

# Somerset Neglect Strategy

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This strategy sets out key multi-agency objectives for tackling neglect in Somerset



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THIS STRATEGY NEEDS TO BE READ  
IN CONJUNCTION WITH SOMERSET  
SAFEGUARDING PARTNERSHIP'S:

[Family Strengths and Needs Toolkit  
& Guidance](#)

[South West Child Protection Procedures](#)

[Resolving Professional Differences](#)

[Effective Support for Children and  
Families in Somerset](#)

# INTRODUCTION

**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 and development.**

*Working Together to Safeguard Children.*

The purpose of this strategy is to establish aims, objectives and priorities for Somerset in supporting better outcomes for children who are experiencing neglect. It was developed by SSCP partners and applies to all agencies across all sectors working in Somerset. The impact of neglect can be serious, enduring and can potentially continue across their life course; neglect commonly occurs in the context of poverty and other aspects of social disadvantage but can affect children in any social context.

Neglect can be difficult to identify and respond to. It rarely manifests in a crisis that demands immediate action, it commonly occurs alongside other forms of abuse and practitioners may become accustomed to the chronic nature of neglect. An effective response therefore requires practitioners to look beyond individual episodes and understand the neglect in context; to look also at the underlying factors that can lead to neglectful experiences – including poor parental mental health, domestic violence, poverty and social disadvantage – and to consider how support and interventions will help protect against further harm and vulnerability.

Neglect leads to poorer health, reduced educational and social outcomes and is potentially fatal. Children and young people's lives are affected and their ability to attend and attain at school can be reduced. Their emotional health and wellbeing can be affected and this can impact on their success in adulthood and their ability to parent in the future.

Research tells us that addressing the needs of a family in a holistic way is more likely to lead to better outcomes for children, young people and their parents or carers with additional needs by co-ordinating the support they receive from children and young people's, adults' and family services.

Neglect can also be an indicator of future harm if not addressed early and 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.

This Strategy is developed in recognition that a whole-system approach is required to effectively identify neglect and support families, and so encompasses all agencies working with children and families in Somerset.

Given the interface of neglect with other forms of harm and abuse, the SSCP places this strategy in the context of other strategic plans that influence the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in Somerset. This includes the impact of neglect in creating the vulnerabilities that make children and young people more susceptible to exploitation in all its forms, including criminal and sexual.

The strategy's accompanying action plan identifies priority areas of work that take into account local context and findings.

# HOW WE CREATED THIS STRATEGY

## TO INFORM THIS STRATEGY, THE PARTNERSHIP CONSIDERED:

- Data, including numbers of Child Protection plans and the identification of neglect
- Case review findings and themes
- Frontline practitioner focus groups and a practitioner survey
- Audits on neglect
- Feedback from children and parents about the support they received

## PRINCIPLES

The principles underlying this strategy are that:

Children being neglected, or at risk of being neglected, need to be **seen, heard and helped.**

**Think Family:** when working with a child, adult or family practitioners should take a holistic approach, think wider than a single service and share concerns to support the family.

**Early Identification:** early recognition and identification of the signs and symptoms of neglect and the importance of effective multi-agency assessment and collaboration to provide help early is the 'right' approach in Somerset.



## CHILDREN MUST BE:

**SEEN** - in the **context of their lives** at home, friendship circles, health, education and public spaces (including social media).

**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 think about what their life might truly be like.

**HELPED** - by remaining **professionally curious** and by implementing effective and imaginative solutions that help children and young people. Practitioners should give parents and families **clear information** in relation to **expectations and improvements**.

A number of factors increase the likelihood of neglect. However, they are not predictors of neglect in themselves and neglect can occur anywhere, including in affluent households.

## THE IMPACT OF NEGLECT

Neglect can take form in a number of ways, including:

**PHYSICAL NEGLECT** - not meeting a child's basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing

**SUPERVISORY NEGLECT** - not supervising a child adequately or providing for their safety

**EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT** - not enabling a child to receive an education

**EMOTIONAL NEGLECT** - not meeting a child's needs for nurture and positive relationships, for instance by ignoring or humiliating them

