

One minute guide

Recognising Neglect of Older Children

July 2020

What is 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 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 caregivers)
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.
- be responsive to a child's emotional needs.
- ensure educational needs are met

During adolescence, the child's brain goes through neurobiological remodelling, strengthening some connections and 'pruning' others:

- This is a critical period for the development of emotional regulation and higher executive functioning (including decision-making, cognition, impulse control, and attention span)
- This is *as* important as the first two years of life are for attachment.

Neglect in older children adversely affects this process and can compound the developmental harms of earlier life neglect.

Conversely, *good care* in this period of brain remodelling can lessen the effects of previous adverse experience.

An NSPCC study found that 4% of under 11s and 11% of 11- to 17-year-olds had experienced neglect. This suggests that older children are almost **three times more likely** to have suffered neglect than younger children.

Key Points

- Neglect of older children sometimes goes unseen.
- Older children still need parental care and support.
- Neglect may present as challenging behaviour; often the child is seen as 'the problem'.
- Older children who experience neglect may have suffered years of neglect and adverse experiences
- The behaviour of such older children must be understood in the context of this trauma.

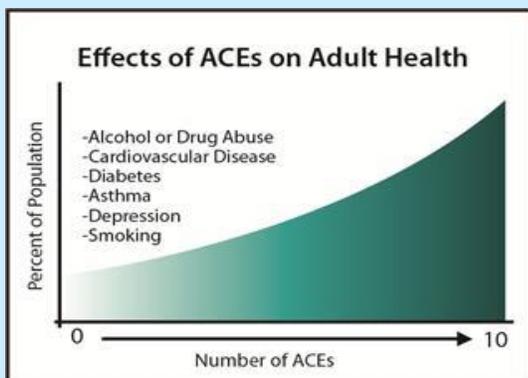
Neglect is a risk factor for sexual and criminal child exploitation

Consider Neglect when an older child:

- is truanting or being persistently kept out of school
- is persistently not brought to health appointments
- goes missing from home
- is showing offending or challenging behaviour
- has poor hygiene or inappropriate clothing
- is misusing substances or alcohol
- is showing emotional distress including self-harming
- is spending time with inappropriate adults to meet basic & emotional needs

Why Neglect Matters

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) affect lifelong health and wellbeing.



- Neglect is a factor in **48% of all Serious Case Reviews** where the child died. Causes of death included suicide, drug overdose, and risk-taking behaviour, as well as concurrent maltreatment
- Neglected older children are vulnerable to criminal and/or sexual exploitation, substance misuse, and mental health difficulties including self-harm.

