

Multi-Agency Response to Children Experiencing Neglect

September 2022

1 Summary

North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NYSCP) carried out a deep dive multi-agency audit into Multi-Agency safeguarding responses to children and young people experiencing neglect. The Audit examined four children who were referred for safeguarding concerns to North Yorkshire County Council between September 2020 and January 2021.

2 Children and young people Experiencing Neglect

Neglect is:

'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'.

Neglect can be in many forms including:

- Medical neglect is when the child's health needs are not met or they are not provided with appropriate treatment as a result of illness
- Nutritional neglect, usually associated with inadequate food for normal growth leading to "failure to thrive" (now referred to as 'faltering growth')
- Emotional neglect which can involve deliberately trying to scare or humiliate a child or isolating or ignoring them.
- Educational neglect includes carers failing to comply with state requirements, but also include the broader aspects of education such as providing a stimulating environment; showing an interest in the child's education and supporting their learning including that any special educational needs are met.
- Physical neglect refers to the dirty state of the home, lack of hygiene, lack of heating, inadequate and/or broken furniture and bedding
- Failure to Provide Supervision & Guidance refers to the carer failing to provide the level of guidance and supervision to ensure that the child is physically safe and protected from harm.

3 What considerations are taken by agencies and professionals?

When considering if a child is experiencing neglect, professionals need to consider child neglect not only affects young children but profoundly impacts the significant age range of 11-18 years old.

Neglect may arise from a lack of knowledge, competing priorities, stress or deprivation. Using an Early Help approach to start conversation with the right people to identify how help can be provided.

4 What did the audit find – areas working well?

The Multi-Agency Audit Group identified good practice across cases including:

- **Recognition of Neglect:** Although one case presented as acute neglect (rather than the more usual longer term presentation) practitioners recognised this and responded quickly.
- **Communication:** The audit group noted good practice in communication with families.
- **Children in Schools:** It was noted that school has been very positive and happy place for one child.
- **Early Help:** Evidence of good engagement with Early Help services to support the child and family.
- **Engagement with men and wider family:** Good practice was identified with regards to engagement with the child's father and wider family support network in assessment and the provision of support. However, it should be noted in some cases, despite professionals' attempts to engage, fathers did not always do so.
- **Quality of joint work:** Evidence of good attendance at meetings and positive engagement with schools
- **Assessment and Planning:** Evidence of good multi-agency engagement with assessment and planning and the production of some dynamic plans

5 What did the audit find – areas for development?

The Multi-Agency Audit Group identified the following areas for development across cases including:

- **Recognition of substance misuse:** The audit group questioned in one case whether a mother's substance misuse could have been identified earlier and services provided.
- **Quality of Referrals:** In some cases the quality of referrals could be improved to provide more background information to support the risk assessment process.
- **Child Protection Medicals:** Strategy meetings should consider Child Protection Medical Assessments for cases where neglect has been identified to ensure health needs are identified and addressed
- **Focus on and voice of the child:** In some cases the focus of assessments was more about the parents than work with the child.
- **Strategy Meeting:** Where a physical harm disclosure is made in the context of 'neglect', then a strategy meeting should always be considered along with a Child Protection Medical Assessment.
- **Dental Hygiene:** Poor dental health can be a sign of ongoing neglect.. Professionals should be aware of dental awareness and prompt dental assessment for vulnerable children

6 What has NYSCP done with these findings?

NYSCP has considered key learning points from this audit:

- A report with recommendations has been presented to the Learning and Improvement Subgroup (LIS).
- The approved actions have been transcribed to the LIS Action Plan and monitored through the subgroup on a quarterly basis until completed.
- The LIS will use the learning from this audit to identify any further actions required and develop appropriate guidance as required.

7 Next Steps and Resources

- All agencies involved in the audit will feedback specific good practice and areas for development identified for their service during the audit day discussion.
- The NYSCP Learning and Improvement Subgroup will monitor implementation of the actions to review how learning has been translated into practice.

Framework for decision-making: Right help, at the right time by the right person

Worried about a child?

NYSCP Standards and Criteria

NYSCP Guidance on Professional Curiosity

NYSCP Neglect Practice Guidance