**MEDICAL NEGLECT** - not enabling the child to access appropriate health care or ignoring medical recommendations

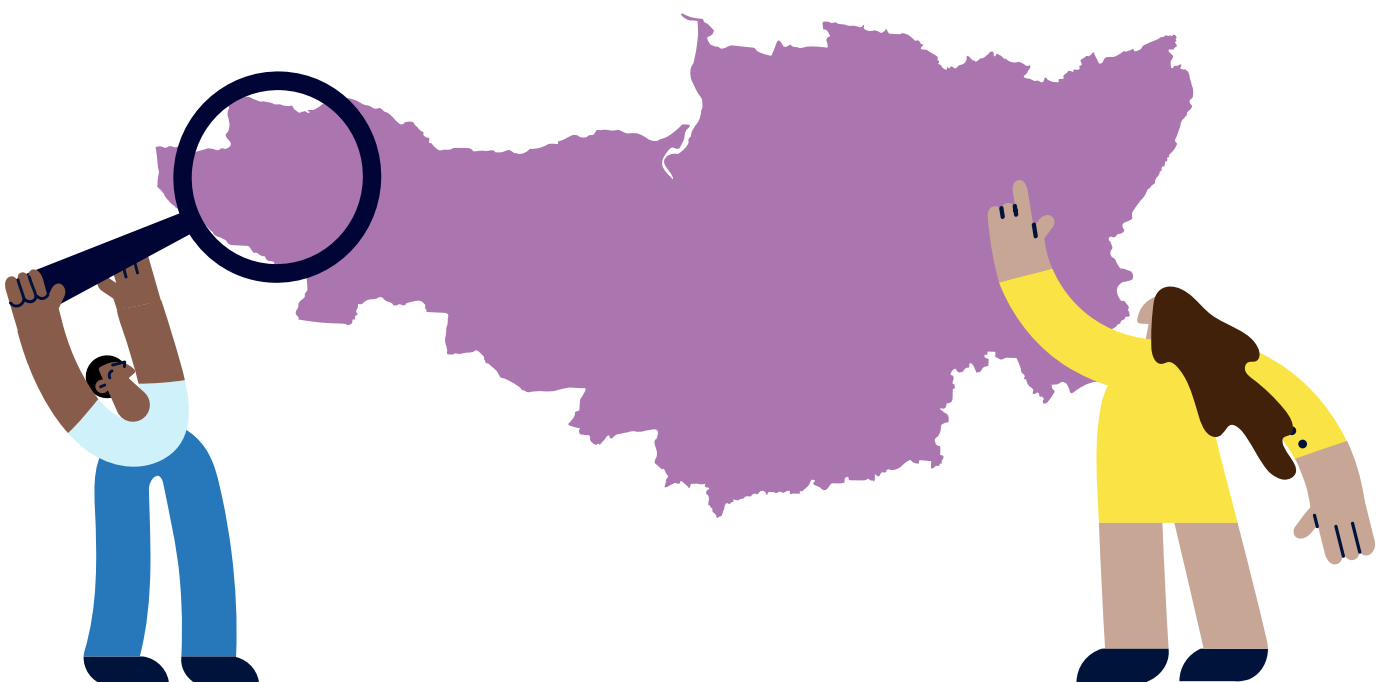
**NUTRITIONAL NEGLECT** - not enabling a child to have a healthy diet, this might include obesity or failure to thrive

Neglect has the potential to compromise a child's development significantly. There is evidence to suggest that it has an adverse impact on all the seven dimensions of development identified in the Assessment Framework: health, education, identity, emotional and behavioural development, family and social relationships, social presentation and self-care skills (Tanner and Turner, 2003; Norman et al., 2012; Hildyard and Wolfe, 2002; Manly et al., 2001).

Neglect is particularly damaging in the first two to three years of life - and it can continue to compromise development throughout childhood and adolescence.

## SOME ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE PREVIOUS NEGLECT STRATEGY 2021-23:

- We changed the name of the Neglect Toolkit to the Family Strengths and Needs toolkit – and practitioners tell us this makes it more engaging to use with families.
- The SSCP trained 278 practitioners about neglect from 2021-2023. Feedback from the course tells us that it significantly improves practitioners' confidence in using the Family Strengths and Needs Toolkit to achieve better outcomes with families.
- We also rolled out Early Help training to 146 practitioners from 2021-2023, which supported better understanding and implementation of the principles of effective early help.
- We converted the Family Strengths and Needs Toolkit into an interactive tool on our website. Practitioners tell us that this is a useful and engaging way to complete the tool collaboratively with families.
- We held an online Forum Week on Neglect in June 2023, which we subsequently uploaded to our YouTube channel and they have been viewed over 145 times.



