NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH AND CARE EXCELLENCE

Guideline scope

1   Guideline title

Child abuse and neglect: recognising, assessing and responding to abuse and neglect of children and young people

1.1   Short title

Child abuse and neglect

2   Remit and background

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has been asked by the Department of Health (with approval from the Department for Education) to develop a social care guideline on child abuse and neglect. The guideline will cover physical, emotional and sexual abuse, and neglect (which are collectively referred to as 'maltreatment') as defined in the statutory guidance Working together to safeguard children (2013).

This guideline will provide recommendations about actions to improve practice, aimed at improving outcomes for children and young people and their families or carers. The guideline is based on the best available evidence of effectiveness, including cost effectiveness. The guideline will be of interest to all practitioners working with children and young people. It is particularly aimed at social workers, healthcare professionals, people in lead professional roles in services such as education, and local safeguarding children boards.

NICE guidelines provide recommendations on what works. This may include details on who should carry out interventions and where. NICE guidelines do not routinely describe how services are funded or commissioned, unless this has been formally requested by the Department of Health.

This guideline will complement NICE guidance on a range of topics, including the clinical guideline on when to suspect child maltreatment and the public health guidelines on the social and emotional wellbeing of young people, and the wellbeing of looked after children and young people. For further details see section 5 (related NICE guidance).

3   Need for the guideline

Children and young people have the right to be protected from abuse and neglect, and to be supported to thrive and develop. However, many children and young people experience abuse and neglect, which adversely affects their wellbeing and development ([The impact of abuse and neglect on the health and mental health of children and young people](#) National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children 2010). The consequences of this can persist into adulthood (Jacobs et al. 2012; Norman et al. 2012). Staff working in health and social care, and those taking the 'lead professional' role in services such as education, have an important part to play in recognising and responding to the abuse and neglect of children. This guideline aims to support practitioners in this role.

3.1   Key facts and figures

3.1.1   Estimating the numbers of children and young people experiencing abuse and neglect is difficult. Estimates vary according to sources of information and the ways in which abuse and neglect are defined ([Safeguarding children across services: messages from research on identifying and responding to child maltreatment](#) Department for Education 2011). One prevalence study found that 5% of children under 11 and 13% of young people aged 11–17 had experienced 'severe maltreatment' by a parent or guardian at some point during their childhood. Neglect was the most prevalent form of severe maltreatment in families ([Child abuse and neglect in the UK today](#) National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children 2011).

3.1.2   Activity data from children's social care services are another potential indicator of levels of abuse and neglect. In the 1 year

period from 1 April 2012 2013 to 31 March 2013 there were 593,500 referrals to children's social care ([Characteristics of children in need in England 2012 to 2013](#) Department for Education 2013). During this period 43,140 children and young people were the subject of a 'child protection plan'. The most common initial reason for children to be made subject to a child protection plan was neglect (in England, this accounts for 42% of child protection plans). Emotional abuse was the second most common reason, accounting for 32% of plans.

3.1.3   Child abuse and neglect, and involvement in the child protection system, are often associated with other types of social disadvantage and distress in families (Featherstone et al. 2014). Family characteristics associated with higher levels of abuse and neglect of children include parental alcohol and drug misuse, parental mental health problems, domestic violence, and parental learning disability, particularly when they appear in combination ('Safeguarding children across services: messages from research on identifying and responding to child maltreatment'). Parents who have experienced abuse and neglect in childhood are also more likely to abuse or neglect their own children (Howe 2005), and are less able to change poor parenting behaviours (Ward et al. 2012).

3.1.4   Economic factors such as poverty and residential instability are associated with higher rates of child abuse and neglect (Freisthler et al. 2006). Some minority ethnic groups, including children from black and mixed heritage backgrounds, are over-represented in the child protection system ([Disproportionality in child welfare: the prevalence of black and minority ethnic children within the 'looked after' and 'children in need' population and on child protection registers in England](#) Department for Children Schools and Families 2009). However, this does not necessarily indicate higher levels of abuse and neglect in these groups, and the reasons for the

disproportional representation of these groups are unclear ('Disproportionality in child welfare').

3.1.5 Abuse and neglect can have serious adverse consequences for children and young people, including:

- impact on growth and physical development (Lazenbatt 2010)
- impaired language development and behaviour by age 4 (English et al. 2005)
- impaired ability to socialise, play and learn (Gardner 2008)
- increased likelihood of being involved in delinquent behaviour ('Child abuse and neglect in the UK today')
- increased likelihood of suicidal thoughts and attempts during adolescence (Miller et al. 2013).

