



North East Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership

Neglect Strategy 2023-2026

A strategic plan to prevent and reduce child neglect,
and to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in North East Lincolnshire.

Introduction

A strategic approach to neglect is critical to all professionals and agencies with responsibility for safeguarding. We know from national research, as well as local evidence, the far- ranging disruption and harm of neglect caused to children is likely to have a lasting effect on their adult life. As such, we need to understand the importance of both identifying and addressing concerns relating to neglect early, effectively, and consistently, to improve both childhood and adulthood outcomes in North-East Lincolnshire (NEL). The NEL Neglect mission is:

To prevent children and young people from experiencing neglect and to intervene at the earliest possible stage to tackle its causes and reduce the impact on children when it happens.

NEL aspires to be a place where children feel, and are, safe. We recognise children and young people have a right to live in an environment where they are loved, feel valued and are cared for, so they can reach their full potential and have aspirations. In NEL, too many children and young people have childhoods that are damaged by neglect, very often because parents are struggling with their own challenges which they often cannot solve alone. We believe many cases of neglect in NEL are preventable, and that interventions can be implemented before children are significantly impacted by neglect. It is crucial that when concerns first emerge we are identifying, assessing and ultimately providing a consistent approach that is recognised and accepted by all agencies across NEL.

The objective of this strategy is to therefore strengthen the partnership approach to the challenge of preventing and responding to childhood neglect in NEL. We will achieve this by promoting a shared understanding of neglect and how it impacts children, as well as supporting how multi-agency partners work with families to identify, intervene and support children and families in a consistent manner across the whole of NEL.

The successful implementation of this strategy will be supported by a robust 6 P plan (see separate document). The operation of this will enable practitioners to work collaboratively to protect children who are at risk of neglect across NEL, whilst also anticipating and avoiding a wide range of health and social impacts for future generations of adults and their children.

Neglect in children presents itself through a range of indicators, many of which may relate to their parents/carers. It is therefore key that this strategy applies to all sectors working with children and families across NEL, including the voluntary sector and services who are more 'adult focused'. All such professionals should be knowledgeable, confident, and competent in identifying and defining elements of childhood neglect and understand their role in protecting children from this type of harm.

Defining neglect

An essential part of this strategy is for us in NEL to have a shared understanding and definition of neglect across all services and partners in NEL. This is key in enabling us to develop and embed a collective approach across all sectors in relation to both the development and planning of training and frontline practice.

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 is an essential piece of guidance that is recognised and accepted as 'good practice' across our partnership. This guidance defines neglect 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 can 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, such as older siblings who are children themselves).**
- **Ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.**

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

Why a strategy is needed

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are now better understood and considered by professionals working with families. Experiencing neglect during childhood represents the highest incidence of child abuse / ACEs both locally and nationally. The science behind neglect is widely reported and it is accepted by most that children who grow-up with neglect are likely to experience the consequences of this harm throughout their life course.

When children experience neglect, it is likely they will also experience:

- cognitive developmental delay which impacts on educational achievement and life chances.
- diminished emotional wellbeing and increased behavioural difficulties.
- difficulty in making and keeping relationships.
- limitations on parenting skills that perpetuate inter-generational cycles of neglect.
- Increased exposure to other forms of child abuse because neglect rarely occurs in isolation and by its very nature increases the risk of other forms of abuse to children.

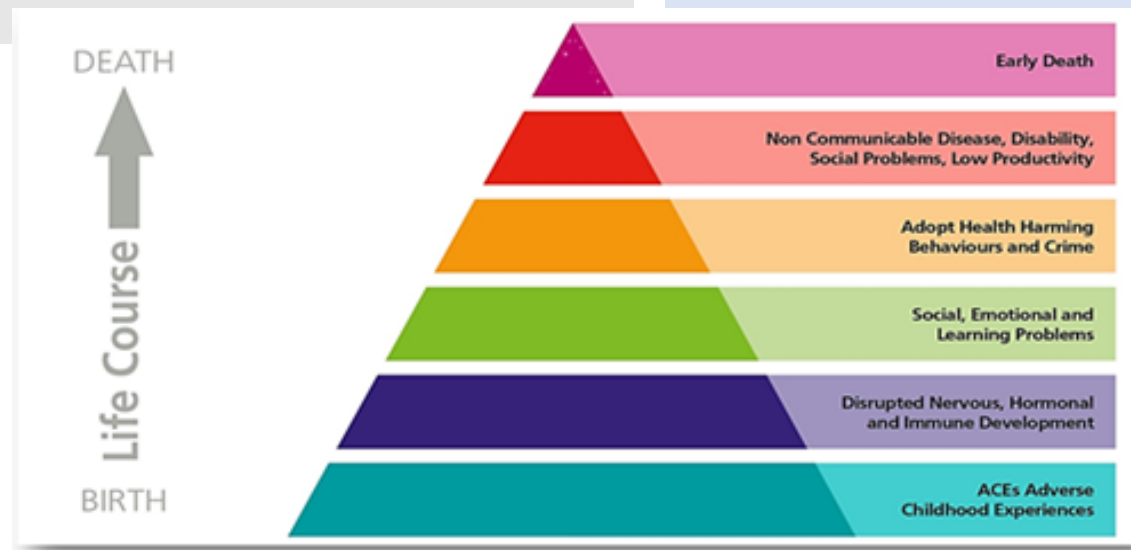
Who is at risk?

