

working with neglect?

Neglect is the most common form of maltreatment and during 2013 – 2014 around 50% of children on child protection plans in Bedford Borough were under the category of neglect

1. Keeping children at the centre of your work is key

Concerns for children and young people frequently arise because of problems and difficulties experienced by their parents and carers; whilst it is essential that attention is given to alleviating such problems it is crucial that professionals maintain a focus on the needs of the children in the family. A hazard of not doing so can lead to adult centred practice, a poor or limited understanding of the needs of the children in the family and them suffering continued or increased risk of harm.

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| **Ask yourself:** * What have I done to help me to understand the daily lived experience of this child?
* What does it mean for the child living in these circumstances; how are the problems and stresses in the family having an impact on him or her?
* Am I making sure I consider each child in the family individually?
* Have I talked to, and spent time with, the child to help me to understand things from their point of view? Have I asked the children what life is like for them and how they feel?
* Do I need to be creative in my work to help me to understand life from the child’s point of view?
* Who else can help me understand to ensure that I have the fullest picture?
* Have I recorded *when* I’ve seen the child, their ascertainable wishes and feelings, and their presentation? Have I record the quality of that contact?

**Being interested in what happens in the child’s day and what life is like at home will help you to understand the child as a real person along with their wishes, feelings and experiences. Talking to children about what is happening to them and trying to see the world from their point of view is good practice.** |

1. Neglect is a source of harm to older children as well as younger children

Nationally, case reviews have highlighted a tendency to perceive the effect of neglect on older children differently from the neglect of younger children and not to consider it as a source of actual or potential significant harm. We all have to challenge and change this unsafe practice and understand the harmful affects on neglect on children and young people of all ages.

Remember that apart from being potentially fatal, neglect causes great distress to children; it can lead to serious impairment of health and development and lead to long term difficulties with social functioning, relationships, education and learning. Young people who are neglected can experience low self-esteem and feelings of being unloved and isolated; the impact of neglect varies dependent upon how long children have been neglected and the multiplicity of neglectful behaviours they have been experiencing

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| **Ask yourself:** * How long has this been going on and have you been successful at addressing any concerns about a child’s needs?
* Are you concerned about all these areas of a child’s development?

Basic careQuality of emotional careAddressing of medical issuesSupervision and guidanceEducation and intellectual stimulation Or * Are you concerned about specific areas of care?
* In what way are family problems having an impact on the child or young person?
* What is causing the poor quality of care?
* Are concerns about acts of omission or commission?
* Do parents accept there are concerns and accept that they have a part in making things change?
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1. Don’t be reluctant to express your concerns about children and young people clearly and directly

Case reviews have revealed that professionals can be reluctant to express their concerns clearly and directly – this was evident in a range of circumstances and across professional relationships. For example, in core groups and in child protection conferences, there have been examples of professionals describing events but not stating what they thought this meant for children in the family.

Clearly communicating concerns helps to protect children from harm. This is because it directs the person receiving the information to consider specific forms of abuse.

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| **Ask yourself:*** Have I described specifically and clearly, what it is I’m concerned about?
* Have I ‘named’ the concerns? (for example, “*I am concerned that these children are being neglected because…”* and provided evidence to support why)
* Are you someone who tends to use euphemistic language? If so, what can you do to change this – do you need some support to achieve this?
* Do I listen to and value the views and opinions of others?
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1. There is sometimes a reluctance to challenge and a tendency to avoid conflict

Findings from the reviews reveal that there is sometimes reluctance to challenge and a tendency to avoid conflict; this means that it is not unusual for concerns not to be voiced and for professionals to accept decisions even when they don’t agree with them. This is a risk to children’s safety and welfare.

Discussion and challenge in the management of cases is healthy and helps to protect children from continuing harm because it allows professionals to have a frank exchange of views and increases understanding. In turn, this clarifies the level of concern for children. Discussion and challenge leads to greater understanding, clear decision making, effective planning and appropriate action being taken.

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| **Ask yourself:** * Do I agree with the response of other agencies and decisions made?
* If you don’t agree with decisions what **have I done** to challenge this?
* Are you clear about the local processes that are there to support professionals in addressing disagreements? For example, are you aware of the local Resolution of Professionals Disagreements Procedure? This can be found by going to[**http://bedfordscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p\_reolution\_disagree.html**](http://bedfordscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_reolution_disagree.html)
* Are you actively participating in and contributing to meetings about children for whom there are concerns? (for example; core groups, child protection conferences and reviews, children in need meetings)
* Are you confident in articulating your views and able to challenge when you disagree with other professionals?
* Do you need support – from your manager, colleagues or through training – in dealing with challenge?
* Do you agree with the proposed plan and intervention? Do you think it will work? If not, have you clearly expressed this and articulated the reasons why?

**Remember it’s not an option to ‘do nothing' when you are concerned about a child; each of us have a moral and professional responsibility to take action.** |