

Child Neglect

Neglect includes a failure to provide a child or young person with an adequate standard of nutrition, medical care, clothing, education, shelter or supervision to the extent where the health and development of the child is significantly impaired or placed at risk.

Neglect can occur in a family or organisational context.

FIVE BROAD DOMAINS OF NEGLECT

Neglect can be categorised into five broad domains (Parkinson et al 2017):

- physical neglect (e.g. failure to provide food, shelter, clothing, adequate hygiene)
- supervisory neglect (e.g. lack of supervision, failure to protect a child from harm, abandonment, exposure of child to drugs)
- medical neglect (e.g. failure to provide appropriate medical care, delays in seeking medical attention, overmedication)
- emotional neglect (e.g. inadequate nurturing or affection, absence of parent–child interactions)
- educational neglect (e.g. failure to meet a child’s educational needs).

PHYSICAL INDICATORS

Possible physical indicators of neglect include:

- poor hygiene (e.g. dirty appearance, smell)
- inappropriate clothing for weather conditions
- living in unsafe, inadequate or unsanitary conditions
- hunger, tiredness and listlessness
- failure to thrive
- developmental delays
- propensity to illness
- weak, listless or sickly appearance
- untreated medical conditions
- lack of supervision (e.g. child left unattended for long periods).

BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS

Possible behavioural indicators of neglect include:

- gorging of food when it is provided
- stealing or hoarding of food
- withdrawal
- irritability
- poor relationship with parent (or carer)
- excessive anxiety
- lack of confidence
- aggression
- excessive affection to strangers
- inappropriate behaviour for the child’s age and stage of development
- poor social skills
- propensity to emotional outbursts – inability to control strong emotions
- poor, irregular attendance at school
- reluctance to go home
- adoption of a caring role (e.g. caring for a parent and/or siblings).

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USEFUL RESOURCES

Child FIRST links vulnerable families, children and young people with relevant services. Child FIRST teams are located across Victoria. Contact information for each region can be found at:

<https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/referral-and-support-teams>

St Vincent de Paul Society provides a Welfare Assistance Line:
phone: 1800 305 330 (Monday to Friday, 10am–3pm)

REFERENCES

Parkinson, S, Bromfield, L, McDougall, S & Salveron, M 2017, *Child neglect: Key concepts and risk factors*, report to the NSW Department of Family and Community Services Office of the Senior Practitioner. www.unisa.edu.au/siteassets/episerver-6-files/global/eass/research/accp/child-neglectkey-concept-and-risk-factors-report.pdf



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE
OF MELBOURNE

Version 1: July 2019
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of all children, young people and vulnerable adults.*