

Recognising different types of child neglect

A quick reference guide for practitioners

Physical neglect



Failure to meet a child's basic physical needs.

- Poor hygiene, dirty or inappropriate clothing, persistent nappy rash
- Underweight or always hungry
- Lack of essential items such as bedding or heating

Environmental neglect



Unsafe, unhygienic, or harmful living conditions.

- Serious hoarding or clutter
- Vermin infestations, no safe food storage
- Broken or unsafe appliances

Medical neglect



Failure to seek medical treatment or follow advice.

- Missed medical appointments
- Medication not collected or treatment plans not followed
- Untreated injuries or medical conditions

Emotional neglect



Failure to provide emotional warmth, stability, or responsiveness.

- Child withdrawn, anxious, overly compliant
- Harsh, unpredictable or unavailable parenting
- Child taking on adult roles (parentification)

Educational neglect



Failure to ensure educational needs, including SEND, are met.

- Lack of support for child's attendance at their registered school
- Inadequate, inappropriate or unstimulating home education provision
- Lack of support for child's educational progress or SEND provision

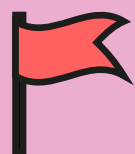
Supervisory neglect



Lack of supervision or exposure to unsafe situations.

- Young children left alone or with unsafe caregivers
- Inadequate sleep routines, absence of boundaries
- Adolescents frequently unsupervised late at night

Red flags for identifying neglect



-  Repeated short interventions with no sustained change
-  Multiple agencies providing food and clothes (compensatory care)
-  Parents repeatedly declining support
-  Child not seen alone, barriers to the child's environment being seen
-  Concerns recorded as isolated incidents but build up over time

Frequently missed forms of neglect



-  Dental neglect: untreated pain, decay, missed check-ups
-  Mental health neglect: missed appointments, distress not explored, self-harm indicators
-  Sleep neglect: unsafe or inconsistent sleeping arrangements, particularly for babies
-  Disability or SEN neglect: missed therapy, lack of communication support, specialist equipment not used or maintained

What practitioners should do



- ☒ Name neglect explicitly in records and discussions
- ☒ See the child - in person and alone where appropriate
- ☒ Observe the home environment
- ☒ Use multi-agency chronologies
- ☒ Proactively share information, especially around compensatory care
- ☒ Consider cultural and disability contexts
- ☒ Be mindful of the difference between poverty and neglect
- ☒ Use structured assessment tools