is a paragraph about published case reviews. This is followed by a paragraph about the Swindon Neglect Strategy 2025-2029. Below that is a paragraph about the information and resources included below. At the bottom of the screenshot is a feedback form with the text: '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.'

We have a dedicated [Neglect](#) webpage with a range of resources for practitioners. This includes information such as:

- ✓ Identifying and responding to neglect including the [SSP neglect framework and practice guidance](#) and [Neglect screening tool](#)
- ✓ Cycles of change
- ✓ Courageous conversations with parents/carers
- ✓ Adolescent neglect
- ✓ Disabled children and neglect
- ✓ A day in the life resources
- ✓ [SSP chronology documents](#)

Supervision and management oversight

- [Defensible decision-making in children's social care - resource pack for practice supervisors: Frontline Briefing \(2022\)](#) – includes a link to download a resource pack which may be useful to partner agencies.
- [Neglect supervision guide](#)
- [Neglect strategy - Appendices 2 and 6](#)
- [Supervision management oversight - Learning from audits](#)

Other relevant useful resources such as:

- ✓ National and local resources, guidance and recordings
- ✓ affluent neglect and the relationship between poverty and neglect
- ✓ Professional response to child neglect in Swindon



Self neglect

"Don't judge me by the chapter you have walked in on. I have a past and a future and not defined by my current situation". Quote from Swindon Experts by Experience.

The [Self-Neglect Strategy](#) outlines the partnership approach we are taking, and is aimed at professionals who are working to reduce self-neglect in Swindon.

It is essential that all partners working with children, adults and the wider public understand what self-neglect is, how it differs from other forms of abuse, and when and how to respond to concerns.

Swindon Safeguarding Partnership's ambition is to work collaboratively across Swindon to prevent self-neglect.

We aim to achieve four overarching strategic outcomes, the four Ps:

- People: Always work with and alongside people who self-neglect
- Prevention: Always work to reduce the risk of serious self-neglect
- Partnership: Always bring partners together to support those who self-neglect
- Practice: Always developing and supporting best practice for Swindon

Definitions of self neglect and of hoarding

What to look for

Why is this important?

What the research tells us

Reasons for self-neglect and the impact on adult life

A person-centred and trauma informed approach

The cycle of change

Courageous conversations with adults

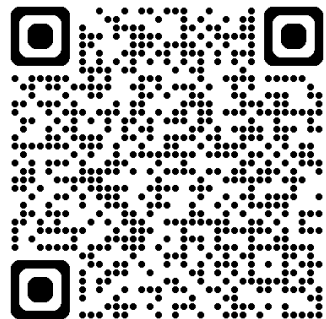
Guidance for professionals when responding to self-neglect

Useful resources

Professional response to self-neglect in Swindon

Self – Neglect Webpage and Resources

- Self-neglect is a strategic priority for Swindon Safeguarding Partnership.
- It is essential that all partners working with children, adults and the wider public understand what self-neglect is, how it differs from other forms of abuse, and when and how to respond to concerns.
- It will be our safeguarding theme for July, and we will be providing additional information then.
- In the interim you can visit the SSP webpage by clicking on this link [Self neglect](#) or using the QR code to find out more.





Access the resources via the links below:

- [Courageous & challenging conversations guidance](#).
- [Courageous and challenging conversations tool](#)

These can also be found on the [SSP Neglect webpage](#) under *courageous conversations with parent/carers*.