3.1.6 These negative consequences can persist into adulthood (Butt et al. 2011; Martins et al. 2011; Norman et al. 2012). Survivors of childhood abuse and neglect may also face difficulties in parenting their own children (Howe 2005).

3.2 Current practice

3.2.1 Statutory guidance on multi-agency child protection practice ('Working together to safeguard children') emphasises that local areas should provide services that can meet a spectrum of different levels of need. This includes 'early help' for families with relatively low level or emerging needs and, for more complex needs, help provided under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. At each level, assessment processes or tools are used to determine need. For example the Common Assessment Framework may be used to assess need at the early help stage. If there is cause to suspect a child is experiencing, or likely to experience, significant harm, an investigation should be undertaken under section 47 of the Children Act 1989.

3.2.2   Local safeguarding children boards are required by the statutory guidance 'Working together to safeguard children' to publish a threshold document including the process for early help assessment and the type of early help services they will provide. The document should also include the criteria for assessing and providing services under the relevant sections of the Children Act. Many local authorities use a tiered approach, setting out thresholds of need and interventions at each threshold.

3.2.3   Despite the guidance available, health and social care practitioners can find it difficult to determine the seriousness of need and risk experienced by children, young people and families. This includes determining whether a child or young person is at risk of 'significant harm'. ('Safeguarding children across services: messages from research on identifying and responding to child maltreatment'). This can be particularly challenging for neglect and emotional abuse, which practitioners find harder to define and assess, leading to preventable delays in taking action ('Developing an effective response to neglect and emotional harm to children'). A perception that high thresholds need to be met before acceptance into the child protection system can also deter professionals from identifying and responding to abuse and neglect (Noticing and helping the neglected child: literature review Department for Children, Schools and Families 2009).

3.2.4   Various universal and targeted services are involved in addressing abuse and neglect at the early help stage. These include specific interventions such as home visiting and parenting programmes. Coordinating the work of multi-agency partners can be challenging. Most areas have established processes for early help assessment, using tools such as the Common Assessment Framework, and arrangements for multi-agency working such as Team Around the Child/Family processes. However, models of early help, and the extent to which they are embedded in practice, vary nationally.

There also remain challenges around, for example, which practitioners feel able to take on the lead professional role in these arrangements ([Exploration of the costs and impact of the Common Assessment Framework](#) Department for Education 2012).

3.2.5   Families needing more intensive support under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (relating to 'children in need') will receive intervention from children's social care services, such as family support and case work by social workers. Alternative care placements for children, such as foster or residential care, may also be considered. Specific time-limited interventions may also be provided to prevent abuse from recurring, and to address the psychological, behavioural and other consequences of abuse. These are delivered by practitioners in services including psychology, psychiatry, health and education. Some interventions are aimed at the child or young person, for example cognitive behavioural therapy or psychotherapy, and others at the parent–child relationship or family, for example family therapy. Multi-agency contributions are coordinated either through 'Child in Need' processes or, for children with child protection plans, regular child protection conferences and core group meetings.

3.2.6   Social work intervention with children and families has a number of challenges. Balancing the need to give parents the opportunity and support to change behaviours with the need to respond and make decisions rapidly enough to avoid undue harm to children and young people can be difficult ([Decision-making within a child's timeframe: an overview of current research evidence for family justice professionals concerning child development and the impact of maltreatment](#) Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre 2012). Social workers and their managers are also likely to have a role in referring children and families to specific interventions, such as family therapy. At present, practitioners, managers and commissioners may have insufficient evidence to know which of

these interventions are most suitable for which children and families. Multi-agency working with families with complex needs also presents challenges, for example in ensuring that multi-agency plans remain focused and do not 'drift' and that information is shared across agencies ('Developing an effective response to neglect and emotional harm to children').

3.3 Policy, legislation and guidance

Policy

3.3.1 There has been significant work in recent years to review and update government policy on child protection and safeguarding.

3.3.2 In June 2010 Professor Eileen Munro was commissioned to undertake an independent review of child protection in England. The final report The Munro Review of Child Protection was published in May 2011. In July 2011 The Department for Education published A child centred system: the government's response to the Munro review of child protection, this included responses to each of the recommendations in the Munro review.

Statutory guidance

3.3.3 The 2013 revision of the statutory guidance Working together to safeguard children: a guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (Department for Education 2013) replaced the 2010 version and 'The Framework for the assessment of children in need and their families' (2000).

3.3.4 'Working together to safeguard children' reiterates the importance of multi-agency working in safeguarding, and of taking a child-centred approach. The guidance is aimed at all practitioners working with children, across a range of sectors. The NICE guideline will provide evidence-based advice for practitioners working in the context of this statutory guidance.

