

## Different forms of neglect

**Physical neglect**— Physical neglect is the failure to provide the necessities to sustain the life or health of a child — the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter.

**Medical neglect**— Medical neglect occurs when a parent fails to provide adequate health care. It includes refusing or delaying seeking medical treatment, failing to give regular medication for chronic conditions such as asthma and diabetes.

**Supervisory neglect**— Supervisory neglect occurs when a parent fails to supervise their child or arrange for proper supervision if they will be absent. Supervisory neglect normally occurs when a child is left in the care of another child who is not old enough.

**Emotional neglect**— Emotional neglect is failing to provide adequately for a child's emotional and psychological developmental needs. This includes not spending enough time with the child.

**Educational neglect**— Educational neglect occurs when the child is not provided with learning opportunities. Even before a child goes to school, some parents do not provide the stimulating objects and experiences which very young children need.

**Abandonment**— Abandonment involves leaving a child totally, without arranging for necessary care.

## How neglect affects children

The effects can range from delayed development and poor school achievement to the death of the child in serious cases.

### Non-organic failure to thrive

This describes an infant who shows a decline from a previously established growth pattern, or who falls well below the expected weight gain for their age. If there is no medical case, for example, a growth disorder or feeding problem, it is likely there is neglect.

### Developmental delay

Neglect causes children to develop more slowly, falling further and further behind their age group on all measures of development, including language, creativity and social skills. Neglected children are likely to have difficulty solving problems and may be more angry and frustrated than other children.

### Poor school achievement

Academic failure is the single most consistent risk-factor for school age children who are neglected. They tend to score far below all their peers on all school performance measures. Neglected children are also more likely to have bad attendance and drop out.

### Brain damage

Severe neglect in early life can cause brain damage which is permanent and irreversible. New techniques measuring brain growth show that children who are not given enough attention can have brains that are 20-30% smaller than others their age.

### Fatality

Children can die from neglect. Sometimes fatal neglect occurs when a child's needs are ignored over a long period of time. More commonly, fatal neglect results from accidents which happen because of poor supervision.

# Child Neglect



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## What is Neglect?

Neglect is the failure to provide necessary care, assistance, guidance or attention that causes or is reasonably likely to cause the person physical, mental or emotional harm. Children who are neglected may beg for food or even steal.

### Physical Indicators

The child:

- Is dressed inappropriately for the season or weather (exposure symptoms might include sunburn, frostbite, recurrent colds)
- Is extremely dirty and unbathed (dirty hair and face, bad body odor, severe diaper rash)
- Does not receive medical or dental care and has unattended health problems (squints constantly at the board at school or complains of aching teeth)
- Does not receive adequate nutrition which may result in the child always being hungry
- Receives inappropriate food and beverages
- Is malnourished (this may be seen as being undersized, having low weight, lacking body tone and being lethargic)
- Lacks adequate shelter (this includes living in housing that is unsafe, inadequately heated, and unsanitary)
- Is inadequately supervised or left unattended more frequently or for longer periods of time than is normally accepted; may be left in the care of an inappropriate caregiver (another child who is too young to protect him or her)

### Behavioral Indicators

The child:

- Is often ignored or pushed aside when trying to tell parents something
- Is afraid to tell parents of minor misdeeds, such as breaking a toy
- Engages in role reversal where the child assumes the parents role of providing care and emotional support
- Suffers from severe developmental lags (speech, motor, sensory) without an obvious physical cause
- Displays extreme and unpredictable behavior (ranging from being unusually aggressive and destructive to being extremely passive and withdrawn)
- Demonstrates lack of attachment to parents
- Excessively clingy or inappropriately affectionate with strangers
- Exhibits sudden changes in behavior, displaying regressive behavior (such as pants wetting, thumb sucking, whining frequently, becoming disruptive, becoming uncommonly shy and passive)
- Is very demanding of affection or attention
- Engages in delinquent acts or abuses alcohol or street drugs

## Why does neglect happen?

Neglect can happen in all sorts of families. Some reasons that neglect can happen include:

### Lack of understanding of child development

Parents who neglect their child often do not know much about how children grow and develop. They don't know what is reasonable to expect at different ages. They do not understand that child raising is a very complex task, with lots of responsibilities.

### Parents' own difficulties

Parents' own difficulties may mean they don't focus on their children enough. Parents may be depressed or have a mental or physical illness or be addicted to alcohol or drugs. Their own childhood may have included neglect and inadequate care. They may find it difficult to trust others, or be too dependent themselves to have others depend on them.

### Parents' interact negatively with their children

Effective parents are flexible with their attitudes and respond to the needs of their child and the situation. Neglectful parents often have rigid ways of responding to life in general and a low level of interaction with their children. They tend to be more controlling and ignore positive behavior while focusing on faults in their children.

### Lack of family and community support

Families who lack extended family support and are socially isolated are more at risk of neglecting their children. Wider family support and a community which provides services for children and parents, together help prevent neglect.