Any child in NEL can suffer neglect. But some children and young people are more at risk than others. These include:

- Children who are born prematurely
- Children who have a disability
- Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- Children who have complex health needs
- Children who are seeking asylum.

National Data tells us:

- Neglect is the most common form of child abuse
- Concerns around neglect have been identified for half of children who are the subject of a child protection plan
- An estimated 1 in 10 children experience neglect
- In households where children experience neglect, they are also likely to be exposed to domestic abuse, substance misuse and / or parental mental ill health
- The number of police recorded child cruelty offences is increasing



*Public Health Wales,
'The Welsh Adverse
Childhood Experiences
(ACE) Study' (2016)*

What we know about neglect in North East Lincolnshire

20% of referrals to children's social care during 2021-22 cited 'neglect' as a concern.

29% of children in North East Lincolnshire are on child protection plans under the category of neglect

85% of Children Looked After categories were as a result of abuse or neglect 2021- 2022

It was also noted that children living in more deprived areas are 10x more likely to 'touch' children's social care. Locally, this is more like 18x. NEL was one of the 20% most deprived districts/unitary authorities in England and about 26% of the children in NEL live in 'low-income families'. It has however been recognised that COVID-19 has altered family dynamics in ways that have threatened to put already vulnerable children at increased risk of abuse and neglect. The data from Children's Social Care Integrated Front Door (IFD), showed that in the most deprived wards of NEL, between 30% & 40% of concerns resulted in a referral to Children's Social Care. In the least deprived wards, only 15% of the contacts are referred to Children's Social Care.

It is accepted that neglect and poverty can become 'normalised' and go unnoticed considering the ongoing increases to the cost of living. Nonetheless, equally important is the need for practitioners to observe and think clearly about the interaction of neglect and deprivation. The Nuffield Foundation (2022) highlights very clearly that "family poverty and inequality are key drivers of harm to children" in their own right. Poverty alone however, does not unilaterally equate to neglect and does not mean a child is unsafe, unloved, or that a caregiver lacks the capacity to care for their child. It instead needs to be recognised that neglect can happen in any family. Whilst we acknowledge the varied challenges faced by our communities, in NEL we want to dispel the myth that neglect only happens in 'low income' or 'deprived' families and instead focus on how individual circumstances impact children.

Learning from reviews locally and nationally.

Learning from NEL Line of Sight and Practice Reviews, alongside the key findings from *NSPCC Neglect: Learning from Case Reviews 2022*, outlines the following issues that this strategy will need to address in the delivery plan:

Local practice reviews and line of sight (LOS) themes

- Neglect was a factor in 80% of local reviews
- The voice of the child was not given weight or sought
- Lack of understanding of roles between agencies
- Inconsistent application of tools and thresholds
- Reactive practice
- Frequent injuries viewed in isolation
- Dental decay
- Missed health appointments
- Lack of training

National learning

- Recognising the signs of neglect
- Accessing and engagement with services
- Information sharing
- Case drift
- Professional desensitisation and normalisation of neglect
- Understanding of complex family needs and risk factors

The National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel recommendations

- Greater understanding of the Child's daily life
- Better working with families where engagement is reluctant.
- Improved critical thinking and challenge
- Better response to changing risk
- Improved information sharing
- Enhanced organisational culture and leadership

What we will do.

1) Leadership: Tackling neglect is 'everyone's responsibility', we will adopt a culture of collective strategic responsibility for addressing neglect in North East Lincolnshire. We will establish a multi-agency leadership team to champion this approach, encouraging and supporting everyone's role in preventing and tackling neglect. The neglect strategy delivery plan will be collaboratively designed, promoted, and put into action by the multi-agency group, ensuring that all agencies are well-informed about their contributions to safeguarding children and addressing neglect.

2) Making an Impact: We are committed to empowering all children and young people in our area, ensuring their well-being and reducing the prevalence of neglect across various needs. To achieve this, we will establish outcome measures and use data-driven evidence to monitor and enhance our progress. This includes analysing data from Children's Social Care regarding their caseloads, conducting formal reviews (LOS and practice reviews), and gathering information on professional training and multi-agency case audits. Through this approach, we will strengthen our efforts to make a positive impact on the lives of children and young people in our Borough.

3) Training and Development: We will foster a culture of continuous learning and development for everyone working with children, young people, and families. We will raise awareness and understanding of the signs, symptoms, and impact of neglect. We will implement and integrate professional development resources to empower practitioners across the entire workforce, enabling them to respond to neglect confidently, competently, swiftly, and effectively. Our neglect training and development programmes will be responsive to insights from research, practice reviews, and case audits. Using this knowledge, we can continuously improve our efforts and ensure that all professionals are equipped to provide the best possible support to children, young people, and families in our Borough.

4) Community Awareness: We will promote community awareness of the signs and symptoms of neglect through a communications plan. Our approach will extend to both the public and workforce who may not regularly interact with child safeguarding, such as adult services and the voluntary sector. By engaging the community, we can create a supportive network that works together to prevent neglect. By increasing awareness among various groups, we empower them to play a crucial role in safeguarding children and promoting their well-being. Through this collaborative effort, we can build resilient communities that prioritise the protection and care of their children and young people.

5) Effective Practice: We will strive to achieve a unified, consistent, and integrated approach to addressing neglect. Our emphasis will be on enhancing collaboration and information sharing between agencies to strengthen the collective effort. We will evaluate the effectiveness and impact of assessments and interventions through case audits and referral data. Through this process, we will aim to continuously improve our practices, ensuring they are responsive and meaningful. Our reporting mechanisms will be robust and clearly identify the specific needs of the child. Assessments will delve into the root causes of neglect, allowing us to address them proactively and effectively. By taking this approach, we can ensure that children and young people receive earlier support and interventions, enabling them to thrive in a safe and nurturing environment.

6) The Child's Voice: We will prioritise all children and young people living with neglect to have a voice, allowing them to express their experiences and feelings. Professional training will play a key role in promoting a shared understanding of the consequences of neglect, including its effects on a child's health, safety, and development, while also emphasising the impact of emotional neglect. We will adopt an ACEs/trauma-informed approach to practice, recognising the significance of trauma in shaping a child's experiences. To further support professionals, we will develop a neglect toolkit that equips them with resources and strategies to promote the child's voice when working with families. In taking this approach, we aim to foster a more compassionate and effective response to neglect and its prevention, ensuring that children and young people receive the support they need to thrive.

7) Prevention and Early Support: In line with our *Prevention and Early Help Partnership Strategy for Children and Families* [\[LINK\]](#), we will work to ensure children, young people and their families receive the appropriate support at the right time by the right person. When indicators of neglect are recognised early, understood and responded to consistently as soon as a problem emerges, we could prevent further problems arising. All children need a strong support network of people that care about them. We recognise at times families may need additional support from professionals, which will create a “Team around the Family” or a TAF. The TAF aims to provide support at the earliest opportunity by promoting a whole family approach to working with neglect and or any other worries families may be facing.

8) Assessing Neglect: We will develop a local neglect toolkit and practice guidance that the partnership actively promotes. Our aim is to create simple and clear referral pathways, along with a toolkit and practice guidance that empowers professionals to recognise, assess, and manage neglect using strength-based approaches. To ensure effectiveness, we will review the toolkit's use and regularly update it with new evidence and insights as they become available. This approach enables us to continuously improve our efforts, adapting to the evolving needs of children, young people, and families in our Borough. By adopting a strengths-based approach in assessing neglect, we can better support and empower families, ultimately working towards preventing neglect and promoting positive outcomes for children and young people.

In order to reduce neglect in children and young people, it is crucial that agencies, partners and stakeholders in North East Lincolnshire promote joint ownership throughout the process.

Measures for success.

This strategy and its implementation are accountable to the North East Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership Board and all operational partners. A 6P's Action Plan for Neglect will set out the multi-agency actions required to enable us to deliver this strategy and will include matters in relation to training and strengthening partnerships in the area. The 6 P's action plans that flow from this strategy will be subject to on-going review and challenge from the board. Outcomes from audit activity in relation to neglect cases will be overseen by the quality assurance group.

We aim to achieve the following outcomes/outputs and will measure them as described in our 6 P's action plan (targets/measures to be determined):

1. Children are kept safe from neglect because North East Lincolnshire is following a clear, systematic, multi-agency strategic approach to tackling child neglect in the county
2. Partner agencies are held to account for their performance and quality of interventions with regard to neglect
3. The Safeguarding Children's Partnership understands the prevalence and causes of neglect in North East Lincolnshire through our links with other Boards, Partnerships and Groups.
4. The impact of long-term neglect is reduced because children and young people who are living with neglect are identified early and the right help is put in place at the right time.
5. The North East Lincolnshire safeguarding workforce is skilled, prepared, well trained and works effectively with others to reduce child neglect in the county.

Summary & Next Steps.

We are aware that we need to recognise the emerging signs of physical and emotional neglect much sooner. We are committed to reducing the numbers of children and families experiencing difficulties arising from neglect in several ways. Creating a Toolkit that all professionals can use, whether their involvement is brief or over a longer period of time, has been identified as a practical way to support frontline staff. All professionals, whether they work primarily with children, adults or entire families, have been asked to contribute to the development of identification of the types of tools they need to support them in their respective roles to identify and / or address issues of childhood neglect.

Having conducted a survey with NEL professionals across several agencies, we understand the need to work towards preventing 'early difficulties' from escalating and becoming 'chronic and entrenched', which we know causes significant health and social impacts for future generations of adults and their children. We need to understand what support is available in our local area and how these services can be accessed. Local mapping has been identified as an essential task to help us understand this.

In North East Lincolnshire we are determined to reverse the current trend, so all of our partners have made a joint commitment to tackling neglect by identifying it as one of our main Safeguarding Children Partnership Board priorities.