



Bromley Safeguarding
Children Partnership

BSCP

**Multi-Agency Neglect Strategy
2022-24**

Original	March 2018
Reviewed	September 2022

1. Introduction

1.1 Neglect is a key priority of the BSCP. Its importance is reflected through the significant activity already undertaken in responding to this issue and the sharp focus applied by the BSCP and partner agencies in ensuring coordinated, early and effective intervention is taking place in this area. Examples of local work undertaken by the partnership to tackle neglect include:

- Neglect being consistently prioritised into single and multi-agency training programmes available to the children’s workforce in Bromley.
- Threshold tools revised and a strong drive across the Borough to ensure everyone knows what to do if they are worried about children.
- The implementation of action plans and the delivery of learning events, case reviews and audits involving neglect.
- The BSCP prioritising neglect and disseminating and embedding lessons from multi-agency case audits.
- Promotion of BSCP multi-agency escalation policy.
- Ensuring a focusing upon the importance of a Think Whole Family approach.
- The BSCP regularly reinforcing the necessity of home visiting and the need for children and young people to be seen, heard and helped – reflected through Bromley’s MASH processes and a commitment, when in doubt to “go look” visits, engaging other professionals to check on a child’s circumstances.
- Development of Children Social Care’s practice model – the Bromley Relationship Model whose aims and vision are key in preventing and tackling neglect.
- Increased alertness of practitioners by recognising that neglect is not isolated to low income families – raising awareness of “neglect by affluence”. This was specifically addressed in the 2017 BSCB Safeguarding Conference.

1.2 The impact of neglect on children and young people is enormous. Neglect causes great distress to children, leading to poor health, educational and social outcomes and is potentially fatal. Lives are affected and their ability to attend and attain at school is reduced. Their emotional health and wellbeing is often compromised and this impacts on their success in adulthood and their ability to parent in the future¹.

1.3 It can be difficult to define neglect and research shows that it often co-exists with other forms of abuse and adversity. It is also the most common reason for child protection plans in Bromley and in the UK. Neglect can also be a catalyst to future harm if not tackled effectively. Its relationship to other forms of child abuse is significant and for some, the impact of neglect upon their development can have serious consequences as they grow older, particularly in terms of their vulnerability to further abuse and exploitation.

1.4 This strategy presents a roadmap for all local professionals. It focuses on the following priorities:

- **Knowing our Problem, Knowing our Response**
- **Strong Leadership and Partnership**
- **Effective Recognition, Assessment and Support**

¹ Taylor and Bridge 2005

2. Purpose of the strategy

- 2.1 The overarching aim of the BSCP Multi-Agency Neglect Strategy is to promote the welfare of children and young people and to improve their outcomes. The strategy itself outlines the vision and guiding principles of the BSCP, with its narrative aiming to galvanise the focus of partners on realising the strategic vision of the BSCP across Bromley.
- 2.2 It is important to note that the multi-agency partnership is not starting from scratch in responding to this issue. There is evidence highlighting how neglect has been and continues to be successfully addressed by professionals across a range of agencies. The Local Authority's practice model, Bromley Relationship Model (BRM), was developed with careful consideration to help our practitioners support our families with consistent, purposeful, and engaging social work and social care. BRM's aim is that by working together with agency partners, we will ensure that every child in Bromley has the right help at the right time to keep them safe, and to meet their needs, so that they achieve, thrive and reach their full potential. One of BRM's visions is that 'We will protect children and young people from harm and make sure their welfare is promoted within their families, where this is consistent with their safety and wellbeing'.

3. Vision for Bromley

- 3.1 **Committed and trained professionals from a range of agencies have a shared understanding about the complexity of neglect. Supported by robust management oversight and effective supervision, professionals recognise neglect early and effectively respond to help and protect children and young people.**
- 3.2 Neglect by its nature is complex and difficult to address. Because of this, it is absolutely vital that practitioners from all agencies get the basics right and get them right every time. The context of our local learning on cases of neglect reflects this importance and as such, the BSCP vision for this strategy is aligned to reinforcing the importance of these fundamental tenets of practice:

Share Information

Assess and Analyse Risk

Focus on the Child (and Think Whole Family)

Evidence decisions and use evidence to inform them and

Record their work accurately

If in doubt, professionals will "go look" and make sure that they, or another professional visits the child or young person at home

4. Principles

- 4.1 Children being neglected, or at risk of being neglected, need to be **seen, heard and helped**.
- **Seen**; in the context of their lives at home, friendship circles, health, education and public spaces (including social media). This will be best achieved by developing a relationship with them, engaging in direct work to understand the child's view of the world.