Legislation

3.3.5   The principal legislative framework for recognising and responding to abuse and neglect is provided by the Children Act 1989. In particular:

- section 17, relating to 'children in need' as defined by the Act
- section 20, regarding the duty to accommodate a child
- section 31, relating to care and supervision orders
- section 47, relating to reasonable cause to suspect children 'suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm'.

3.3.6   The Children Act 2004 introduced further provisions to strengthen multi-agency working in child protection, in particular by introducing duties for local authorities to promote cooperation between relevant agencies, and to establish multi-agency local safeguarding children's boards.

3.3.7   This guideline will also need to take account of the provisions of the Children and Families Act 2014, which applies to various aspects of the child protection system, in particular the family justice system.

4   What the guideline will cover

This guideline will be developed according to the processes and methods outlined in The social care guidance manual. This scope defines exactly what this guideline will (and will not) examine and what the guideline developers will consider.

The guideline will cover recognition and assessment of and response to child abuse and neglect, focussing on abuse and neglect perpetrated by parents, family members, carers or household members. This includes extended family such as step parents and parents' partners and professional carers such as foster carers or residential child care workers.

4.1 Who is the focus?

Groups that will be covered

4.1.1   Children and young people (under 18, including unborn babies) who are at risk of, are experiencing, or have experienced abuse or neglect (including sexual abuse).

4.1.2   Parents, families, carers and household members of children and young people (under 18) who are at risk of, are experiencing, or have experienced abuse or neglect (including sexual abuse).

4.1.3   Adults who are suspected or known to abuse children or young people of whom they are the parent, step-parent, partner of a parent, family member or carer).

Protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 will be considered during scoping and an equality impact assessment will be completed. This will be published alongside the final version of the scope.

Groups that will not be covered

4.1.4   Adults who are suspected or known to abuse children or young people of whom they are not the parent, step-parent, partner of a parent, family member or carer.

4.1.5   Adults (18 or older) who experienced abuse as children.

4.2 Settings

Settings that will be covered

4.2.1   All settings where child abuse and neglect may be recognised, assessed or responded to, such as:

- children's own homes
- out-of-home placements including foster care, residential care and secure accommodation
- primary and secondary health settings

- schools and colleges
- secure settings for children and young people (including young offender institutions)
- childcare settings
- police stations
- youth clubs.

4.3   Activities

Key areas and issues that will be covered

Activities and interventions that aim to recognise, assess and respond to child abuse and neglect perpetrated by parents, family members, carers or household members. This includes extended family members such as step-parents and parents' partners and professional carers such as foster carers or residential child care workers.

The guideline will focus specifically on 'what works', including the following:

4.3.1   Recognition of child abuse and neglect (building on When to suspect child maltreatment NICE clinical guideline 89 (2009).

4.3.2   Multi-agency assessment of child abuse and neglect (after referral for early help or child protection), including:

- involving children, young people and families in the assessment process (including specific support, such as advocacy)
- tools and ways of working to support effective assessment
- awareness of misdiagnosis of abuse and neglect.

4.3.3   Targeted activities and interventions to prevent child abuse and neglect perpetrated by parents, family members, carers or household members.

4.3.4   Social work activities and interventions responding to child abuse and neglect perpetrated by parents, family members, carers or household members.

4.3.5   Specific interventions as part of a package of support for people who have experienced child abuse and neglect perpetrated by parents, family members, carers or household members. This might include:

- Activities and interventions aimed primarily at children and young people, including psychological interventions such as cognitive-behavioural therapy and psychotherapy.
- Activities and interventions aimed primarily at parents and families including parenting programmes, family therapy and systemic interventions.

Areas and issues that will not be covered

4.3.6   Abuse or neglect (including sexual abuse) perpetrated by adults who are **not** parents, family members, carers or household members. This is because different types of intervention would be required to prevent a recurrence of this type of abuse, with less focus on family support and family interventions. Research also suggests that abuse and neglect by adults outside the household is less prevalent than intra-familial abuse (Child abuse and neglect in the UK today National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children 2011).

4.3.7   Criminal investigation of child abuse and neglect.

4.3.8   Disciplinary procedures for paid carers who are suspected or known to abuse children and young people.

4.3.9   Universal prevention of abuse and neglect (for example school-based 'Stay Safe' education programmes for children).

4.3.10   Parental support that is not directly related to preventing or addressing abuse and neglect (for example generic mental health services, domestic violence services not directly related to preventing harm to children).

