Cumbria Multi-Agency Neglect Strategy 2016-18

We are working together to keep children and young people safe in Cumbria.
- Not feeling loved
- Not being able to socialise
- Feeling angry
- Bad temper
- Being ignored
- Feeling hungry
- Not having boundaries
- Being alone
- Not being able to see health care providers (e.g., dentist, GP)
- Not being able to make a proper mouth
- Unseen, unheard, unwanted
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Introduction

The Cumbria Neglect Strategy has been developed to set out the strategic aims and objectives of Cumbria's approach to tackling neglect. It identifies the key principles underpinning work with neglect and priority actions to improve the way we work.

The LSCB wants to ensure that we are able to identify children and young people, whose needs may be neglected by their care givers, at the earliest point so that appropriate services can be provided to address this and prevent the need for statutory intervention.

Our vision

There are varying experiences of neglect but long term exposure to neglect or serious neglect have long lasting effect on children. Therefore, we need to have a proportionate response dependant on the seriousness. Our vision for Cumbria is that fewer children will experience neglectful care and will be raised in a loving family environment.

Cumbria has identified an overarching priority of ‘Collaboration and Working Together’. The strategy will promote a partnership approach and a shared understanding of neglect. The collaboration across the partner agencies will result in timely and effective interventions to tackle neglect.

To that end we will:

• Provide focussed strategic leadership to deliver this strategy.
• Monitor the effectiveness of the work undertaken through the LSCB.

Pivotal to the Cumbria strategy is the acknowledgement that early help and support for families where neglect is identified is of the utmost importance in safeguarding children from harm. Knowing when, what and how to refer, and making that referral swiftly, is fundamental to ensure the right level of support and intervention is provided to children in need or at risk of harm. See cumbrialscb.com

“Children have the right to feel safe; we want children to have the building blocks in place to thrive” Walter McCulloch, Assistant Director, Children and Families.
What is neglect?

Definition

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2015) describes 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 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.

Categories of neglect

As well as the statutory definition, it is important to have regard to the specific needs of children that are often subsumed under the term ‘failure to meet basic needs’. These include:

Physical neglect

Failing to provide for a child’s basic needs such as food, clothing or shelter. Failing to adequately supervise a child, or provide for their safety.

Educational neglect

Failing to ensure a child receives an education.

Emotional neglect

Failing to meet a child’s needs for nurture and stimulation, perhaps by ignoring, humiliating, intimidating or isolating them. It’s often the most difficult to prove.

Medical neglect

Failing to provide appropriate health care, including dental care and refusal of care or ignoring medical recommendations.

There is an overlap between emotional abuse and many forms of child maltreatment and this is especially true of neglect. So when practitioners are working with children who are experiencing neglect an understanding of emotional abuse is also important.
What neglect looks like in Cumbria

Children In Need in Cumbria are children who have been referred to Children’s Social Care Service’s and who receive an initial assessment and if appropriate a further service. Level of need is as defined in Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (Children In Need).

Data

Data is collected on these children as a separate category:

- In March 2015 the DfE Census recorded 3,421 Children In Need in Cumbria (363.9 per 10,000 population aged 0-17).
- The greatest proportion of these recorded abuse or neglect as the primary need – 64%
- 691 out of 4786 Child and Family Assessments in the year ending 31st March 2016 had neglect identified as a relevant factor.

The percentage of Child Protection (CP) plans for neglect in Cumbria is the same as the national level of 42%. Of the children subject of CP plan at 31 March 2016, 48% were in the category of emotional abuse.

Messages from Audit including Serious Case Reviews (SCR)

- The Childs Voice needs to be clear in all work being undertaken as children living with neglect may not speak out. All work needs to remain focussed on the child.
- Practitioners need to work in a SMART way with clear evidence of Assessment, Planning and Review at all levels of assessment.
- Historical Information needs to be considered in all circumstances.
- At all stages, intervention must be thorough, timely, and involve key partner agencies to provide a holistic whole system approach.
- Practitioners need to be aware of issues around disguised compliance and need to establish fact about what is actually happening rather than accepting parents assertion.
- All members of the family and household should be considered in an assessment this should include estranged parents and current partners in family relations.
- Non-attendance in an Education setting should be viewed potentially as Educational Neglect and schools should initiate an EHA when attendance falls below 85% to identify reason and attempt change.

What will we do?

Messages from Audit and SCR’s inform the development of strategy and influence changes in training and styles of working. All relevant documentation and Policy will be changed on a regular basis to reflect this.
What young people in Cumbria tell us about Neglect

In Cumbria we listen to children’s experiences to create positive change, young people told us that safe and trusting relationships with adults are important to enable them to speak out about their experiences of neglect.

On 25th July 2016 the LSCB young people’s Shadow Board ran the first young people’s forum created and delivered by young people. They ran 3 workshops: Neglect a saw, Badge it and Neglect matters, the workshops were designed to find out what young people living in Cumbria think neglect is and how it affects young people.

The day started off with a short film and a poem written by a shadow board member to introduce what is meant by neglect. Some of the young people felt sad when they learned more about neglect in Cumbria, they felt that one of our priorities should be about raising awareness of neglect to other children and young people; teaching staff and parents.
What the practitioners of Cumbria tell us about Neglect

The LSCB consult and engage with professionals in a number of ways to help our understanding of people’s needs, views and experiences on a particular topic or issue. Using the ‘touchstones’ and some members of the LSCB volunteer training pool we undertook an informal engagement event to ask a series of questions to determine what professionals experiences of neglect in Cumbria are. This information alongside other evidence was used to inform the design and delivery of the Neglect Strategy.