- **Heard**; to effectively protect children and young people, professionals need to take time to hear what children are saying and put themselves in the child or young person's shoes and understand what their life might truly be like.
- **Helped**; by remaining professionally curious and by implementing effective and creative solutions that help children and young people. Professionals should give parents and families clear information in relation to expectations and improvements.

5. What is Neglect?

5.1 Neglect is defined in [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018](#) 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.

5.2 Neglect is characterised by the absence of a relationship of care between the parent/carer and the child and the failure of the parent/carer to prioritise the needs of their child. It can occur at any stage of childhood, including the teenage years.

5.3 Neglect can be defined from the perspective of a child's right not to be subject to inhumane or degrading treatment, for example in the European Convention on Human Rights, Article 3 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Article 19.

5.4 **The impact of neglect of children is often cumulative, advancing gradually and imperceptibly and therefore there is a risk that agencies do not intervene early enough to prevent harm.**

5.5 It is common for evidence of neglect to present through signs and symptoms which may be noticed by different agencies in relation to different children in the family at different points in time. Agencies need to feel confident in the recognising and the naming of neglect. It is important that all agencies, Health, Schools/Education, Police, Probation, Housing, Voluntary and Community Organisations identify emerging problems and potential unmet needs and seek to address them as early as possible. It is equally important that practitioners are alert to the danger of drift and 'start again' syndrome.

6. Risk Factors

6.1 A number of factors increase the likelihood of neglect in some families. Vulnerable families may have a combination of the following risk factors:

Child risk factors	Parental risk factors	Wider Risk Factors
Disability Behavioural problems Chronic ill health	Poor Mental Health (especially maternal mental health difficulties) Substance Misuse	Poverty Unemployment Poor social support

	Domestic Violence and Abuse Learning Difficulties Lack of experience of positive parenting in childhood Emotionally unavailable/detached parents	
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6.2 Whilst poverty is a recognised feature, not all the above risk factors are exclusive to children and young people living in poor households. Professionals must remain alert to neglect by affluence. Professor Claudia Bernard’s 2019 paper² cites the following from research³:

- Wealthier families may have the material resources to hide physical and supervisory neglect while being psychologically or emotionally neglectful; this point is key to understanding why neglect may go undetected in affluent families
- Many affluent parents do not spend enough quality time with their children and put excessive pressure on their children to be high achievers, and that such factors create psychological and emotional problems for the children in adulthood.
- Some affluent parents are emotionally disconnected from their children because they work very long hours, often leaving their children alone or with a range of paid carers.
- It has been suggested that the issue of neglect in affluent families is made more complex because of differing values. Some affluent parents have a more relaxed attitude to drug use and sexual activity, and as a consequence their children can be exposed to greater risks.
- Furthermore, although children may be living in affluent households, they may also be affected by parental alcohol and substance abuse, and/or domestic violence/abuse.

7. Context is key – Neglect Profile Snapshot

7.1 The BSCP is committed to ensuring the local contexts in Bromley remain key to the understanding of the prevalence and types of neglect across the Borough.

- **1 in 10 children have experienced neglect**
Source: Radford, L. et al (2011) [Child abuse and neglect in the UK today](#).
- Over 29,000 children across the UK were the subject of a child protection plan or on a child protection register because of neglect in 2019/20, **making it a concern for half of all children on a plan or register**.
Sources: [DfE, 2020](#); DoH, 2020; Scottish Government, 2021; Welsh Government, 2021
- **Neglect is a factor in 60% of serious case reviews and Domestic abuse, mental ill health and/or substance misuse were common in households where children were neglected**
Source: Brandon, M. et al. (2013) [Neglect and serious case reviews: a report from the university of East Anglia commissioned by NSPCC](#).
- **Neglect is the most common reason for taking child protection action in the UK**

² Read Claudia Bernard’s 2019 paper ‘Recognizing and Addressing Child Neglect in Affluent Families’. (Goldsmiths University) which used Bromley in its research.
<https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/25232/1/Accepted%20Recognising%20and%20Addressing%20Child%20Neglect%20in%20Affluent%20Families%209%20Oct%202018.pdf>

³ Watson, 2005, Luthar & Becker, 2002; Luthar & Crossman, 2013; Luthar & Latendresse, 2006; Bellis et al., 2014b.