# SOMERSET CONTEXT

## Somerset Key Demographics

**52.7%**

**CHILDREN ON CHILD PROTECTION PLANS FOR NEGLECT**

*(DECEMBER 2023)*

**17.7%**

**CHILDREN IN SOMERSET LIVE IN LOW INCOME FAMILIES**

*(DECEMBER 2023) - ENGLAND 20% / SOUTH WEST 17%*

**23.8%**

**CHILD PROTECTION PLANS OPEN FOR 12+ MTHS WHERE NEGLECT IS A CATEGORY OF CONCERN**

*(JANUARY 2024)*

**127**

**YOUNG CARERS**

**11,706**

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SEN SUPPORT**

*(JANUARY 2024)*

**765.7** per 100,000

**SELF-HARM HOSPITAL ADMISSIONS (10-24 YRS)**

*(Public Health 2021-22)*

**577**

**CHILDREN MISSING OUT ON EDUCATION**

*(JANUARY 2024)*

**216**

**INJURY ADMISSIONS OF CHILDREN UNDER 5**

*(OCTOBER 2022-23) SUS DATA*

# LEARNING FROM REVIEWS

Local learning review work in 2022 and 2023 have highlighted the following themes:

- The importance of identifying and supporting children experiencing neglect who are hidden from agencies.
- Identifying adult self-neglect and recognising the impact of this on children in the home.
- Recognising children who are acting as young carers for their siblings.
- The importance of input from health professionals in identifying and responding to medical or basic care neglect.
- Engaging with fathers and male carers as well as mothers to gain an understanding of their role within the family.
- The importance of escalating concern between agencies when not in agreement about planning for a child.

Learning from reviews nationally has also included:

- Professionals must be able to recognise the different forms of neglect and understand its cumulative effects.
- Agencies must take a 'Think Family' approach when supporting any member of the family in considering the impact on the child and share information appropriately. All agencies need to contribute relevant information to multi-agency meetings.
- Newborn/premature babies, disabled children and teenagers are particularly vulnerable to their needs being missed.
- Professionals in all agencies should understand the significance of children not being brought to appointments or missing school.
- Interventions must be linked to specific improved outcomes, and regular reviews should check improvements are being made. The importance of escalating concern between agencies when not in agreement about planning for a child.





# PRIORITIES

## PRIORITY 1 – PREVENTION

To improve the recognition, assessment and response to children, young people and families 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.

Professionals who come into contact with children and young people and families 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.

- 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 SSCP to partner agencies.
- All professionals take a whole family approach and are alert to the risk of children being neglected through exposure to domestic abuse, parental substance misuse, parental mental health issues and learning difficulties.
- Staff do not normalise neglect because of poverty, there is greater awareness of 'neglect by affluence'.
- Professionals understand how and when to share information about neglect and the legal basis for this'.
- Early Help ways of working effectively assess and provide timely, robust multi-agency services to prevent problems getting worse with fewer children and young people being brought up in households suffering from neglect.

## PRIORITY 2 – INTERVENTION

To demonstrate robust multi-agency working together, sharing information and an understanding of agency's threshold of intervention whereby agencies are able to collaborate early and intervene in ways which engage the parents and take into account historical information to inform present position and the multiagency response.

- There will be an understanding of each agency's thresholds for intervention – which will allow effective and meaningful challenge (and escalation as appropriate) concerning cases of neglect.
- There is effective collaboration and information sharing, including drawing on the voice of the child and their lived experience.
- Hard to reach families are effectively engaged with support.
- All services consider/research historical information to inform the present position but also appreciate that circumstances may change.

- Agencies take a 'Think Family' approach to considering need and agreeing plans of support.
- 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, and measure change.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase awareness of the Family Strengths and Needs toolkit in all areas of the Partnership, from early help to Child Protection planning.
- Continue to equip the workforce with skills to identify and support neglect.
- Promote understanding across the workforce about adult self-neglect and the impact of this on children.
- Support practitioners to develop skills to support parents who have experienced trauma or where there are barriers to engagement.
- Promote improved school attendance for children in Somerset, and awareness of safeguarding risks of low attendance.
- Support practitioner understanding about information sharing'.
- Increase understanding about the SSCP Resolving Professional Differences process across the workforce.
- Ensure Connect Somerset is giving families access to practical support at the earliest possible stage.
- Promote a robust response for children when they are not brought to medical appointments.
- Raise awareness about Young Carers and support available for them.
- Increase understanding about children who are hidden from agencies.

# CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The SSCP will monitor performance through a set of outcome measures against an action plan which will be determined by the Quality and Performance subgroup.

## ASSESS

Data, learning from reviews and other information which helped to share the Strategy.

## PLAN

Strategy document and associated action plan.

## DO

Carry out action plan.

## REVIEW

Report progress to the Quality and Performance subgroup, utilising evidence such as feedback from parents and children, audit, data and case studies.





This publication has been produced by the  
Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership