

# Birmingham Neglect Strategy 2022-26:



Working Together to Build  
Strong Family Foundations



## Foreword

### **Penny Thompson CBE, Independent Chair, Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership**

Neglect is the most common form of child abuse in the UK and, while we don't yet have detailed data, the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to have increased the risk of children being neglected. Neglect can have a devastating effect on children's lives. Whatever organisation we come from, and whatever role we do, we all have a responsibility to look for signs of neglect in our work with children and families and to take action when we identify them.

That is why agencies across the city have come together under Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership to develop this shared strategy for 2022-2026. By working together in a consistent way – and by taking a whole family approach – we can prevent and reduce neglect across the city. In order to tackle neglect, all agencies should respond as soon as a need is identified. Our aim is to meet children's needs at an early stage as neglecting the issue of neglect can lead to significant harm.

This strategy sets out our guiding principles, strategic objectives, approach and priorities. We have deliberately kept this document short and top level. It will be supported by practitioner guidance on tackling neglect and by multi-agency action plans that will be regularly reviewed and refreshed. By recognising the signs of neglect and taking pro-active multi-agency action we can make a real difference to the lives of some of our city's most vulnerable children.



# Contents

Section	Page
1. Why is tackling neglect so important?	4
2. Our Guiding Principles	7
3. How do we Recognise Neglect?	8
4. Capturing the Child's Voice	10
5. Children with additional needs	10
6. Thinking about Adolescents	11
7. Working with the whole family	12
8. How will we tackle neglect?	13
9. Reviewing our progress	15
10. Joint statement from Strategic Leaders	16
11. Further reading	17

# Why is tackling neglect so important?

The most likely reason for a child in Birmingham to need support and/or protection is neglect. Neglect can cause significant and long-term harm but can be hard to identify. All children and young people (including unborn babies) need adequate food, water, shelter, warmth, protection and health care in order to thrive. They also need their carers to be warm and consistently emotionally available as well as to provide them with stimulation, guidance and boundaries. Children are neglected if the things they need to develop and grow are not provided for them.

## What is Neglect?

Working Together to Safeguard Children 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 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'

For full Working Together statutory guidance [click here](#)

## How does neglect impact on children and young people?



These are just some examples of the impact neglect can have. For more information [click here](#).

# Neglect: A National Picture

Neglect is the most common form of child abuse in the UK with the NSPCC estimating that 1 in 10 children will experience neglect. It is also the most common reason for children to be subject to a child protection plan (around 50%). Neglect has been identified as either a cause of death or a contributing factor in 75% of Serious Case Reviews (now known as Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews).

Data tells us that the percentage of children living in poverty in the UK has increased in recent years, particularly in working families. Not all children living in poverty will experience neglectful care. However, poverty is an important factor linked with neglect and can significantly reduce parenting capacity.

The Covid-19 pandemic is likely to have increased the risk of children being neglected as it has led to more families experiencing financial difficulties, increased rates of domestic violence, drug and alcohol issues and mental health difficulties. All of these things can mean that children's needs are not met consistently. In addition to this, children have been out of school for long periods of time, have not been visible to professionals and may have been isolated from other sources of support.



**1 in 10**  
children will  
experience neglect

Neglect is  
responsible for  
**50%** of child  
protection plans



# Neglect: A Local Picture

Birmingham is the largest Local Authority in the UK which means there are a large number of children (over 250,000) to support and safeguard. Birmingham has a younger than average population with over a quarter of its residents aged under 18 according to 2011 census data.

There are significantly more children living in poverty in Birmingham than the national average. Figures published in 2021 show that 3 of the 5 areas with the highest child poverty rates in the UK are in Birmingham. (Hodge Hill with 53% of children living in households below the poverty line, Ladywood with 50% and Hall Green with 46%). Hodge Hill also has the highest rates of unemployment in the UK.



Health outcomes in Birmingham are also poor in comparison to national averages. The West Midlands has consistently had the highest rates of infant mortality in England and Wales (according to ONS data). NHS data shows that Birmingham has one of the highest childhood obesity rates in England with over a quarter of children classed as obese at age 11.

