

Communication – Context - Curiosity

Although children may experience child abuse or neglect at all ages the NSPCC identify that many practitioners lack confidence in identifying neglect in younger children. Exposing an infant or young child to neglect has been shown to be associated with post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and other difficulties later in life. The neglect of children in the first two years of life has a strong association with a range of later problems, including mental health.

- ❑ **What you might notice in parental interaction in infants (0-18 months old)** They may not seem to be tuned in to their child's needs, or sensitive to their child's feelings. They speak little to them, and when they do it is often in the form of orders, with very little positive feedback. They describe their babies as irritating and demanding. Even within the first few days of life.
- ❑ **What behaviour in a child aged 0-18 months might concern you?** A young baby or toddler may be unnaturally quiet and passive, gradually becoming more angry or aggressive as they reach two years of age. When parents leave the child may not seem upset. When parents return, the child either avoids them or is not comforted by them. Neglected infants may demonstrate developmental delay, or a failure to thrive within the first year, particularly in the area of speech and language.
- ❑ **What you might notice in parental interaction among toddlers (1-3 years)** The parent is unresponsive and uninvolved with their child, or fails to respond to them appropriately. They are often critical of the child and ignore their child's signals for help. They may even seem comfortable when their child is struggling to complete a task. When the parents are critical or verbally aggressive, the child shows more anxiety.
- ❑ **What behaviour in a child aged 1-3 years might concern you?** As neglected children grow older, they become less passive and can become more aggressive and hostile, particularly with other children. They may become angry when trying to solve puzzles or problems, and are noticeably angry or avoidant of their parents, perceiving them as unavailable to meet their needs.
- ❑ **What you might notice in the parental interaction among older children (age 3-6)** Parents may not be engaged in playing with the child, they show little affection and are unlikely to reach out to the child to relieve their distress. They may offer less praise and show less positive contact. They speak little to the child, which may contribute to language delay that is evident in emotionally neglected or abused children of this age. They are more likely to resort to physical punishment than other parents.
- ❑ **What behaviour in a child aged 3-6 years might concern you?** When playing, the older child can be angry or disinterested and show little creativity. They may also become more socially isolated, having poor interactions with other children. They may be disinterested, hostile, have poor attention, and have difficulty correctly interpreting emotions in others. They also tend to be less likely to help others or expect others to help them. As they get older, they may have a noticeable learning delay, in particular a delay in both understanding and constructing sentences.

Signs to look out for in children aged 5-14 years:

Behaviour: The impact on behaviour is often greatest when neglect starts early in a child's life, or if the child is both neglected and emotionally abused. They may present as aggressive and hostile, for example, the child may be prone to angry outbursts or lashing out towards others. They may be more impulsive than other children and may show features seen in Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), for example, poor concentration or impulsive behaviour. Neglected children specifically, may be particularly quiet or withdrawn.

Relationships with other children: The children may have difficulty with friendships and have more problems socialising than other children do. They may describe another child as their 'best friend' but the other child does not reciprocate this. The child may have few friends and be perceived by other children as more likely to be aggressive or disruptive.

Emotional or self-perception issues: They may have little self-confidence, and the more severe neglect they experience, the lower their self-esteem. They may experience more mood swings than would be expected for their age, or show levels of affection towards others, which are inappropriate for the situation. Neglected children may see themselves as being worthless to others. They may have developed fewer effective coping skills than other children. They may become angry or restrict their emotional displays.

School performance: They often have more difficulty than their classmates carrying out complex tasks, particularly when they are required to understand and follow instructions that involve visual and motor integration. Despite poor performance in some areas, neglected children may be better at problem solving, planning and abstract thinking than other children.

Health and development: They may have untreated health conditions, and may not be brought to health appointments. They are less likely to develop the skills and abilities of similar aged children or may have had to develop skills and abilities beyond what is typically expected of their age.