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Background:

Working Together defines neglect as 'the persistent failure to meet a child's basic and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development'. There is widespread understanding of the impact of neglect on younger children but neglect of adolescents has, by contrast, had less recognition.

NSPCC. Teenagers: Learning from case reviews Feb 2021 published a briefing that highlights how professionals need to listen to adolescents, understand their wishes and best interests and provide timely and appropriate interventions.

**Adolescent Neglect**

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Why it matters:

Studies have challenged a widely-held assumption that young people may be more resilient to abuse or neglect than younger children – the impact of maltreatment does not decline with the age at which it is experienced and many adolescents carry the legacy of long-standing abuse and neglect with them.

Young people who experience maltreatment only during adolescence display a range of negative outcomes at least as strong as those of children who experience maltreatment only during childhood. More than ¼ of Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) are for young people aged 11-18 (Sidebotham et al, 2016; Brandon et al, 2012)

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What to do

Use RBSCP resources to identify and assess neglect. The resources supply tools to consider the impact of neglect on adolescents whilst being able to actively involve adolescents and their family in assessment.

The tool prompts critical thinking in assessment via child neglect strategies key questions.

You will also find information on next steps with direct links provided to early help assessment, child need and response framework and the escalation policy.

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Information:

It is essential that practitioners understand the impact of neglect and how to better support young people and their families where neglect occurs.

Ages of Concern, an Ofsted thematic review of SCRs, noted the range of the risk factors facing teenagers, which encompassed factors such as alienation from their families; school difficulties; accommodation problems; abuse/exploitation by adults; unemployment; drug and alcohol misuse; emotional and mental health difficulties; domestic abuse in the home; reactions to bereavement; and risks arising from adults' misuse of the internet.

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Questions

- What makes the young person vulnerable?
- What are the root causes of surface problems?
- Do you have a clear understanding of the young person's experiences over time?
- Is there an assumption that they will ask for help if they need it?
- Is the young person being expected to behave/cope as an adult?
- Is there an understanding of normal versus harmful risk taking?
- What are the views of the young person/to what extent has their voice been heard?

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Information:

- There is a higher risk of neglect where a family is headed by a lone parent.
- The re-constitution of families can lead to neglect – e.g. an increased tendency for older adolescents to be forced out of home when a new partner/step-parent is introduced
- Parental alcohol/drug misuse is known to be associated with neglect
- Young people whose parents suffer from mental ill health such as depression may be at higher risk of neglect as may those living in households where there is domestic abuse

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Information:

Adolescents who have experienced neglect are more likely to have disorganised or insecure attachment styles and may find caring and supportive relationships frightening or confusing.

High risk behaviours should not be interpreted as 'adult lifestyle choices' or 'putting themselves at risk'. These phrases stigmatise the risks seen with adolescents and reinforce the myth that adolescents are in complete control of their choices.