Birmingham is a diverse city with a higher number of residents than average from minority ethnic backgrounds (including 58% of children according to 2011 census figures). There are also far more residents in the city than the national average born outside of the UK and more than twice as many people than average for whom English is not their first language. Children in these communities may be more vulnerable to neglect than those of White British heritage as their families are more likely to be living in poverty, more likely to experience isolation and may face barriers in terms of access to services.

## Links:

- [NSPCC research](#)
- [2011 Census data](#)
- [Child poverty data](#)
- [ONS data on infant mortality](#)
- [NHS data on childhood obesity](#)



# Our Guiding Principles

## Right Help, Right Time

This strategy sets out our approach to tackling neglect in Birmingham. It forms part of the wider work of our Children's Partnership and embraces the Right Help, Right Time (RHRT) principles.

RHRT sets out how we should all work together, putting the child and the family at the centre, building on strengths and providing effective support to help them.

RHRT principles are the way we expect each other to work with children and families. We will:

- provide effective help and support as early as possible
- have conversations and listen to children and their families as early as possible
- understand the child's lived experience
- work collaboratively to improve children's life experiences
- be open, honest and transparent with families in our approach
- empower families by working with them
- work in a way that builds on the families' strengths
- build resilience in families to overcome difficulties

More information on [RHRT](#).



## Our Purpose

When tackling neglect, we have identified **four** strategic objectives:

**Recognise:** practitioners and managers in all agencies are able to recognise the signs of neglect.

**Respond:** all partner agencies take pro-active action to address neglect using a multi-agency whole family approach. We work together with families to achieve long lasting change.

**Quantify:** we gather information on the extent and range of neglect in the city and use this to agree and implement improvements in practice.

**Evaluate:** we monitor and evaluate the quality of our multi-agency response to neglect across early help, family support, child in need and child protection. We ensure our work improves outcomes and the quality of life for children, young people and families.

# How do we recognise neglect?

## Pre-birth Neglect

Neglect of a child can begin before they are born.

**The impact of pre-birth neglect can include:** low birth weight, premature birth, increased risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and impaired brain development.

**Warning signs for professionals to look out for might be:** poor engagement with antenatal services, history of neglect (with previous children or in own childhood), self-neglect, drug or alcohol misuse in pregnancy, mental health difficulties and learning disability.



## Neglect in Infants (0-2)

Children of this age are most vulnerable to neglect.

**The impact of neglect in infants can include:** failure to thrive, increased infections and injuries, poor attachment and growth and/or developmental delay.

**Warning signs for professionals to look out for might be:** routine appointments missed, not gaining weight as expected, not meeting milestones, speech delay, recurring nappy rash, self-soothing behaviours or a baby that is overly clingy or withdrawn.



## Neglect in preschool children (2-5)

Children are becoming more independent and should be safely learning about the world

**The impact of neglect in preschool age children can include:** speech and language delay, increased infections and injuries, difficulty in managing emotions or behaviour.

**Warning signs for professionals to look out for might be:** lack of routines, developmental delay, delay in toilet training, under or overweight, untreated health issues, withdrawn or over-familiar with strangers.



## Neglect in school age children (5+)

This is the stage where the impact of earlier neglect can become apparent.

**The impact of neglect in over 5s can include:** poor social skills, limited attention span, lacking in confidence, difficulty in following rules, difficulty in regulating behaviour and/or emotions, not reaching academic potential.

**Warning signs for professionals to look out for might be:** poor hygiene and presentation, low school attendance, withdrawn or very demanding of adult attention, hunger, dental decay, under or overweight.



