

## *Common problems and how to overcome them*

**When working with neglect practitioners should be mindful of the following issues or barriers to effective assessment and interventions:**

- A failure to observe or listen to children and see the world through their eyes
- A belief that neglect can be addressed solely by relieving poverty
- A failure to recognise children as part of a wider community, whose responses to the neglected child may be to bully or socially exclude them
- Taking a collective view of children in the same family, when an individual assessment is required
- A belief that parenting is innate and natural and therefore parental behaviours must be right
- A fear of imposing professional and class values on others
- Making assumptions about race and culture that could under or overstate the risks
- Viewing neglect as inevitable as the parents are unable to change their lifestyle/behaviour
- Developing pervasive belief systems that as long as the children seem happy, other omissions of care are less important
- A lack of knowledge of the impact and long term consequences of neglect
- An adherence to a belief in the adults rights to self-determination which may deny or be in conflict with the rights and/or best interests of the child
- Over identification with vulnerable parents, leading to denial of children's needs
- A belief that nothing better can be offered to children
- Studies have shown that when professionals have fixed views about the family and child, and the 'rule of optimism' develops, it is then difficult for workers to change their views about the family. This may occur in spite of compelling evidence of neglect and significant harm
- Neglect is usually seen as the mother's failure to provide care whereas little is known about male figures and the impact they have upon the children within the family



*I can't seem to get the family to understand what I am concerned about*

Try This....

- ✓ Share the chronology you have compiled with the family
- ✓ Think of creative ways to discuss the issues you are concerned about
- ✓ Produce individual cards with a concern written on each one. Ask the family to prioritise them. Leave them with the family to think about
- ✓ Ask the family why they think you are visiting and use their response as a springboard to talk about issues
- ✓ If you have been involved with the family for a long time and you feel that when you talk about issues you are no longer making an impact, try and visit with a colleague to produce a new way of talking about the same things
- ✓ Be mindful of level of cognitive ability of the family and adjust your language accordingly (particularly relevant with families with significant learning disabilities)



*There is a plan in place  
but I remain concerned  
for the child's safety*

*Try This....*

- ✓ Discuss your concerns with your line manager, the named person within your organisation who has responsibility for child protection, or where the child is subject to a Child Protection Plan, the Chair of the Child Protection Conferences
- ✓ Ask for the review to be brought forward
- ✓ Produce a multi-agency chronology
- ✓ Reflect on concerns in relation to the child and parent and the effectiveness of the current plan
- ✓ Use tools/resources to consolidate concerns
- ✓ Seek legal advice about commencing the Public Law Outline (Social Care staff only)



*The plan doesn't seem to be working, the family isn't cooperating – I feel 'stuck'*

*Try This....*

- ✓ Review what you have done so far to engage the family – what has been most successful? What has been least successful and why?
- ✓ Discuss the case with your line manager
- ✓ If there are practical issues blocking progress attempt to resolve these. It may be that the home environment is so chaotic when you visit that you are unable to complete any assessment. If this is the case, plan carefully how you can assess the family in these circumstances.
- ✓ Resolve some of these practical issues that may be distracting the family (although be aware to the possibility that they are not being used as excuses to distract you)
- ✓ Think about what the family most likes to talk about, for example, the children, themselves, housing issues. Structure your visit and allow them 10 minutes at the beginning of the session to let off steam and then spend the remaining time looking at issues that you want to cover
- ✓ Plan your visits. Think carefully about what time you will visit, what you want to achieve from the visit and how you will do it
- ✓ Think carefully about how you are going to monitor and measure the issues of neglect. It is not acceptable to see this as ongoing activity that you cast your eyes over when visiting the family home. Use resources and tools to review change and feedback to the family what you perceive the situation to be
- ✓ Consider using creative ways to engage the family e.g. DVD, games
- ✓ Consider using a written agreement with the family
- ✓ Use observation as a method of gaining information and then feedback the issues to the family and engage in discussion about this
- ✓ Consider discussing your family within your team, possibly at a team meeting. Your colleagues may think of new ways of engaging the family or support to offer
- ✓ Consider having a colleague co-work with you. This will provide you with support and may also help to provide a fresh approach to the case



*It's hard to effect change and work with issues of neglect within this family because sometimes parenting is 'good enough' and sometimes it isn't*

Try This....

- ✓ Share chronologies between agencies (think about when you need consent for this)
- ✓ Use this to review the multi-agency plan
- ✓ Establish whether there is any pattern to decline or triggers that can be identified
- ✓ Consider the likely long-term outcome for the children without change and the impact of this
- ✓ Be clear about the outcomes sought
- ✓ Be mindful to use the same criteria with children with additional needs



*The family have shown that they do know and understand what good parenting is...but they don't do it consistently*

*Try This...*

- ✓ Look for and require consistency; it is common for parents who have received support and services such as parenting skills programmes to have knowledge of what good parenting is. Often parents can talk about what they should be doing with their children and a lot of the time they demonstrate an ability to provide good enough care, however they are not always able to do this consistently.
- ✓ Consider involving individuals who can act as role models to parents, preferably in the home. There may be resources within the extended family for this. The aim of this exercise would be to have someone who is able to spend significant periods of time in the home assisting and guiding parenting. It might mean helping a young mother or father to safely bath a baby. Or helping a family to understand the necessity for good hygiene in the kitchen
- ✓ Keep the needs of the children in focus. Talk to the children and find out what their experiences are, e.g. [what a day in their life is like](#).
- ✓ When you know that parents **can** care adequately some of the time it becomes harder to remain objective and there could be a tendency to err on the side of optimism. Record carefully when the dips in parenting occur and compile chronologies of accidents and issues around poor supervision
  - ✓ Bear in mind that there has been a tendency to use a different criteria with regards to neglect for disabled children. The criteria should be the same. Disabled children are 3.4 times more likely to be abused and 3.8 times more likely to be neglected than non-disabled children<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Sullivan and Knutson, 2000