Source: [NSPCC](#)

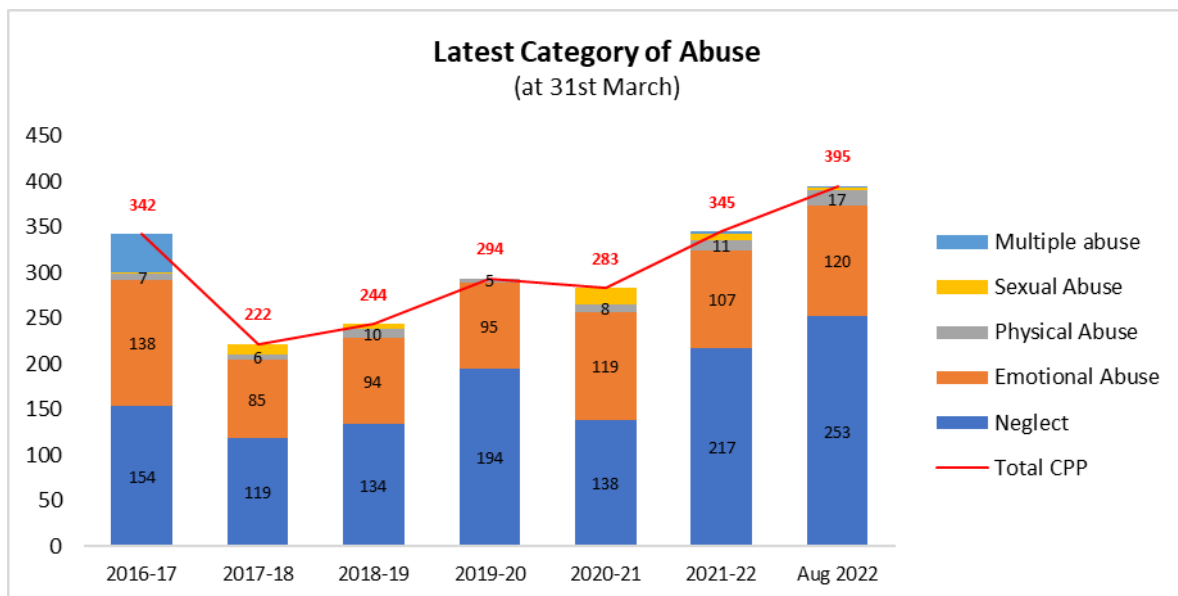
- In 2020/21 the NSPCC's helpline responded to a total of 84,914 contacts from people who were concerned about a child's welfare. 12,833 contacts related to concerns about neglect, **making it the 2nd most discussed concern and the most commonly mentioned form of abuse.**

Source: [NSPCC data](#)

- There is little difference in rates between boys and girls on CP Plans for neglect.
Source: [DfE data 2020](#)
- Younger children are more likely to be on a child protection plan because of neglect than older children. However, research suggests that the neglect of older children is more likely to go overlooked as signs of neglect may be more difficult to identify in older children and there can be an underestimation by professionals of older children's need for parental care and support ([Ofsted et al, 2018](#))

Local Statistics on Neglect

- As at March 2022, the highest category of abuse for children subject to child protection plans in Bromley was neglect (217) accounting for 63% of all cases and demonstrating significant shift from the proportion in March 2017 (45%).
- For a number of years in the London Borough of Bromley, neglect has been the highest category of abuse for a child being made subject to a Child Protection Plan and this is in line with national pattern. However, recent proportionate share (March and August 2022) is now 20 percentage point above national average distribution of 47% (2021)



Source: LBB Children Social Care statutory return 2022

8. Strategic Priorities

- 8.1 Given the interface of neglect with other harm and abuse, the BSCP understands the need to place this strategy in the context of other plans that influence the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and that its implementation must involve continued engagement with relevant groups representing local communities across both areas.
- 8.2 This includes being explicit about the impact of neglect in creating the vulnerabilities that make children and young people more susceptible to exploitation, whether this be related to sexual exploitation, radicalisation or gang involvement.
- 8.3 It is essential that neglect continues to form part of the ongoing dialogue and scrutiny at key strategic forums and that everyone is playing their part in dealing with this issue. It is also essential that the response to neglect is seen as one providing **early help to children and young people - early help in the sense that dealing with neglect swiftly and effectively prevents the life limiting consequences that result from growing up in such an environment.**
- 8.4 In its 2014 report into a number of thematic inspections (*In the Child's Time: Professional Responses to Neglect*), Ofsted identified that "the pervasive and long-term cumulative impact of neglect on the well-being of children of all ages is well documented". Findings from both inspections and research highlight the following areas as being key components to a successful, multi-agency response to neglect.
- **Early recognition**
 - **Robust management oversight and supervision**
 - **Specialist training**
 - **Acknowledgement of complexity**
 - **Effective and timely professional responses both for help and protection**
- 8.5 The following strategic priorities, informed by the above factors and local learning, provide the focus for further developing the local arrangements and responses to neglect. BSCP action plans will be informed and focused by this strategy.

