



# Torbay Multi Agency Neglect Strategy 2021-2024

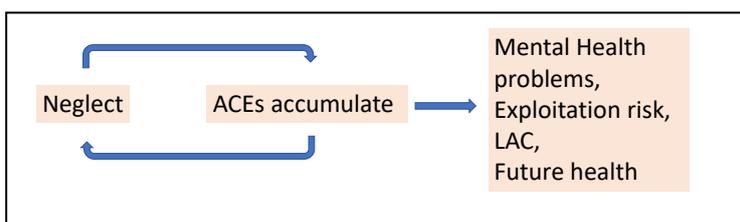
Children should be seen, heard and helped

# 1 Introduction

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Neglect means that a child's needs for safety, physical care and love are not being met, to an extent that could cause them serious or lasting harm (NSPCC). By this definition, there is a clear overlap with emotional abuse.

Neglect is the most common serious Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) that has a significant impact on a child's long-term health, prosperity and wellbeing, as proven by numerous international studies. Neglect also allows other adverse childhood experiences to accumulate, amplifying long term effects for the child.



There is a linear relationship between a child's exposure to ACEs that can be measured in primary school, which changes a child's future academic and social trajectory through school. For example, the reduction in attainment at Key Stage 1 for children that have ever been a 'Child in Need' is 14%, for those that have ever been on a Child Protection Plan is 17%, and for those that have ever been in care is 24% (Berridge 2020).

The latest genomic techniques are improving our understanding of the biological mechanism responsible. For example, long term exposure to stress hormones, starting in the womb, changes the way the body uses the instructions in its DNA template for growth and repair (Parade 2021). This mechanism also affects the immature eggs in a female infant's ovaries (her future children), contributing to the multigenerational biological and social impact of neglect.

Conversely, the multigenerational Raising Healthy Children Study from Seattle, USA has shown that effective early support provides socioeconomic benefits not just to the most vulnerable children and families directly assisted, but to their future offspring as well (Hill 2020).

The NSPCC states that neglect can be prevented, and it can be stopped once it starts (NSPCC 2015). At one time or another, all parents face difficulties in their lives that can make parenting hard. By providing timely and accessible high-quality advice, support and interventions we can both prevent these difficulties leading to neglect and improve the future prospects of children and young people in the Bay.

