

Definitions of Abuse and Neglect

Child Protection is part of safeguarding and promoting welfare. This action refers to the activity that is undertaken to protect specific children who are suffering, or are at risk of suffering, significant harm.

Effective child protection is essential to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. However all partner agencies will aim proactively to safeguard and promote the welfare of children so that the need for action to protect children from harm is reduced.

Children in Need are defined by section 17 Children Act 1989 as those whose vulnerability is such that they are unlikely to reach or to maintain a satisfactory level of health or development, or their health or development will be significantly impaired, without the provision of services for them. Children with disability are automatically included in this definition. Many of the children who fall within the remit of this definition will be dealt with through the Integrated Children's Service, i.e. the Common Assessment Framework and Team Around the Child (TAC) model.

Significant harm

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2006) page 36 says:

“There are no absolute criteria on which to rely when judging what constitutes significant harm. Consideration of the severity of ill-treatment may include the degree and the extent of physical harm, the duration and frequency of abuse and neglect, the extent of premeditation and the presence or degree of threat and coercion, sadism, and bizarre or unusual elements....

To understand and establish significant harm, it is necessary to consider:

- The nature of harm in terms of ill-treatment or failure to provide adequate care;
- The impact on the child's health and development
- The child's development within the context of their family and wider environment;
- Any special needs such as a medical condition, communication impairment or disability that may affect the child's development and care within the family;
- The capacity of parents to meet adequately the child's needs
- The wider and environmental family context”

It is important always to take account of the child's reactions, and his or her perceptions, according to the child's age and understanding.

Categories Of Significant Harm And Their Definition

Physical abuse

Physical Abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces illness in a child.

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond the child's developmental capability, as well as over-protection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child in participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying, causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, including prostitution, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (e.g. rape, buggery or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual on-line images, watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

Neglect

Neglect is 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)
- Ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment

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