Priority 1: Knowing our problem, knowing our response

To continue to improve our understanding about the quality of the response to neglect in the London Borough of Bromley.

The focus of this strategic priority is to ensure that all professionals in the London Borough of Bromley have an understanding of their local picture of neglect and, that there is a common understanding of neglect and the thresholds of intervention.

- Partners will have an overview of the prevalence and type of neglect affecting children and young people in their local area.
- Professionals who come into contact with children and young people will have relevant knowledge and a common understanding of neglect between and within agencies, as this is crucial to allow effective identification and a common language
- There will be an understanding of each agency's thresholds for action – which will allow effective and meaningful challenge (and **escalation** as appropriate) concerning cases of

neglect. Partners will know we use the indicators of need in the London Threshold Document: Continuum of help and Support, which is available at <https://www.londonsafeguardingchildrenprocedures.co.uk/thresholds.html>

Priority 2: Strong Leadership and Partnership

To secure collective commitment to addressing neglect across all partner agencies and to demonstrate effective leadership in driving forward the appropriate systems, culture and process changes required.

The focus of this strategic priority is a recognition of the need for all organisations to show leadership and commitment to identifying and responding to neglect, to promote a culture that encourages professional curiosity, challenge and appropriate escalation of concerns. This commitment is required from all levels and all agencies including those who are in the housing and environmental services.

- Leaders will ensure their staff have a **shared understanding** of neglect and know **what to do if they are worried** about a child and how to **escalate concerns**.
- Early identification and the effective response to neglect will remain a **priority** across all organisations, both statutory and non-statutory.
- Leaders will support **effective joint working between adult and children services** and across relevant strategic Boards; supporting a clear local partnership response to neglect that Thinks Family.
- Leaders will drive the importance of the professional network talking with each other and **sharing information** appropriately in order to tackle neglect effectively.
- Leaders will ensure their staff are **sufficiently trained** (both single and multi-agency training) to recognise and tackle neglect and are particularly alert to the risks arising for children with **special needs and disabilities**
- **Relevant developments in service provision are promoted** and clear for practitioners on a multi-agency basis

Priority 3: Effective recognition, assessment and support

To improve the recognition, assessment and response to children and young people living in neglect, before statutory intervention is required, including the appropriate use of assessment tools and to empower families to respond to children's needs.

Through a focus on this priority, it is intended that there is early recognition of neglect, robust management oversight and supervision of practitioners and effective and timely responses both for help and protection.

Early Recognition of Neglect

- Neglect is identified and **named as a concern** by professionals at the earliest opportunity. Professionals know who to contact, and know what will be done in response. This is supported through robust awareness raising and regular training provided by the BSCP, to partner agencies.
- All professionals **"Think Family"** and are alert to the risk of children being neglected through exposure to domestic abuse, parental substance misuse, adult mental health and learning difficulties.

- Staff do not normalise neglect because of poverty.
- There is greater awareness of “**Neglect by Affluence**”.
- **Early Help** services effectively assess and provide timely, robust multi-agency services to prevent problems getting worse with less children and young people being brought up in households suffering from neglect.

Robust management oversight and supervision

- All professionals receive **effective supervision** to help them test, challenge and reflect upon their analysis of risk to children and young people; particularly in the context of neglect and the cumulative indicators of harm.
- Professionals **challenge each other and escalate** as appropriate when there are professional differences.

Effective and timely professional responses both for help and protection

- All professionals are intently **curious** about family circumstances and undertake or facilitate **home visits** to check on children and young people at home. **“If in doubt, go look”**
- There is effective collaboration and **information sharing**.
- **‘Hard to engage’ parents** do not prevent effective intervention with the child or young person.
- All services consider/research **historical information** to inform the present position.
- Professionals are able to identify and address vulnerabilities associated with neglect and **build up families’ ability to sustain change**.
- There are clear processes and mechanisms to enable practitioners to **assess and identify risk**.
- Where **neglect themed assessment tools** are used by agencies – these are aligned to the Bromley Threshold of Need document.

The **BSCP Neglect Toolbox** contains links to existing evidence-based assessment and identification tools, a simple chronology, and links to useful information from leading organisations on child neglect. Partner agencies within the BSCP partnership will choose which tools will be used by them. The toolbox also contains a link to the neglect indicators from the London Threshold Document, which is used by all partners in Bromley.