The touchstones told us that in Cumbria neglect often goes unseen by professionals, there are ‘cycles of neglect with certain families’ and we also face the challenges of poverty and rurality. The touchstones also told us that neglect is not identified early enough and there was a need for a common understanding of neglect. We heard that practitioners need tools to help them to identify neglect earlier and respond quickly and effectively and plans need to be SMART’er so that families and other professionals know what they need to do. The touchstones also contributed to the vision and the priorities for the strategy.

Neglect and the impact on the child

Neglect can have a damaging effect on all areas of the developmental needs of a child (Horwath 2007). The way in which a child’s brain develops depends on the care-giving experience (forming attachments) and there are certain ‘sensitive’ periods including early childhood and adolescence, when the brain will not develop without the correct form of stimulation or environmental conditions (Schore 2002).

There are difficulties when trying to predict neglect however the presence of a number of characteristics (Evans 2002) e.g. lone motherhood, young and/or isolated mothers, larger families, relationships with domestic violence, parental mental health problems and maternal low self-esteem and their cumulative effect raises the chances that neglect may occur.

An individual’s own parental experiences establish the working models of relationships and self-esteem that in turn will influence their own style of parenting. Neglectful mothers/fathers are more likely to have a history of unstable, hostile and non-nurturing childhoods (Stevenson 1998) and be less responsive and sensitive to their children (Crittendon 1993).

Poor attachment can significantly affect the relationships that people have throughout their lives, including how they interact with their own children. Early intervention can change attachment patterns, reducing harm to a child and helping them to form positive attachments in adulthood. (Howe, 2011)

Protective factors can significantly reduce the impact of neglect—these include support (bond or confiding relationships), coping strategies (planning ahead, optimism) and meaningful or rewarding roles (academic or sporting achievements) (Bilfuco and Moran 1998). Research has found that disabled children are three to four times more likely to be abused and neglected than non-disabled children (Jones et al 2012; Sullivan & Knutson 20004).

Neglect: interventions that work

In the Childs time: Professional Response to Neglect’ Ofsted Thematic Audit (2014) reported that the pervasive and long term cumulative impact of neglect on the wellbeing of all children of all ages was well documented. Evidence from inspections and research of what works included:

• Early recognition including supporting the development of protective factors.
• Good quality assessments including the use of standardised approaches (such as the Graded Care Profile) and comprehensive frameworks to assess risk in neglect cases and to monitor change over time.
• Management oversight and supervision.
• Specialist training.
• Acknowledgement of complexity.
• Effective and timely professional responses both for help and protection.

Working with families

As a partnership we will ensure that:
• All Practitioners working with families will use a child-centred approach, and will listen and understand the ‘lived experiences’ of children who experience Neglect.
• All practitioners have the skills to identify neglect at the earliest opportunity using the Early Help Assessment, are able to provide timely intervention, effectively use the tools recommended by the LSCB to assess risk, and develop SMART plans for children who are experiencing neglect.
• Ensure that Professionals who care for disabled children and their families consider the possibility of maltreatment in their assessments of the child.
• Ensure that Assessments do not become static and there is no drift, take into account the lessons from local Serious Case Reviews, which would include, awareness of disguised compliance, rule of optimism, historical information about the family, and risk assessment of other family members.

What we need to do:
• Provide training for all Practitioners working with children on the Graded Care Profile, guidance on working with resistant families, assess key areas of risk in relation to neglect to enable practitioners to apply structure and systematic analysis to very complex situations.
• We need to give permission and time for all practitioners to take part in multi-agency processes so that assessments and plans are coordinated and reviewed.

We recognise that there is a ‘cyclical’ issue of neglect in Cumbria, whilst neglected children will not inevitably become neglectful parents, research and practice experience clearly identifies the inter-familial nature of neglect. Appropriate intervention can therefore contribute to the prevention of the cycle of inter-generational neglect.

• We will directly address the cycle of inter-generational neglect through working with parents to break the cycle.

We understand that difficulties experienced by parents as a result of underlying features can link to the neglect of children and that some parents lack the capacity to provide the care that children need.

• We will address this through effectively working with parents and ensure that professionals always maintain a focus on the child or young person’s timeframe.
How will we know if we are making a difference?

We think it is important to know if the strategy is working and we are reducing the number of children experiencing neglect in Cumbria. The following performance measures will help us do this.

**Measures we would expect to see increasing:**

- Children having their needs met by their parents and families.
- Children achieving expected milestones in all areas of their life.
- Families asking for help and support when they need it without fear or stigma.
- Shared ‘universal’ language and use of evidence based tools to identify and assess neglect at the earliest point.
- Early Help Assessment initiated due to low level or emerging neglect.
- Consistent practice and quick response evidenced in all audits.

**Measures we would expect to see reducing:**

- Less referrals and re-referrals for neglect to Cumbria Children’s Services.
- Fewer children on Child in Need plan or child protection plan under the category of neglect.
- Fewer Cumbrian children becoming looked after children.
- Fewer Cumbrian children experiencing long term or chronic neglect.
- No serious case reviews of Cumbrian children suffering or dying due to neglect.
- Criticism of inconsistent practice or response from all organisations.

**Measures that will be taken to develop confidence of all staff in identifying and working with neglect:**

- Increase in staff undertaking basic Awareness of Child Abuse and Neglect training.
- Collaborative approach to deliver training on ‘universal’ language and to develop skills in the use of evidence based tools such as Graded Care Profile.
- Practice champions amongst all staff to ensure rolling programme of awareness, learning and knowledge of neglect and how to tackle it at the earliest point.

**Delivering on our priorities**

The priorities and actions set out in this strategy will be incorporated into the LSCB Business Plan for 2016-19.
References

• Ofsted 2014: In the Child’s time: Professional Response to Neglect Thematic Audit, Reference no: 140059.