## 2 Background

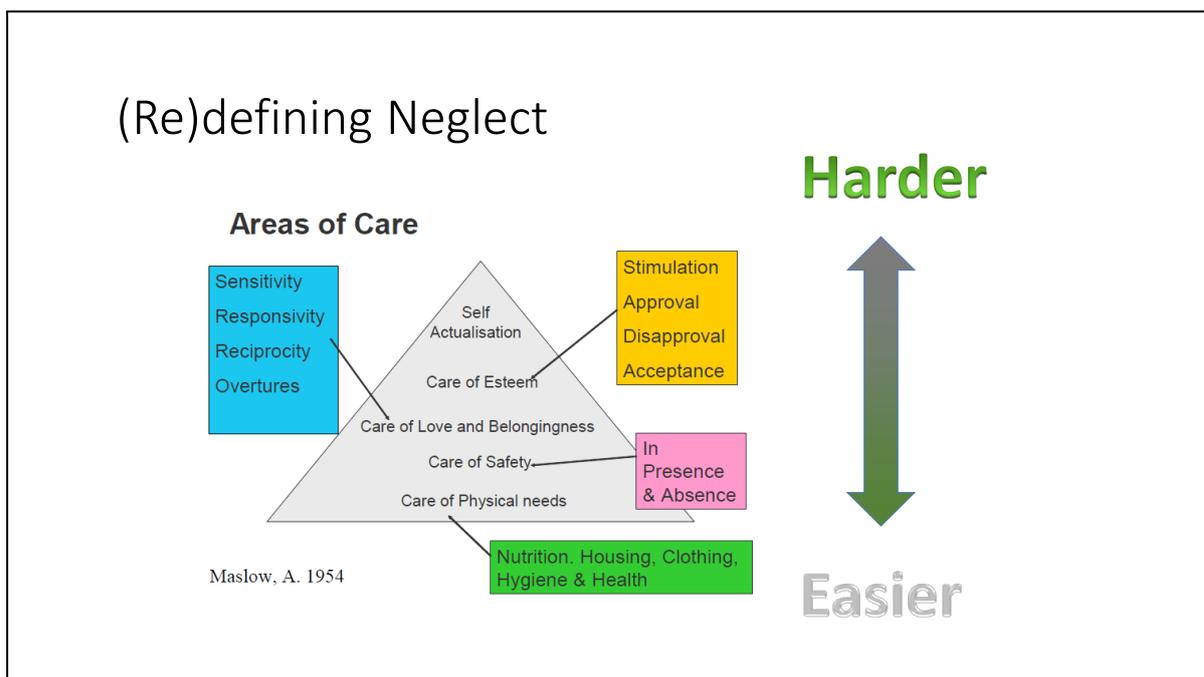
### 2.1 Thinking about neglect

According to Working together to Safeguard Children 2018, 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); or
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

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

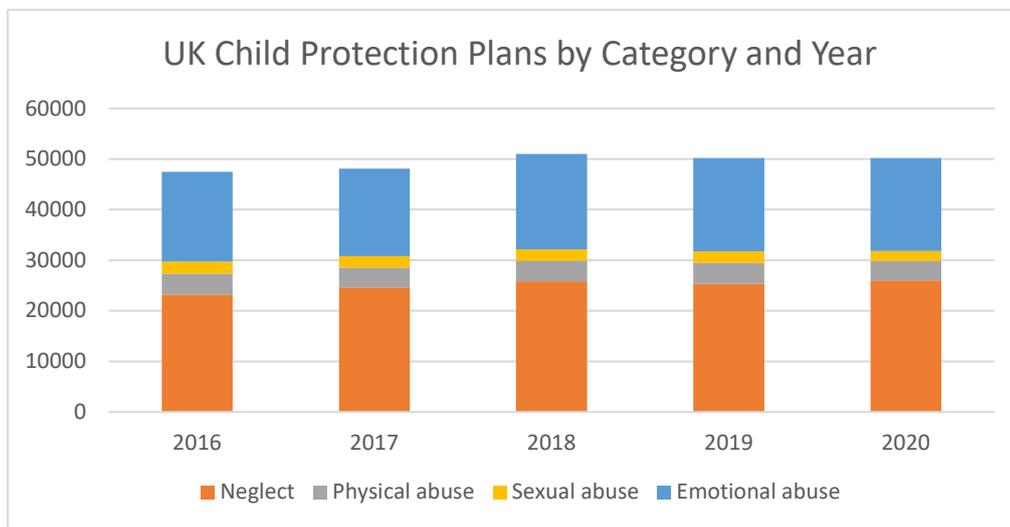
Another way to encapsulate the problem, recommended by the NSPCC, is based on Maslow’s pyramid of self-actualisation, a psychological construct from the 1950s. It describes the conditions required for a student to thrive, and of course a neglected child suffers the exact opposite. As the top of the pyramid is approached, the signs of neglect will be more subtle, underlining the complexity of the problem:



A family and society’s ability to provide for these needs will vary with time, as will the child’s level of need. Inadequate provision is likely to increase a child’s needs until the balance is restored. Long term or relapsing mismatch is likely to result in more permanent maladaptive behaviour.