## Challenges for Practitioners

- Neglect is complex and can be very difficult to identify and measure. Neglect is an absence or omission of care, meaning that professionals working with children and young people need to measure what isn't there.
- Neglect is cumulative and its impact is often a result of a number of incidents rather than a single action. Because of this, it is really important for agencies to work together, be curious and share any concerns in a timely way.
- The signs and symptoms of neglect can vary widely. Professionals can disagree about what is 'good enough' care and may have different perspectives.
- Neglect can be uncomfortable to talk about, and historically professionals have been worried about offending parents.
- Practitioners working with the adults in the family may become over-optimistic about parent's capacity to change or focus on the adult's needs rather than the children. It is important to remember that it is everyone's responsibility to address concerns about children's welfare.
- Neglect can be a deliberate act or it can be unintentional. In cases where parents understand the impact of their actions on children and continue to cause harm, this should be taken very seriously. In most cases, neglect is a result of the parent or carer's needs being prioritised over the child's and support should be offered.

Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership have introduced the Graded Care Profile v2 (GCP2) tool to help identify neglect at an earlier stage. The Partnership is committed to training and supporting professionals to enable them to better support children and families where neglect is a concern.

## Capturing the child's experience

Despite neglect being the most commonly identified form of child abuse, it is the least likely to be identified by children. Children and young people are often unaware that the care they receive is neglectful or even different to their peers so we need to be creative in understanding and capturing their lived experience.

The factors that can lead to neglect often mean that a parent/carer can struggle to put the child's needs ahead of their own. It is easy for professionals working with a family to become distracted from the child's perspective by these issues. Practitioners need to ensure the child is central to any assessments or decisions about their care.

In order to understand a child's experience, professionals should use direct work but also observations of their interactions, presentation, behaviour and home environment. Information from different agencies should also be used where possible to corroborate.

Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership have introduced a Toolkit for professionals working with children to help them capture and understand the child's lived experience and to use this to inform assessments, plans and interventions.



## Children with additional health or learning needs



Children with additional physical or learning needs, with disabilities or long-term health conditions are particularly vulnerable to neglect. This is because their needs can be difficult for carers to meet and because they may be impaired in their ability to communicate and to understand what is happening to them. They may also be receiving care from a number of carers, increasing the possibility of neglect or abuse.

When working with children with underlying additional needs it is, therefore, even more important to ensure their experience is captured. Any speech and language needs should be taken into account and specialist advice sought to understand the child's needs where appropriate.

When considering whether a child is experiencing neglect, a child with additional needs or a disability may experience the same issues as other children but they can also be at risk of other types of harm. These can include failure to meet the child's communication needs, failure to use equipment that has been provided, failure to provide medication or a special diet or denying the child access to play or stimulation.

# Thinking about Adolescents

Older children and teenagers can be particularly vulnerable to neglect and require special consideration. As children get older they need different responses rather than less care and parents can struggle with this. Young people can present with challenging behaviour as a result of neglect and this behaviour can often be viewed by professionals as 'typical' and not fully explored. Neglect of adolescents can also go unseen as children of this age may be able to hide the impact of neglect and meet many of their own needs.

The most common way that older children's needs are neglected is with a lack of adequate supervision and boundaries. This places young people at risk of harm in the community and online.

Neglect, particularly of a young person's emotional needs, can be a 'push' factor where concerns of contextual safeguarding are identified.

It is also important to consider that an older child may have experienced neglect throughout their life and this could have caused them significant and long-term harm.



**The impact of neglect in adolescents can include:** poor educational attainment, low self-esteem, mental health difficulties, difficulty in forming healthy relationships, risk of exploitation.

**Warning signs for professionals to look out for might be:** poor school attendance, inability to concentrate, withdrawn or disruptive behaviour in school, self-harm, involvement in criminal or antisocial activity, drug and/or alcohol misuse.



## Working with the whole family

When thinking about neglect, it is important to consider the family holistically because neither the children nor the adults exist in isolation. Any adults who live in the home or the child has frequent contact with should be included in an assessment.

Neglect is very often a result of the parents' vulnerabilities and these need to be addressed in order for the neglect to be tackled effectively. The adults in the family may be experiencing issues such as drug or alcohol misuse, mental health difficulties, domestic abuse, poor physical health, poverty learning disability or coping with their own childhood trauma. Some parents may have grown up in a neglectful home and may not have acquired basic parenting skills as a result. Covid-19 has been traumatic and harmful for families and the impact of this also needs to inform our practice.

