



Wigan Safeguarding Children Partnership Neglect Strategy 2021

The Wigan Neglect Strategy promotes a consistent understanding and approach, by developing opportunities for partners to work together to tackle child neglect.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The impact of persistent neglect cannot be underestimated. It is well documented that children who are neglected over a long period of time will have their physical and emotional development restricted. They will have difficulties in establishing and maintaining relationships, in reaching their educational potential, in having confidence in themselves and their abilities, in relating to others appropriately, and in developing along their physical centiles according to their age. In extreme cases, persistent neglect can result in death. As a result of Covid 19 it is even more critical we get this right with the increase in disadvantage that has been created.
- 1.2 The Greater Manchester Safeguarding Partnership recognises that there are opportunities to work with partners and partnerships across Greater Manchester (GM) to tackle child neglect through the creation of this strategy.
- 1.3 This strategy does not intend to replace definitions of neglect which can be found in the [Greater Manchester Safeguarding Procedures](#).
- 1.3 The Wigan Neglect Strategy has been developed to ensure the people who live and work in the Wigan Borough are able to recognise neglect and work in partnership to provide an effective response which will improve outcomes for children, young people and their families.
- 1.4 The underpinning principle of [Wigan Safeguarding Partnership](#) and the [Deal for Children](#) is to provide support for children and their families at the earliest possible opportunity, appropriate to the help they need.
- 1.4 Central to the strategy is working alongside families to identify and prevent neglect at the earliest opportunity. This will be achieved by raising awareness with the workforce and wider community, ensure effective assessments are completed, including the Graded Care Profile 2 (GCP2, is used in all cases where neglect is suspected and we develop clear action plans with families, ensuring children remain at the centre.
- 1.5 It is vital that we recognise and build on children and family's strengths. Underpinning our approach will be the use of the [Signs of Safety](#) practice model Families will be encouraged to identify their own difficulties, strengths, needs and solutions. In most cases, outcomes for children will only be improved by supporting and assisting parents and carers to make changes.
- 1.6 It is important to develop meaningful relationships with children and families and, where possible, reduce the number of professionals a child, young person and family might be interacting with.
- 1.7 To improve outcomes professionals will identify assets within the family and community; build resilience within families in order to achieve sustained change.

2. Mission statement

- 2.1 Our mission is to tackle child neglect at the earliest opportunity; to improve the lives of children, young people and their families.

3. Roles and responsibilities

3.1 All practitioners, in all agencies and organisations, where they come in to contact with children and young people, should:

- Be alert to potential indicators of abuse or neglect and know how to report it;
- Be alert to the impact on the child of any concerns of abuse or maltreatment;
- Use the GCP2 assessment tool in all cases of suspected child neglect.
- The lead professional, where the case is open at Early Help level, should consider which professional should undertake the GCP2.

4. Vision

4.1 Child neglect is a complex issue; too often it takes us too long to recognise the impact it is having on our children. The vision of this strategy is that action is taken at the earliest opportunities to prevent neglect having a long-term impact on children.

4.2 The strategy aims to identify opportunities to work across Wigan to develop partnership systems to improve responses to neglect across all levels of need.

4.3 This Wigan Neglect Strategy aims to promote the values and principles of 'The Wigan Deal' as outlined below, ensuring that we work with everyone in the Wigan Borough.

4.4 This will include the workforce across the whole partnership, statutory and non-statutory, and the voluntary and community sector using the Signs of Safety Practice Model.

4.5 This will be achieved by:

Preventing

Early intervention with regards to neglect; raising awareness by developing a shared understanding of the early indicators of neglect. We will do this by listening to children's experiences, working with children, families, and their communities to understand what neglect is and what to do when they are concerned. We will empower families and communities to recognise their strengths to enable them to create and maintain positive change.

Intervening

Developing confident workers and communities; making sure all have the skills, knowledge and tools to understand why neglect happens. We will do this by building trusting relationships with children and their families and by delivering effective interventions in partnership with children, families and their communities.

Protecting

Taking decisive action; making the right decisions in the child's time when working with families. We will support families by using Signs of Safety Practice Model and the GCP2 and we will work with families to analyse parental capacity to change. We will always place the child at the centre of what we do.