New Courageous & Challenging Conversations Resources

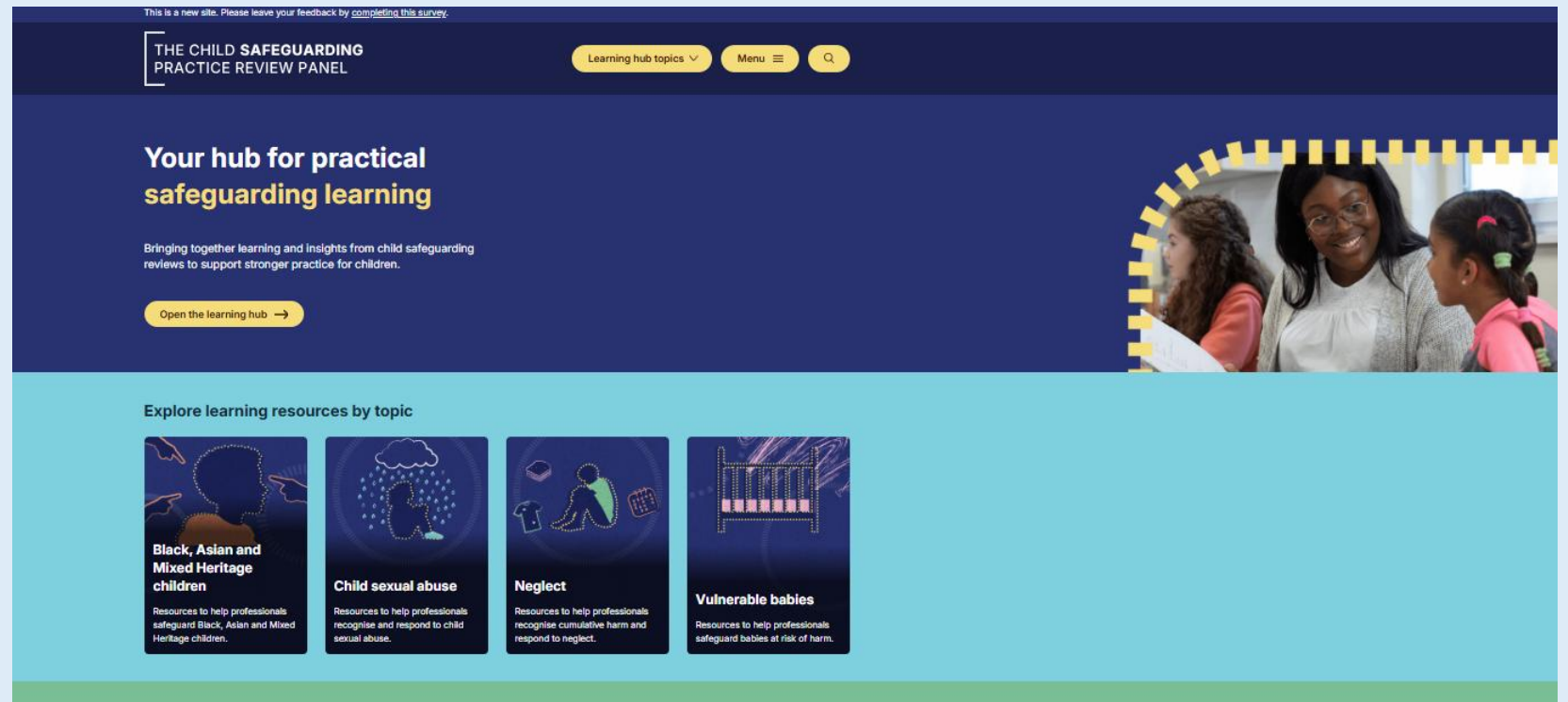
- Courageous and challenging conversations are an important feature of safeguarding children. Honest discussions about concerns can be uncomfortable and sometimes difficult to manage.
- Professionals' own worries or uncertainties about holding these conversations can lead to delay in concerns being discussed or raised and issues being understood or resolved.
- Sometimes it can also mean that information is taken at face value or assumptions are made, which do not safeguard the well-being and safety of children.
- A frequent issue identified in practice reviews has been the lack of effective or sufficient challenge by professionals, including not questioning parent or carers accounts of events, being reluctant to discuss child welfare concerns, and not making use of escalation procedures to explore multi-agency disputes and challenges with other professionals.

Voice of the Child

- Consider harm from the view of the child – by ‘standing in their shoes’ as well as from what research and practice wisdom tells us.
- Reflect the child's daily lived experience.
- 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
- Appendix 1 SSP neglect framework and practice guidance also has some questions for practitioners to assist in understanding children’s lived experience of neglect.
- [Practice Brief: Capturing the voice of the child in records](#)

***Ask yourself -
‘What is it like to
be a child in this
family or
household on a
daily basis?’***

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel have a new website and learning hub.



There is information and resources on themes relating to Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children, child sexual abuse, neglect and vulnerable babies.