As well as identifying vulnerabilities and risks, professionals should consider any support available to the family from wider family and community. Using tools like a chronology and genogram can help understand the family as a whole. Specialist support should be offered to the adults where risks are identified as this will help parents to meet their child's needs.

The cultural and religious needs of the child and family should be considered and it is important to understand that all families will have different ways of raising their children which should be respected in most cases. However it is also important to ensure that cultural sensitivity does not prevent a child's needs from being met.

## Responding to neglect in Birmingham - Our priorities for 2022-26

### **1. Strategic commitment across all agencies to understand, prevent and reduce the impact of neglect in Birmingham**

Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership is committed to raising awareness of neglect and its effects across the city for professionals and the wider community. The aim of this is to prevent children from experiencing neglect where possible and to reduce the impact neglect, poverty and inequality has on children and families. A Neglect Lead Manager was appointed in 2021 to ensure that neglect remains a strategic priority for the Partnership and that agencies are consistent in their understanding, their responsibility, and their response. Education and training around neglect will be delivered to all agencies working with children, young people, and families. This will include those working primarily with the adults in a family to ensure the child's lived experience is not overlooked. The Partnership will engage with children and families to empower them by ensuring they are involved in public health and education campaigns and supported in meeting their children's needs.



### **2. Improve the capability of the multi-agency workforce to recognise and act on the signs of neglect**

Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership aims to support practitioners working with children and families in all agencies and at all layers of need to identify, assess, and support families where neglect is a concern. The NSPCC Graded Care Profile version 2 (GCP2) was introduced in 2021 and training of the Early Help workforce has commenced. Foundation projects have been established in two separate areas of the city to address neglect and embed GCP2 in the Early Help workforce. This will be rolled out to the other localities in 2022 to enable practitioners in a range of agencies to be confident in identifying neglect and supporting families using a strengths-based approach to tackle concerns. Because of the cumulative and often hidden nature of neglect, it is vital that all agencies work together and share information where appropriate and in accordance with Working Together guidance. This will help build a full picture of a family's circumstances, ensure neglect is recognised and targeted support offered.





### **3. Respond to neglect in a consistent and timely way through Early Help**

Responding to neglect across the city is a multi-agency responsibility. Improving the Early Help response is a priority in the city and training for professionals to ensure that neglect is identified and addressed at an early stage is an important part of this strategy. In addition to the GCP2 training, practitioners across the multi-agency workforce will be supported with regular workshops and newsletters which will embed learning, promote good practice, and address any barriers. A network of Neglect Champions is being established alongside a neglect communication strategy to ensure that agencies working with children and families keep neglect as one of their priorities and have access to up to date information.



### **4. Improve the effectiveness of assessment, planning and interventions to reduce the impact of neglect**

A Neglect Toolkit will be introduced alongside this strategy to further support practitioners in understanding, identifying, assessing, and intervening where there are suspicions of neglect. This will provide practical guidance and resources to use when working with children and families and ensure that professionals have access to the information they need when it comes to assessing, intervening, and reviewing any progress. The Toolkit, alongside Right Help, Right Time guidance, aims to ensure professionals in all agencies have a consistent approach to working with families and are aware of when concerns should be escalated. The GCP2 tool will inform a targeted family plan to support families to make achievable changes with help from professionals. We will also consult with children, young people, and families to understand what they feel works in addressing neglect and what has not been successful. This will ensure that the child's voice is at the centre of our work.



# Reviewing our progress

This strategy is overseen by Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership, however it requires commitment from all partners across the city to embedding the values, learning and objectives within their organisations.

The impact of the strategy will be assessed using a range of quantitative and qualitative measures. An action plan has been developed alongside the strategy: this sets out how the strategy will be implemented, how progress will be captured and the measures we will use. The action plan will be regularly reviewed and refreshed to ensure it continues to be relevant and that progress is being made. A performance dashboard will also be developed in order to track performance indicators in relation to neglect. It should be acknowledged that due to improved awareness and recognition of neglect there may be an increase in some indicators rather than a reduction initially.