5. Principles

5.1 In delivering this strategy we will adhere to the following principles:

- **The child's welfare remains paramount;**
- **Services need to model the kinds of positive, meaningful relationships that might be missing in a young person's life;** where possible, this means reducing the number of professionals a young person might be interacting with to one, or a small number of professionals who will 'stick' with the young person. Positive relationships are built through asking open questions, listening, being transparent, not asking for information without a reason and taking time to really get to know each other. This may involve challenging traditional professional roles or boundaries;
- **We will recognise that every child is part of a complex web of relationships and past experiences;** these past experiences and existing relationships are key to both understanding the current situation and to mapping out a better future; The Signs of Safety Practice model will help us to identify a family's support network.
- **We work with families;** this means that families are equal partners and integral to assessment, planning and intervention. The wishes and views of the child and their family should underpin all aspects of support.
- **We will use evidence-based tools and interventions** which will help to highlight strengths within a family and identify areas where support is needed. We will work with families in a meaningful way, utilising the skills of the multi-agency partnership to develop resilience and build upon protective factors;
- **Families will be supported to make sustained positive changes** which will decrease the risk of dependence on others and improve long term outcomes;
- **We will consider the family history** in order to identify strengths and any patterns of concern. Any intervention will be focused on supporting a proactive, age appropriate and timely approach; and the impact of this history in the child's lived experience and how key events shape their life.
- **Practitioners will be open and honest with families.** Decision making will be based on rigorous assessment and parental capacity to change within agreed timescales to ensure children and young people are adequately protected over time.
- **We will engage with children and families** in the development of our offer, including how they want to access our services. The offer will be shaped around children, young people and families. Professionals need to feel confident, creative and flexible, with services, pathways and processes designed to enable and not restrict this ambition. In practice, this way of working will be enabled by more flexible working hours, more creative packages of support, permission to try new things and a reduction in the external pressure's professionals are under.

- **We recognise that children who experience neglect may be vulnerable to other types of abuse and negative health outcomes**, such as poor mental, problems with brain development, at increased risk of engaging in risky behaviours and at greater risk of exploitation.
- **We recognise that the impact of neglect is not always evident immediately** Actual harm can be particularly difficult to demonstrate following early emotional abuse or neglect as disruptions to the child's brain development may not be visible or may be particularly difficult to attribute to the maltreatment.
- **Local and National Serious Case Reviews** have evidenced the correlation between children who suffer from neglect and how they are at increased risk of Contextual Safeguarding.

6. Definition of neglect

6.1 Neglect is rarely a 'one off' incident and can be challenging to define and measure in an objective way.

6.2 As a starting point, [Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2018\)](#) provides an overarching definition of neglect:

'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 maltreatment 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 all medical care and treatment including dental health, immunisations, healthy child programme and all universal healthcare;*
- *Ensure children who have additional needs access the appropriate level of support and intervention.*

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.'

6.3 In practice, this means that a child who is experiencing any of the following is experiencing neglect:

- Does not have enough food, adequate clothing, somewhere safe to live and sleep;
- Not accessing appropriate education, whether in a nursery/school/college or at home, and is not being supported within this;

- Not taken for routine or necessary health¹ appointments and treatment;
- Not being supervised and cared for by a consistent, available and safe adult;
- Left on their own to fend for themselves;
- Absent or missing from home with no timely action being taken or appropriate response including alerting the relevant authority;
- Being ignored, scapegoated or excluded unreasonably from family activities;
- Expecting a child or young person to have caring responsibilities above their age and understanding which prevents them engaging with their peers.

6.4 All of these examples will need to be placed in a context of:

- How frequently they occur;
- How old the child is and their level of cognitive ability;
- How resilient they are;
- How willing the parent is to recognise the impact of their behaviour on their child and their capacity to change.

6.5 Defining neglect should focus on the impact on the child, not necessarily on the behaviour of the parent. Nevertheless, the parent's behaviour is the most obvious factor in determining whether neglect exists or will develop.

