

Briefing for schools

Responding to concerns of neglect

October 2017

[Neglect](#) is a serious form of abuse that can affect children's health, mental wellbeing and life chances.

Children spend most of their time at school, so school staff and volunteers are in a good position to notice any worrying changes in the behaviour or physical condition of a child and take timely action.

School policy, ethos and training

All schools must have a child protection policy that includes a recognised definition of neglect and outlines what action staff should take if they have a concern about a child. All staff and volunteers should be familiar this policy.

Staff should also be aware of the need to record even low level concerns and report concerns to the school's designated safeguarding lead. It is important for staff to have attended [child protection training](#) so they are better placed to recognise potential signs of abuse or neglect.

The voice of the child should be embedded in the way the school runs. The ethos of the school should promote a message that lets children know it is okay to speak to any member of staff if they are worried about anything, knowing they will be listened to and their concerns taken seriously.

It is a good idea for schools to display posters around the building signposting children to services that might be able to help them if they are worried such as [Childline](#).

Activities such as breakfast clubs, after school activities, nurture groups, pastoral support and family liaison could all be used to demonstrate how schools are addressing early help for neglect. Schools could also use the pupil premium to address achievement issues.

Peer support schemes can be an effective way of encouraging young people to share concerns. This can help to create an atmosphere of trust and make it more likely that problems are picked up.

It is useful to map out what the school is doing in relation to concerns about neglect in the same way as additional provision for children with special educational needs is mapped and allocated.

What school staff should do if they are worried about a child

Schools need high quality reporting, recording and reviewing procedures and it is imperative that information is shared and not just placed in a folder and not reflected upon. Unfortunately it is often a high profile event involving a pupil that forces a school to look into the number of instances and it is only then that the pattern is identified which may have prevented the incident in the first place.

Neglect can be difficult to identify so it is important that any concern, however small, is recorded by staff and reported to the designated safeguarding lead. Seemingly small concerns can sometimes be part of a bigger picture.

Since schools have regular contact with children and families, they are likely to be in a position where they can notice early signs of neglect. These include:

- changes in attendance i.e. frequently being late for school or picked up late
- poor hygiene
- inadequate clothing for the weather conditions i.e. no winter coat
- a child being tired all the time and finding it hard to concentrate
- parent/carers lack of interest in their child's educational attainment or wellbeing at school
- weight loss/ being hungry all the time and having no packed lunch or money for food.

If a member of staff has a concern about a child but is unsure of how to progress with it they should discuss it with the designated safeguarding lead and consider the following questions:

- does the child get themselves ready for school in the morning?
- do they have breakfast?
- how do they get to school?
- do they come to school dressed appropriately and with all the things they need?
- how does the child interact with other children and with adults at school?
- does the child seem happy at school?
- what happens after school?

Discussing these questions with the designated safeguarding lead should help the school to build up a picture of the child's daily routines around and during the school day. This is important because:

- neglect is hard to define
- the effects of neglect are cumulative, and it can be difficult for professionals to identify the point at which to make a referral
- neglect often co-exists with other forms of child maltreatment. Boundaries between abuse and neglect can become blurred.

When making referrals relating to neglect, schools will need to present as much information as possible with as much detail about their concerns and the impact on the child.

Some concerns may not reach local authority thresholds for intervention, which can be frustrating for staff. It is important that they feel supported by the management team to progress with concerns, and that schools can challenge decisions they do not agree with and achieve the best possible outcome for the child.

Lessons and assemblies

Schools should aim to make children aware of all forms of abuse in an age appropriate way through lessons and assemblies, this will encourage children to feel more confident about coming forward with any worries they may have.

The NSPCC [Speak out. Stay Safe](#) programme enables trained volunteers to go into schools to deliver assemblies and lessons to children aged 5-11 about all forms of abuse.

Children also need to be taught about healthy relationships, how parents and carers care for us and what happens when basic needs are not met. PHSE (England), PDMU (Northern Ireland), and PSE (Wales and Scotland) lessons can be used to teach children about neglect and other forms of abuse and for primary school children 'circle time' can be used as a means for children to share any worries they may have.

Working in partnership with other organisations

Strong communication between schools and local authorities can help with recognising risk and determining thresholds. LSCBs are a useful source of advice and support for many schools and can provide specialist training.

It is important to establish links with organisations that can provide advice, support and services to parents and families, including offering parenting programmes. In

some cases this support is provided in-school with school staff involved. Schools also need to be able to signpost and help parents to access support.

It is really important that any changes that schools notice, either positive or negative, are fed back to the agencies working alongside them and the family themselves.

Useful links

[Keeping children safe in education](#)

[National guidance for child protection in Scotland](#)

[Safeguarding and child protection in schools - A guide for schools](#)

[All Wales Child Protection Procedures Review Group](#)

National helplines

[Childline](#) – 0800 1111

[NSPCC](#) – 0808 800 5000

[Family Lives](#) – 0808 800 2222

Online training for schools

- [Child protection in schools](#)
- [Safer recruitment in education](#)
- [Managing sexualised behaviour in primary schools](#)
- [Keeping children safe online](#)

Contact the NSPCC's Knowledge and Information Service with any questions about child protection or related topics:

Tel: 0808 800 5000 | Email: help@nspcc.org.uk | Twitter: [@NSPCCpro](https://twitter.com/NSPCCpro)

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