Click on this link to access: [Your hub for practical safeguarding learning](#)

Useful resources regarding neglect can be found on the following links:

[Neglect | Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel](#)
[Child neglect: A thematic analysis](#)
[Poster](#)

'Why Doesn't Anything Change'

Published 29th June 2026 Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (LCSPR) - 'Lola', 'Liam', 'Willow Children' and Thematic Review

- [LCSPR: 'Lola' full report, June 2026 \(PDF\)](#)
- [LCSPR: 'Liam' full report, June 2026 \(PDF\)](#)
- [LCSPR: 'Willow Children' full report, June 2026 \(PDF\)](#)
- [Thematic review: 'Why Doesn't Anything Change', June 2026 \(PDF\)](#)
- [7-minute learning brief: 'Why Doesn't Anything Change', June 2026 \(PDF\)](#)

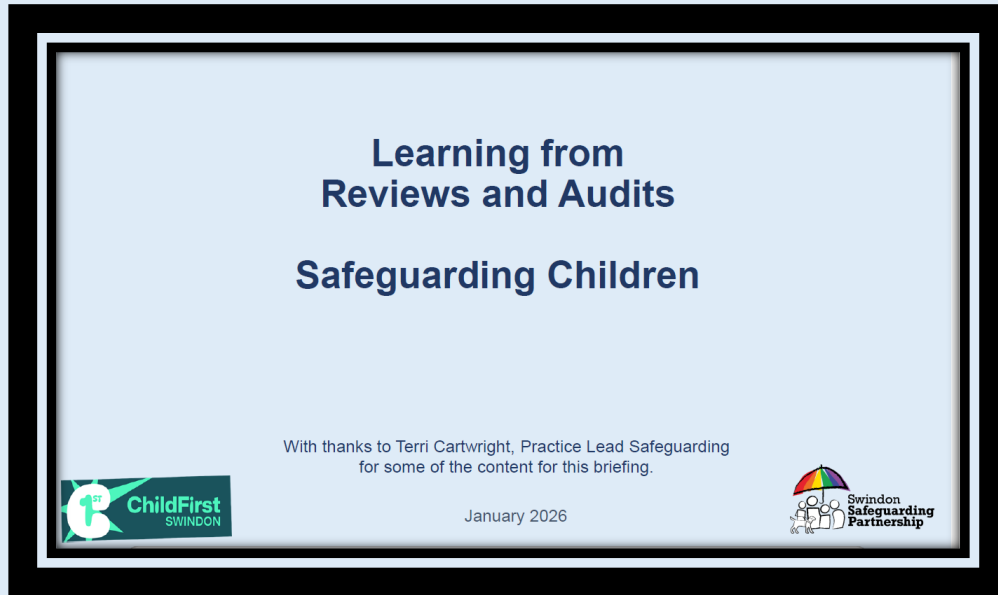
Previous Monthly Safeguarding Themes Resources

The following monthly resources have a range of information:

- Safeguarding theme February - Staying safe online
- Safeguarding theme March - All age exploitation
- SSP Safeguarding theme April - Unborn babies and under 2s
- SSP Safeguarding theme May - Mental Health Awareness
- SSP Safeguarding theme June - Child neglect
- SSP Safeguarding theme July – Self-Neglect

Recurring learning themes identified in safeguarding reviews and audits

- In Swindon, over the past year, several recurring learning themes have been identified in child safeguarding reviews and audits.
- Themes have been outlined in learning resource [Learning from reviews and audits](#) (published January 2026) and includes signposting to relevant resources.
- A webinar was delivered in February 2026, and the recording can be accessed via this [link](#)
- Some of the learning themes will also be relevant to safeguarding adults



Neglect isn't always obvious.

Professional curiosity can make the difference

Useful Resources:

SSP Webpage: Professional curiosity includes a range of information, resources and video clips.

eLearning: Being professionally curious

Practice Briefs

- **SSP:** Professional Curiosity Resource Pack
- **SSP:** Working with resistance or disguised compliance
- Professional Curiosity Learning Resource SABN
- Posters for professionals
- **New!** Being Professionally Curious aide memoir

1st April 2026 was Professional Curiosity Day and we asked for some of your top tips and these are included on the next slide.

Be curious...



SSP Resources

- [Adult safeguarding policy and procedures](#)
- [Multi-agency policy and guidance on responding to self-neglect](#)
- [Self-neglect - 7-minute brief](#)
- [Think Family' Practice Guidance](#)
- [SSP chronology guidance](#)
- [Information sharing and consent](#)
- [Safeguarding Adult Reviews \(SARs\)](#)
- [Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and Case Learning leaflets](#)

Feedback

We would like to here your views about this webinar.
Please take a couple of minutes to give us your feedback

Either via the link below

[Learning from Reviews and Audits -Evaluation form](#)

or scanning the QR code.



Are you on our circulation list?

Do you want to be kept updated about SSP related matters such as training, learning resources and our newsletter?

You can sign up to our circulation list circulation list by clicking on this link: <https://forms.office.com/e/f7CRNF6Wax>

Or using the QR code.



You can ask to be removed at any time by emailing safeguardingpartnership@swindon.gov.uk