6.6 Neglect often co-exists with other forms of abuse or risk factors so this needs to be taken into consideration when assessing neglect; for example domestic abuse, substance misuse and adult mental health, child poverty, youth homelessness, child sexual exploitation and taking risks such as going missing from home and missing from education.

6.7 Identifying vulnerability in the teenage years can be challenging. This is due to the need to balance protection against the increasing need for the young person to develop age-appropriate autonomy. Behaviours can sometimes be viewed and explained as 'typical teenage behaviour' rather than being recognised as potential indicators of underlying vulnerability or neglect.

7. Key messages from research and learning from our serious case reviews

7.1 Trauma and Long-Term Impact

Neglect in the early years of life can be damaging, and development continues to be affected into adolescence. There are links between trauma and poor health and social outcomes in adulthood. Early intervention, positive relationships and robust assessment are important in reducing the long-term impact of neglect.

7.2 Diversity

Perceived cultural norms can prevent professionals from appropriately challenging 'hard to reach' parents and carers. This can also occur when professionals apply their own cultural norms to families of different cultural backgrounds to themselves.

¹ This covers a range of health appointments including dental, ophthalmic, speech and language, emotional health etc.

7.3 **Disability and ‘Hidden’ Neglect**

Disabled children are 3.8 times more likely to suffer neglect than a child without a disability. In addition, due to the presence of disability, the impact of abuse and neglect can easily be minimised by both parents and professionals.

7.4 **Parental Needs vs Children’s Needs**

Reviews into serious case reviews featuring neglect, have found that assessments have focused almost exclusively on parental needs. When parents have additional needs, this can impact on parenting capacity and engagement with services; the parent becomes the primary client.

7.5 **Child Development and Attachment**

Ofsted highlight the importance of social workers possessing an understanding of child development; this provides knowledge of how neglect can impact on the child over time and emphasises timely decision making. Children who have experienced neglect often exhibit behavioural problems. A lack of secure attachment to the primary caregiver has a significant impact on children, often as a result of issues inhibiting parental capacity. Up to 80% of children brought up in neglectful environments develop disorganised attachment styles.

7.6 **Neglect Baseline and Thresholds**

Thresholds in neglect are difficult to establish due to variations in parenting styles, and perceptions as to what is ‘good enough’ makes it challenging to establish a ‘baseline’. Neglect must be distinguished from poverty, especially in deprived areas. Effective assessment tools are vital to establish the family situation in relation to the child’s well-being. To assist this, practitioners in Wigan should refer to the [Wigan Threshold Toolkit](#).

7.7 **Professional and Parental Rapport**

Engaging caregivers in open discussion about the nature of concerns and changes expected can lead to positive outcomes. The Signs of Safety practice model will promote successful and sustained engagement with families. It is also recognised that frequently encountering neglect can lead to desensitisation. Conversely, disguised compliance, normalisation of neglect or fear to challenge can negatively affect intervention.

7.8 **Neglect as a Continuum**

Neglect is rarely displayed by a single occurrence but may be more evident at times in the levels of care given, parental engagement and risk faced by the child. Neglect should be understood holistically and historically in the context of the child and family.

8. Strategic objectives

8.1 **The Wigan Neglect Strategy has three strategic objectives:**

Preventing

- To raise the awareness and understanding of neglect for all in the Borough, and how neglect can be identified across the life course. This includes strengthening the understanding and response to neglect in statutory and non-statutory agencies and in community and voluntary settings. This is an opportunity to improve the collaborative efforts by all agencies in both adult and children’s services.

- In order for the strategy to be effective, all partners involved need to share a common understanding of neglect. This includes mutual understanding of language, agreed and understood thresholds and pathways. Central to this is the development of a skilled workforce, through an effective training offer to all sectors;
- Crucial to the Wigan Neglect Strategy is the Early Help offer, a clear understanding of the Wigan Threshold Toolkit, and that interventions and support are provided to families at the right time, in the right way.
- Working effectively requires all partners to adopt the Signs of Safety approach, which creates opportunities for sustainable change. The strategy is built on the premise that any support will be child focussed, holistic, and consider the needs of the whole family.

