

Fife Child Protection Committee Neglect Strategy

Why is Neglect a Focus in Fife? Neglect is one of the most common and persistent forms of harm to children in Scotland. It's often chronic, cumulative and hidden in plain sight. Reviews repeatedly show that neglect can become normalised and practitioners, families and even communities can become desensitised to the child's ongoing experience of harm. Early, proactive responses make a real difference but children are left waiting too long for help or don't get the right help.

Please visit Fife Child Protection Committee Neglect Hub for resources to support your response to neglect.

Understanding Neglect: National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021 (updated 2023) defines neglect as, *"the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and or psychological needs, likely to result in serious impairment of the child's health or development"* and can include: Physical neglect, medical neglect, nutritional neglect, emotional neglect, educational neglect and a lack of supervision. Learning Reviews stress that neglect is often complex and can be linked to factors such as parental mental ill health, poverty, substance misuse and domestic abuse but whilst it is important to understand the wider context, practitioners must overcome barriers to effect systemic change and escalate to legal measures where required.

What Learning Reviews Tell Us: Recurring themes from national and local learning reviews include:

- **Start again syndrome** – New professionals reassess the family from scratch overlooking long histories of concern.
- **Drift and delay** – Cases remain open for long periods with little progress.
- **Focus on parents, not children** – Practitioners often record what parents say, rather than what the child experiences.
- **Over-optimism** – Professionals may want to believe things are improving without clear evidence of sustained change.
- **Non-engaging families**- Families may appear to co-operate but underlying issues remain unchanged.
- **Use of legal measure and escalation** – Are essential to consider and prevent missed opportunity to effect change.

The Voice of the Child is Key: Children living with neglect often appear withdrawn, anxious or overly independent. They can have poor physical health or development delays or experience emotional neglect affecting attachment and self-esteem. Reviews highlight that voice of the child is too often missing from assessment. Practitioners must see the world through the child's eyes to drive decision-making and ask:

"What is life like for the child?" and "Would this be good enough for my own child?"

Professional Curiosity and Challenge: A common message from reviews is the need for professional curiosity – not accepting things at face value:

- Ask questions and check evidence from different sources.
- If something doesn't feel right, say it in plain language and address it – neglect is rarely a one-off event.
- Challenge drift in plans without delay – if things aren't improving, escalate.
- Supervision and reflective discussion are vital to prevent desensitisation and burnout.

If you are unhappy with a decision made in relation to a child or young person escalate to your line manager and follow the Fife Multi-agency escalation and dispute resolution protocol which empowers and supports every statutory and 3rd sector member of our partnership to have decisions about a child or young person's wellbeing and or safety reviewed by senior managers. If a child or young person you work with is open to Social Work and the case is not improving, please discuss with the Social Worker and consider a referral to Complex Case Review Panel.

Key Actions:

- **Identify and name neglect early** – small concerns matter, respond empathetically but robustly.
- **Focus on the child's lived experience** – what are they seeing, feeling, enduring? What appointments were they not taken to? Why are they absent from school? Ensure that the child's voice is represented in all professional interactions with families.
- **Be curious and persistent** – cross check information from different sources.
- **Ensure multi-agency collaboration** – agencies have a statutory duty to protect children from harm and must share information appropriately. Neglect often accumulates over time and across services.
- **Use your agency tools and frameworks to assess neglect** – chronologies play a key role and should be analysed to identify patterns over time. Along with other tools, they should inform planning, review and decision-making.
- **Use supervision and share concerns** – to support with decision-making and prevent drift where risks may be increasing. **Escalate when progress stagnates or no sustained improvement** – cases may require review to ensure that appropriate action can be taken to reduce risk.

Measuring Change:

- Ongoing monitoring of Early Help and Support assessment data and neglect cases requiring statutory intervention, with the aim of strengthening early help responses and reducing reliance on statutory services.
- Metrics of the Neglect hub webpage show that practitioners across services are accessing resources.
- Audits, feedback and questionnaire data indicate improved parental understanding of neglect and increased feelings of safety and support among children.
- The views and experiences of children are clearly evidenced and embedded within all professional interactions with vulnerable families.
- Reduction in the number of Learning Reviews that neglect is featured as a key area of concern.