4.3.11   The general care children receive after they are placed in foster care, residential care or other out-of-home placements.

4.3.12   Harm to children and young people as a result of witnessing domestic violence.

4.3.13   Bullying between children and young people.

4.3.14   Violence in intimate relationships between young people.

4.3.15   Forced marriage of children and young people.

4.3.16   Child trafficking.

4.3.17   Online grooming and abuse.

4.3.18   Child sexual exploitation when perpetrated by individuals who are not parents, carers, family members or household members.

4.4   Main outcomes

The main outcomes that will be considered when searching for and assessing the evidence are:

- Preventing occurrence and recurrence.
- Incidence of abuse and neglect.
- Quality of parenting and parent-child relationships, including quality of attachment.
- Preventing impairment of:
  - physical health (mortality, morbidity, injuries)
  - emotional and mental wellbeing
  - social wellbeing
  - educational attainment.
- Avoiding adverse consequences for children and young people, for example substance misuse, risky sexual behaviour, mental health problems.
- Service outcomes, including:

- appropriate referrals to children's social care
- avoiding removal to alternative care
- avoiding long-term or repeated child protection plans.

4.5   Review questions

Review questions guide a systematic review of the literature. They address only the key areas and issues covered in the scope, and usually relate to interventions, service delivery or the experiences of people using services and their carers. The review questions will be used to explore evidence to consider how the outcomes that are important to people using services and their carers can be improved. Equalities issues will be considered within the review questions. Some possible review questions are:

4.5.1   What are the views and experiences of children and young people and their families on the process of recognising and assessing abuse and neglect, and on the services aiming to prevent or respond to abuse and neglect of children and young people?

4.5.2   What are the views and experiences of practitioners working to prevent, identify and respond to child abuse and neglect?

4.5.3   What are the consequences of abuse and neglect for children, young people and their families?

4.5.4   What tools and ways of working support effective recognition and assessment of child abuse and neglect?

4.5.5   What activities and interventions are effective for targeted prevention of child abuse and neglect?

4.5.6   What social work practices, activities and interventions are effective in responding to children and young people who are at risk of, or experiencing, abuse and neglect?

4.5.7   What factors help and prevent effective social work, including supporting good professional judgement?

4.5.8   What specific interventions are effective in responding to child abuse and neglect?

Please note that these are only examples of areas that may be addressed. The review questions will be agreed by the Guideline Development Group (GDG) at the start of guideline development.

4.6   Economic aspects

The guideline developers will take into account cost-effectiveness when making recommendations involving a choice between alternative interventions or services. Appropriate economic review questions will be identified. A review of the economic evidence will be undertaken in line with the methods outlined in [The social care guidance manual](#). Economic analysis, where undertaken, will consider all relevant commissioners, decision-makers, funders, providers, people using services and carers.

4.7   Status of this document

Scope

This is the consultation draft of the scope. The consultation dates are 23 July to 20 August 2014.

Timing

Guideline development will formally start in October 2014. The guideline is scheduled to be published in June 2016.

5   Related NICE guidance

5.1   Published NICE guidance

- [Domestic violence and abuse: how services can respond effectively](#) NICE public health guideline 50 (2014)
- [Head injury](#) NICE clinical guideline176 (2014)
- [Social anxiety disorder](#) NICE clinical guideline 159 (2013)
- [Conduct disorders in children and young people](#) NICE clinical guideline 158 (2013)

- Social and emotional wellbeing: early years NICE public health guideline 40 (2012)
- Promoting the quality of life of looked-after children and young people NICE public health guideline 28 (2010)
- Nocturnal enuresis: the management of bedwetting in children and young people NICE clinical guideline 111 (2010)
- Constipation in children and young people NICE clinical guideline 99 (2010)
- Social and emotional wellbeing in secondary education NICE public health guideline 20 (2009)
- When to suspect child maltreatment NICE clinical guideline 89 (2009)
- Social and emotional wellbeing in primary education NICE public health guideline 12 (2008)
- Depression in children and young people NICE clinical guideline 28 (2005)
- Self-harm NICE clinical guideline 16 (2004)
- Eating disorders NICE clinical guideline 9 (2004)

5.2 Guidance under development

NICE is currently developing the following related guidance (details available from the NICE website):

- Children's attachment NICE clinical guideline. Publication expected October 2015.
- Sexually harmful behaviour among young people NICE public health guideline. Publication date to be confirmed.

5.3 NICE Pathways

- When to suspect child maltreatment NICE Pathway (2012)

6 Further information

Information on the guideline development process is provided in The social care guidance manual. Information on the progress of the guideline will also be available on the NICE website.

7 References

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