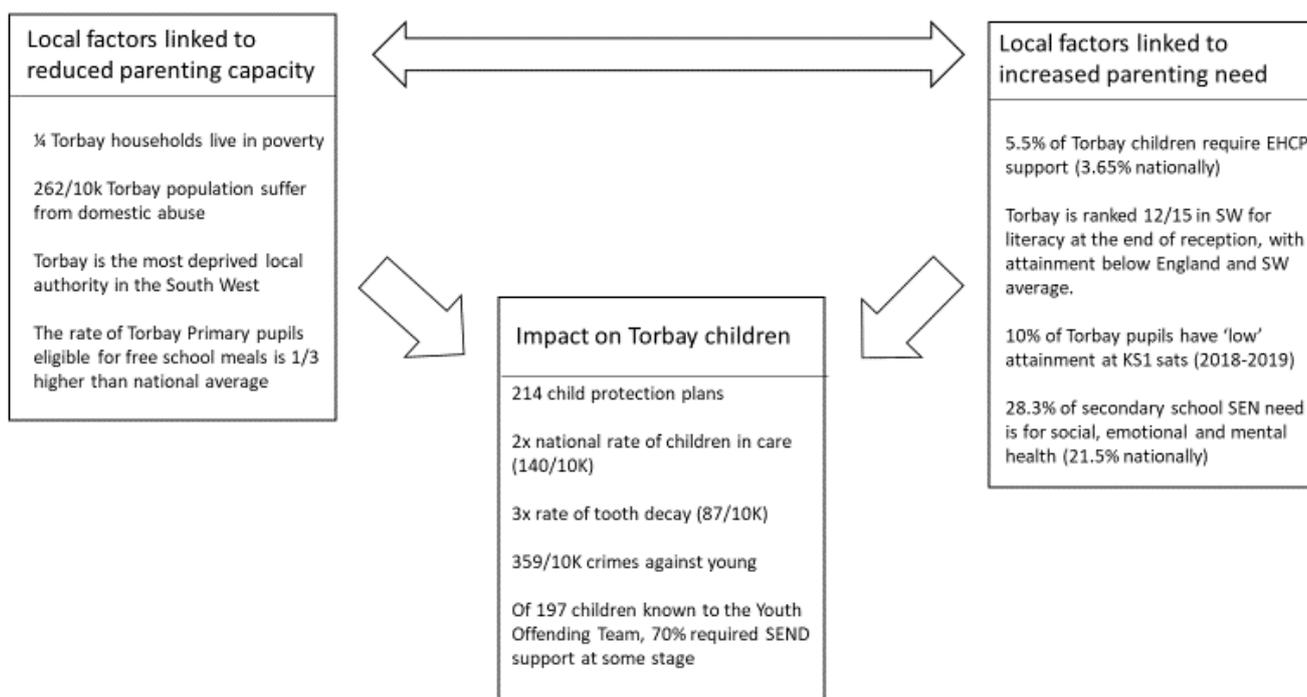
## 2.2 Neglect is a huge problem nationally

Nationally, neglect and emotional abuse are the most common reasons for child protection plans, the most common reason for children to contact the NSPCC helpline, significant contributory factors to the majority of severe cases of child abuse including those that have resulted in serious case reviews:

