



Neglect of Adolescent's

We often work within a framework to rescue young children and reform adolescents, not thinking about the “**why?**”. Consider the child in the road at 3am. When it is a 2 year there is a rapid response, when it is a 14 year old we are questioning the child's motives. Older children have been wrongly viewed as being more resilient than their younger counterparts and perceived as ‘making free life choices’ rather than being subject to harm.

The signs of neglect of older children may be more difficult to identify than signs in younger children, and older children may present with different risks. For example, older children may want to spend more time away from a neglectful home, and, given their experience of neglect, they may be more vulnerable to risks such as going missing, offending behaviour or exploitation (HM government 2018). Previously in local reviews there has been a lack of action to address the neglect of health needs and the accompanying emotional impact meant that the child was ill equipped to manage the challenges of adolescence, leading to exploitation and extra-familial harm. There is then a danger that the focus shifts to the young person and they can start to see themselves as “the problem” and interventions focussed on the child or young person can reinforce this, shifting the narrative from “what has happened to them” to “what is wrong with them”.

Neglect has a cumulative effect. Young people may have difficulties coping in school, maintaining supportive social networks and be vulnerable to further victimisation. They may experience a confusing mix of emotions including loyalty to parents, lack in self-confidence, feel they are to blame and feel shame. Where adversities are continuous, compensatory help must be long term.

“I had to grow up since the age of 12 being the parent for this family. They [professionals] saw me as functioning fine...They saw me as working and coping, working fine. They just ignored me completely...”

Positively, the adolescent developmental stage holds distinctive strengths and opportunities.

What is important when responding to neglect of the adolescent?

- Relationships- the ability to sustain intimate friendships, and the availability of support networks of friends, siblings and other important social ties have been associated with resilience, both in childhood and later life (Beardslee et al.1987).
- Aspirations- opportunities for careers or further education will.....result in a greater likelihood of adult stability and increased income. (Rutter 1997)
- Strong social support networks- Exposure to people or events that contradict risk effects will compensate for previous bad experiences and ... help counter the belief that risk is always present. (Rutter 1997). The presence of at least one unconditionally supportive parent or parent substitute, offering the opportunity to develop positive attachment relationships, including the opportunity to develop supportive relationships with a caring adult, mentoring programmes in schools consisting of a one to one relationships with a school staff member.

The involvement of a reliable and committed person from outside the immediate family is widely reported as a factor associated with resilience. Some evidence exists for the effectiveness of mentoring schemes, notably in relation to developing new skills, reducing the risk of social exclusion and improving the ability to make relationships with adults (Alexander 2000; Todis et al 2001)

- Positive school experiences - Schools are one of the key arenas for the promotion of resilience (Wang and Gordon 1994; Wang and Haertel 1995). A belief that one's own efforts can make a difference- Children may learn to respond to stressors and challenges with helplessness - "I can't influence events, what will happen will happen" or optimism - "what I do will make a difference, I can affect the world around me" through providing opportunities for adolescents to develop confidence and competencies (Finch et al. 1991; Mortimer and Finch 1996).
- Participation in positive extra-curricular activities- Meaningful work has been identified as a protective factor for adolescents (Engel 1967; Thiede Call 1996),
- Reframing adversities as well as recognising the damaging effects.

Helping others as well as not to being excessively sheltered from challenging situations If children are exposed to manageable demands and opportunities to succeed in valued tasks, thenthey will develop more competencies and their competencies and self-esteem will grow.

Useful links and video's

[Adolescent health and development \(who.int\)](http://who.int)

[Core info: neglect or emotional abuse in teenagers aged 13-18 \(nspcc.org.uk\)](http://nspcc.org.uk)

[Understanding Adolescent Neglect: Troubled Teens | The Children's Society \(childrenssociety.org.uk\)](http://childrenssociety.org.uk)

The Adolescent Brain: A second window of opportunity [The Adolescent Brain: A second window of opportunity \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

Childhood Trauma and the Brain | UK Trauma Council [Childhood Trauma and the Brain | UK Trauma Council - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

Rewiring a Brain Traumatized During Childhood [Rewiring a Brain Traumatized During Childhood \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)