Some of the performance indicators that will be used to measure impact will include:

- The views of children, young people, and their families gathered as part of existing processes (such as feedback from child protection conferences, child in need plans, at case closure) as well as specific neglect work
- Rates of school and/or nursery attendance for children with an open Social Work, Family Support or Early Help intervention for neglect
- Numbers of children and young people supported via Early Help where there are neglect concerns
- Numbers of practitioners trained to use GCP2
- Number of GCP2 assessments completed
- Numbers of children subject to a Child protection plan for neglect for a second or subsequent time
- Length of time Child Protection plans are open under the category neglect
- Numbers of repeat referrals to CASS where neglect is a concern

In addition to the performance indicators and feedback from children and families, an evaluation of the introduction of the GCP2 tool has been commissioned and this will support learning as to what works and where changes may be needed.

The progress of the strategy and action plan will be monitored by the Neglect Operational Group who will ensure agencies are accountable and will report to the Partnership Executive Board.

## **Family Foundations Project**

The use of Graded Care Profile 2 (GCP2) is being trialled in the Northfield and Hodge Hill areas of the city to support practitioners in identifying and addressing neglect at an Early Help level. The Family Foundations project aims to support families at an early stage by providing targeted interventions. It also aims to improve practitioners' understanding of neglect and how to respond by working in partnership with families and other agencies. The project is currently being evaluated by the Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) and the report will be published in September 2022.



## Joint statement from Strategic Leaders

"Childhood neglect can have a lifelong impact on an individual's health and wellbeing.

Neglect in Birmingham is a serious issue and we recognise that addressing this must be a priority for the key statutory safeguarding partners and the wider Safeguarding Partnership.

This multi-agency strategy demonstrates our commitment to working together with the shared goal of preventing and reducing the impact of neglect. If all practitioners working with children, young people, and their families understand their role and responsibility in tackling neglect, we can achieve better outcomes for the children living in our city."

Andy Couldrick  
Chief Executive  
Birmingham Children's Trust



Lisa Stalley-Green  
Chief Nurse  
University Hospitals Birmingham

Richard North  
Chief Superintendent  
West Midlands Police

Sue Harrison  
Director of Services  
Birmingham City Council



## **Birmingham Neglect Tool Kit**

<https://lscpbirmingham.org.uk/documents/birmingham-neglect-toolkit>

## **Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership website**

<https://lscpbirmingham.org.uk/learning-zone/learning-resources/neglect-and-gcp2>

## **Right Help, Right Time: Delivering effective support for children and families in Birmingham**

<https://lscpbirmingham.org.uk/documents/right-help-right-time-guidance-dec-2021>

## **Working Together Statutory Guidance**

[Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/681266/Working-Together-to-Safeguard-Children-2018.pdf)

## **NSPCC website**

[Neglect is also Child Abuse: Know All About It | NSPCC](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-we-do/our-approach-to-child-abuse/neglect-is-also-child-abuse/)

## **NSPCC - Testing the reliability and validity of the Graded Care Profile Version 2 (GCP2)**

[Testing the reliability and validity of the Graded Care Profile version 2 \(GCP2\) \(nspcc.org.uk\)](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-we-do/our-approach-to-child-abuse/testing-the-reliability-and-validity-of-the-graded-care-profile-version-2/)

## **Ofsted - In the child's time: professional responses to neglect**

[Professional responses to neglect: in the child's time - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/681266/In-the-childs-time-professional-responses-to-neglect.pdf)

## **Department for Education - Missed opportunities: indicators of neglect - what is ignored, why, and what can be done?**

[Department for Education \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/681266/Missed-opportunities-indicators-of-neglect-what-is-ignored-why-and-what-can-be-done.pdf)

## **Children's Society - Understanding Adolescent Neglect: Troubled Teens**

[Understanding Adolescent Neglect: Troubled Teens | The Children's Society \(childrenssociety.org.uk\)](https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-approach-to-child-abuse/understanding-adolescent-neglect-troubled-teens/)

## **Children's Society - Neglecting the issue: impact, causes and responses to child neglect in the UK**

[Neglecting the issue.pdf \(londoncp.co.uk\)](https://www.londoncp.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Neglecting-the-issue.pdf)



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