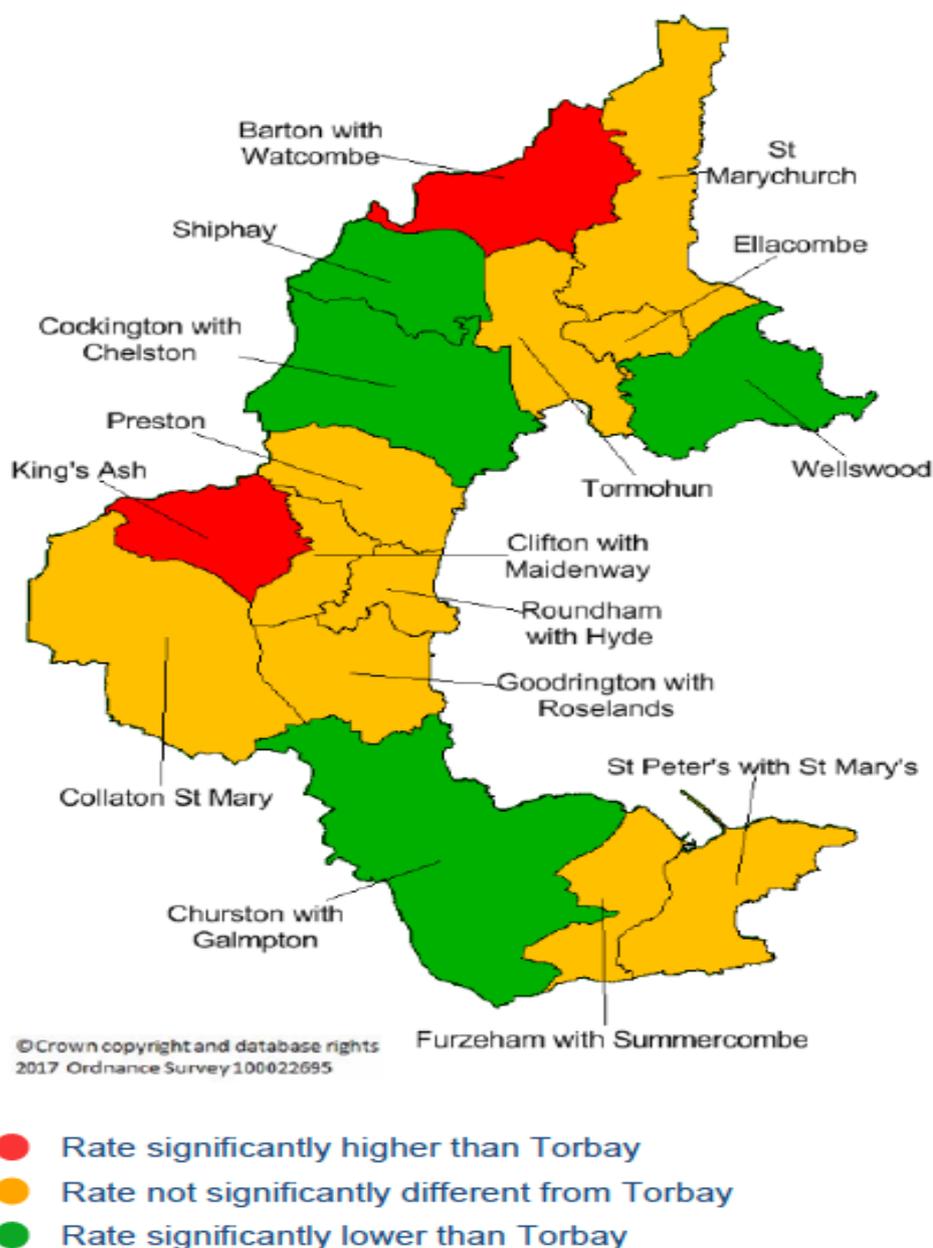


Data collected by the NSPCC via their childline services shows that children’s worries about neglect and emotional abuse account for over half of all contacts. They experienced a 32% increase in contacts during the summer lockdown 2020. The description of their lived experiences, by the children contacting the NSPCC, is harrowing.

## 2.3 Torbay is a national outlier for both the risk factors for neglect and its impact



## 2.4 The areas of greatest need for early years support are well localised within Torbay



## 2.5 Learning from serious cases - common pitfalls when working with neglect

According to the national triennial review of serious cases 2019 for Warwick University (Myers 2019), the majority of children suffering from severe harm or death fall into two categories:

1. The first consists of those unknown to services. Their data show that approximately 1/3 of children seriously harmed are not known to services. These children would be best served by strengthened and accessible universal services, and training universal staff to spot signs of neglect and take an enquiring approach with parents that do not engage.