Intervening

- Developing confident workers; making sure our workforce has the skills, knowledge and tools to understand why neglect happens, build trusting relationships with children and their families to deliver effective interventions;
- Review and develop practice guidance tools to assist the workforce to assess neglect across all levels of need;
- Develop reflective practice questions for use by practitioners and managers working at all levels;
- Map current neglect intervention services or approaches used across GM with the potential to scope opportunities to pilot specific evidence-based neglect services;
- To improve the identification and assessment of children and young people living in neglectful situations as early as possible. This includes the use of the GCP2 assessment tool, which is the agreed assessment tool for practitioners working in Wigan.
- The Wigan Neglect Strategy ensures that all statutory, non-statutory, community and voluntary partners are able to identify and act on indicators of neglect. This includes an understanding of the Early Help Offer, The Threshold Toolkit and the role of targeted and specialist services. It also means a confident and skilled workforce knowing when and how to share concern over a child's welfare when child protection concerns may be apparent;
- Where there are indicators of neglect, partner agencies should use the GCP2 with families to identify strengths and areas for improvement. This allows interventions to be targeted in the areas of greatest need with agreed timescales. Progress should be reviewed in partnership with the family to measure progress and outcomes for the child;

- The Early Help framework identifies opportunities to provide support at the earliest possible stage of need. The GCP2 aligns with this as a specific tool for further, focussed assessment of neglect across several domains.

Protecting

- Taking decisive action; making the right decisions in the child's time when working with families. Supporting families by using a strong evidence base to analyse parental capacity to change. Always placing the child at the centre of what we do;
- Specific neglect supervision tools for social workers to promote reflective analysis and evaluate impact on the child;
- Developing and sustaining a multi-agency response to neglect;
- WSCP, through Partners Improving Practice Subgroup, will monitor and support the effectiveness of the multi-agency response to neglect through audit, practitioner and family feedback and scrutiny of performance information. Findings from this monitoring will be presented to WSCP for dissemination to inform future development of the strategy;
- Agencies to hold responsibility for ensuring their workforce has access to relevant training and development opportunities and to support practitioners by signposting them to relevant WSCP multiagency training for neglect and how to use the GCP2;
- Providing practitioners with effective skills and tools to work with families experiencing neglect;
- Supporting practitioners to resolve common problems when working with families experiencing neglect.

9. Success measures

Wigan is within the national average, however there is some difference between Wigan and the North West average, albeit only a few percentage points.

- 9.2 Whilst other types of 'Contextual Safeguarding' i.e. Child Sexual Exploitation, Female Genital Mutilation, Child Trafficking dominate the media; it is important to remember that neglect remains the most common form of child abuse across the UK, and in the Wigan Borough.
- 9.3 Neglect is also one of the forms of child abuse where there are opportunities to improve identification, make predictions about the likelihood of its continued occurrence, and take more effective and earlier interventions to reduce the impact on a child.
- 9.4 Identifying neglect earlier and responding more effectively can improve outcomes in the longer-term including reducing the risk of children being victims of CSE, engaging in anti-social behavior or criminal activity, experiencing substance misuse problems, poor mental health etc., as well promoting a positive transition to adulthood.
- 9.5 Key indicators of implementation of this strategy will be measured by:

- Increased awareness and identification of neglect across the partnership, including communities and voluntary sector organisations;
- Increase in the number of Early Help Assessments closed (in cases where neglect is identified) with a positive outcome, evidencing that an early intervention approach has been effective;
- Evidence of the use of the GCP2 to improve outcomes for children and families where neglect is a factor;
- Reduction in the number of referrals to Children’s Social Care where neglect is an identified factor;
- Reduction in the percentage of children subject to a Child Protection Plan for neglect;
- Reduction in the number of children re-referred into services because of neglect.
- Practitioner forums are routinely held for staff to access support and training and completing GCP2.

Appendix

Further information regarding the use of the GCP2 can be obtained from the Partnership Team:

wscbtraining@wigan.gov.uk

This can also provide further information regarding the assessment method.

For further information:

[Research on Neglect and its relationship to other forms of harm.](#)

Police Aide Memoir on Neglect, can be obtained from the Partnership Team:

wscbtraining@wigan.gov.uk