2. The second consists of those known to services, but where a number of common pitfalls have prevented an adequate response. Common themes in local and national serious cases amenable to staff training include:
  - i. professionals do not believe the case will meet a threshold for intervention
  - ii. professionals worry that referral will break any therapeutic relationship they may have with a vulnerable family
  - iii. 'starting again' (e.g. due to supportive relationship breakdown or staff turnover) and giving insufficient weight to documented risk factors and previous experiences of working with the family.
  - iv. Insufficient peer support, rigour and oversight
  - v. Disguised compliance and supporting those reticent to engage

## 2.6 Restorative Practice

Agencies within the Torbay Safeguarding Children Partnership have agreed to implement a restorative and relational model of working with children, young people and families that ensures they remain at the heart of our practice. Restorative practice describes a way of being, an underpinning ethos, which enables us to build and maintain healthy relationships, resolve difficulties, and repair harm when relationships breakdown by recognising the importance of separating the behaviour from the person. This means we are committed to shifting the balance of power so that our work is family and not practitioner led. We recognise the importance of families being supported to utilise their own resources and strengths to overcome challenges and develop long term solutions to areas of need.

Restorative working involves simultaneous high support and high challenge. The essence of working restoratively is that people are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behaviour when those in positions of authority do things with them, rather than to them or for them. When we work restoratively with children and families there is strong evidence of outcomes being improved.

## 2.7 Early Help and how it is being delivered in Torbay

**Early Help** is not a specific service or team it's an approach to working that brings together professionals from a range of different services who will work with the whole family to help improve things for everyone.

We believe that children and families need to be heard when they first ask for help to minimise the risk of problems getting worse and help them address them at the earliest opportunity. Engaging a family in Early Help is also a voluntary process and consent from children, young people, and their families to work with them should always be sought. Without this, it is unlikely that they will engage in the support that we can offer them.

Early Help can be provided through a single agency or multi agency response as appropriate to the needs of the child and family and the concern.

Our principles for Early Help are based on the principles of the legislation as described in Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2018:

“Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child’s life, from the foundation years through to the teenage years. Early help can also prevent further problems arising, for example, if it is provided as part of a support plan where a child has returned home to their family from care.”

Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2018

In practice, this means:

- Always working WITH the child, young person, and family, and not “doing to”
- Working in a relational and strengths-based way
- Considering the whole family as part of the analysis of need and the solutions to that need
- Identifying and addressing the problem at the earliest opportunity
- Early Help being “everyone’s business”, promoting accountability, evaluation, and sustainability across the partnership

In delivering **Early Help**, we are very clear however that where there is a safeguarding concern, the Torbay Children Safeguarding Partnership’s safeguarding procedures must be followed.

## 2.8 Reframing Neglect

Neglect is a highly stigmatising diagnosis that is extremely difficult to make, as above. Qualitative research commissioned by the Office of National Statistics, to understand the best ways to discuss neglect and parenting capacity with families, identified themes that were then tested in a quantitative manner with larger representative groups. They found that the best ways to promote long term positive behavioural changes was in terms of a ‘core story’:

### AN EMERGING CORE STORY FOR COMMUNICATING ABOUT MALTREATMENT

These explanatory tools represent an important component of an emerging *Core Story* for communicating about child maltreatment, and child neglect in particular. Below, we provide an emerging outline of this Core Story:

- Begin with the **value of Social Responsibility** to leverage productive assumptions about responsibility that people already hold, and to increase their receptivity to solutions.
- Include **facts and solutions** that provide information about the prevalence of maltreatment and discuss solutions in concrete terms.
- Introduce the **Overloaded metaphor** to describe *how* child neglect happens.
- Use the **Equipping Parents Explanatory Chain** to explain how specific social factors can affect parenting capacities and lead to neglect.

This kind of approach to talking about neglect dovetails nicely with restorative practice models.

## 2.9 Social and material resources build parenting capacity

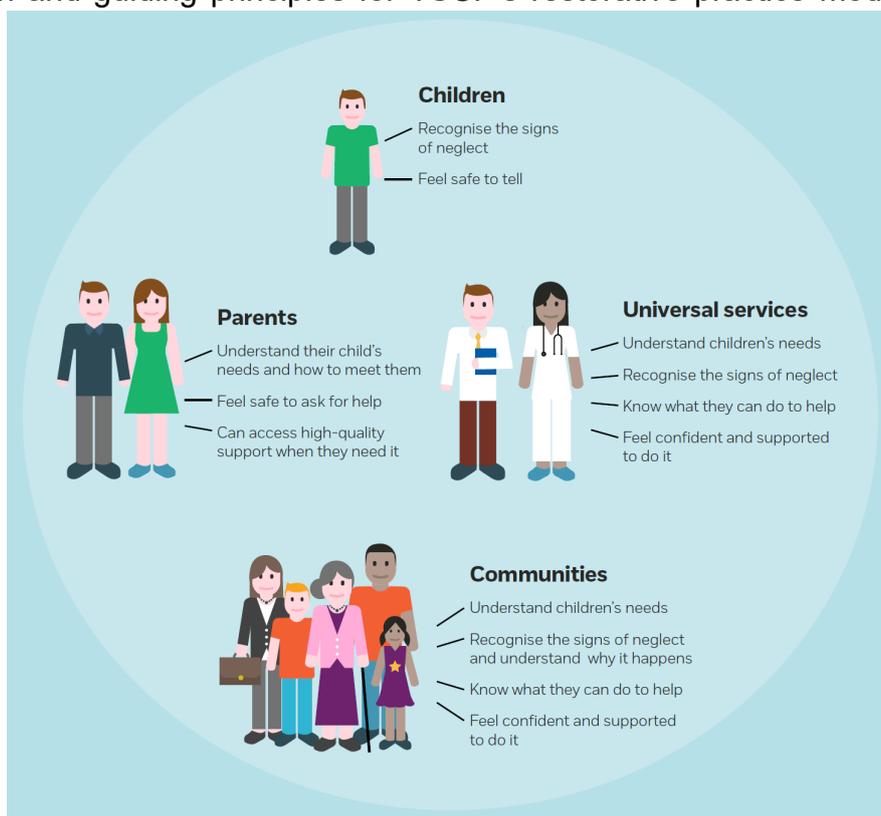
According to a detailed 2016 study for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, there is a complex interplay between self-reinforcing factors associated with both poverty and child abuse and neglect, but none are proven to be causal. Social connections and material wealth are associated with increased parenting capacity, whereas unemployment and isolation have the opposite effects.

While JRF were able to attribute 2/3 of the annual cost of the United Kingdom's children's services to alleviating poverty, the costs of late interventions were over 3 times higher and this did not include additional costs later into adult lives for the health, education, housing and criminal justice systems.

In summary, early support and intervention is likely to have the greatest impact. The Nuffield foundation have shown that over the last 10 years of austerity, overall spending on children has declined, but the share of that money spent on prevention has declined massively while that spent on statutory intervention has actually increased overall.

## 3 Vision, development, and use of this document

The aim of TSCP is to promote the welfare of vulnerable children and young people, to maximise their chances of becoming successful and fulfilled adults. The purpose of this document is to outline the vision and guiding principles for TSCP's restorative practice model that empowers



children, parents, communities and universal services to understand and meet children's developmental needs.

The neglect operational group representing social care, health, education and the Police has reviewed the previous TSCB strategy, recent strategies from other local authorities, data from the triennial analysis of serious case reviews, recent publications from a diverse group of national bodies including the NSPCC, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Nuffield Foundation, Department of Education, OFSTED, JTAs and relevant scientific literature to produce this document (see references below). The background information above is a summary of this work and should be used to support educational programmes about neglect for TSCP. The strategic priorities below are also based on this work.

This document should be used alongside other key local initiatives such as Restorative Practice, the [Early Help Pathway](#), [Professional Differences Policy](#), [Think Family Protocol](#), [Thresholds document](#), Practice Guidance for Children/Young People Missing from Home/Care, [Torbay Domestic Abuse Strategy](#), and [Exploitation Toolkit](#).

## 4 Strategic Priorities

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### 4.1 Use evidence-based services for preventing and addressing neglect

Reverse the trend of reducing funding for universal preventative services.

Appraise and oversee the roll out of the most up to date and effective tools such as Graded Care Profile 2 (GCP2) and 'SMART About Neglect, focussing on overcoming barriers to effective intervention.

Develop a dashboard of measurable process outcomes that can be used to monitor both the direct impact of these interventions and the wider long-term impact such as Public Health England fingertips data, KS1 attainment, and the National Childhood Measurement Programme.

### 4.2 Increase the community's knowledge and awareness of child development

Enhance access in the most vulnerable areas.

Work with maternity and health visiting services to empower new parents and to promote their understanding of child development.

Oversee the roll-out of accessible parenting support, e.g. online Solihull Parenting Courses, using a restorative practice model.

Oversee the provision of education about normal child development to the whole community.

### 4.3 Equip practitioners to recognise risk

Provide specific training about the impact of neglect on children, recognition of neglect and intervention for neglect to universal services practitioners.

Promote an enquiring approach to children appearing not to meet expected developmental milestones.

Promote the provision of adequate time and funding for effective peer review of cases.

Monitor the impact of this training programme.

Promote routine enquiry around the Think Family agenda in agencies.

#### **4.4 Enable positive, trusting, long term relationships**

Work with providers of universal services to ensure that additional support is accessible.

Re-frame parenting difficulties in a non-stigmatising manner, for example by using explanatory chains as described above.

Work with universal services to ensure frontline workers receive sufficient support and peer review of their work.

Use the lived experiences of children to improve services offered

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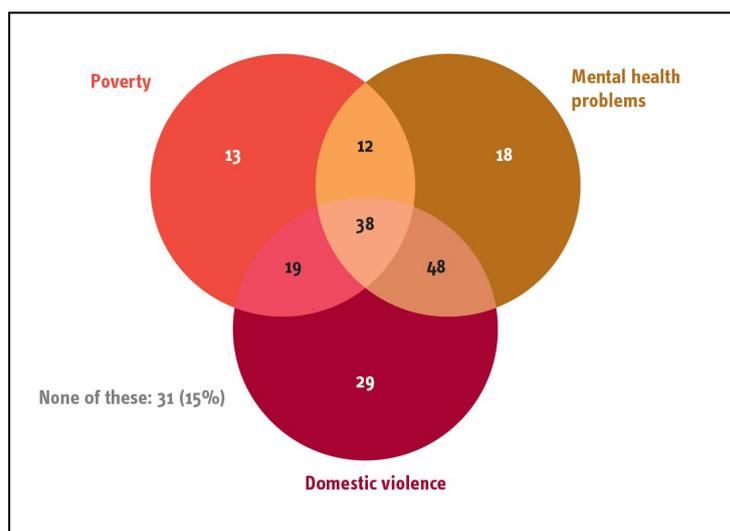
\* only first author / sponsoring organization listed, in date order

# 6 Appendix – risk factors for neglect and recurrence

Vulnerability and protective factors as identified by Department of Education 2017

Protective Factors	Vulnerability Factors
Supportive family environment and social networks	Parent's exposure to adverse experiences during childhood (e.g. parental domestic violence, substance misuse, mental health issues)
Communities that support parents	
Adequate housing	Domestic abuse, mental health difficulties, drug and alcohol misuse (combined or singly)
Access to health care and social services	
Nurturing parenting skills	A history of crime (especially for violence and sexual offences)
Stable family relationships	Patterns of multiple consecutive partners
Reasonable and consistent household rules and child monitoring	Acrimonious separation
Parental employment	Parental learning disability
Caring adults outside the family who can serve as role models or mentors	As above, the impact of poverty is even more complex
The presence of a non-abusive partner	
Parents' recognition of the problems	
Parents' willingness to engage with services.	

Risk factors for recurring neglect and their likelihood in serious adverse events as identified by Research in Practice for Warwick University include:



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