

Neglect and Disabled Children

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Terms of Reference for LSCB Safeguarding Disabled Children Task and Finish Group

The cohort of children that are the focus of this Task and Finish Group will be those who are defined as 'disabled children' these include:

Cambridgeshire Disability Eligibility:

- The working description of disability that is applied is:
The needs of the disabled child or young person are beyond those of a non disabled child of the same age and means they are likely to require lifelong support in the future from statutory services.

Special educational needs (SEN)

- A child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her.
- A child of compulsory school age or a young person has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age. Or has a disability which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post-16 institutions.

The abuse of disabled children

- Disabled children are significantly more likely to be abused than non-disabled children
- Abuse often goes unrecognised and under-reported. Several studies reveal evidence of under-reporting in UK and other countries (Stalker et al 2010)
- Disabled children are 3 or 4 times more likely to suffer violence (Jones et al 2012)
- Incidence of abuse 3.4 times greater for disabled children than non-disabled (Sullivan and Knutson, 2000)
- Those children with communication impairments or 'behavioural disorders' are 5-7 times at higher risk of abuse

Reasons why disabled children are more vulnerable to abuse

More isolated physically and socially and from mainstream services

Their dependency on parents and carers for practical assistance in daily care, including intimate personal care, increases their risk of exposure

Exposed to more carers, professionals and volunteers including residential and respite care

Have an impaired capacity to resist or avoid abuse e.g. restricted mobility

Are subjected to an increased inequality of power

Less likely to receive sex education or information about their own bodies

Reasons why disabled children are more vulnerable to abuse (continued)

Use different communication systems; may not have the language skills to disclose

May be unable to distinguish between types of touch

Have less choice in everyday life

Don't believe their wishes are heeded

Tend to obey in order to survive

Don't believe they can control things

Some particular risks...

- Over or under medicating
- Challenging behaviours
- Requirement for personal care into late childhood
- May have multiple carers
- Lack of friends

Features of abuse particular to disabled children

- Failure to provide treatment or providing inappropriate treatment
- Not allowing adaptations or equipment a child might need
- Threats of abandonment/exclusion
- Exclusion: from family events, over use of 'respite', unnecessary schooling away from home. Depriving of visitors
- Not feeding enough to keep child light for lifting

Features of abuse particular to disabled children

- Excessive surgery
- Forcing treatment that is painful
- Inappropriate use of physical restraint
- Rough handling, extreme behaviour modification
- Lack of communication or stimulation
- Teasing, bullying or blaming because of their impairment
- Having too high/low expectations of child

Protecting disabled children: thematic inspection

When child protection concerns were clear they were investigated promptly and steps were taken to ensure that children at immediate risk were safe. However when concerns were less clear-cut, and particularly when the concerns related to neglect, there were delays in identifying when thresholds for child protection were reached.

Inspectors found that where children were receiving services from children's social care under child in need procedures there had too often been delays in recognising that the threshold for child protection had been met. Most of these cases related to neglect concerns.

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In one case where there were concerns about neglect a mother said that having her child on a child protection plan helped her to see the seriousness of what was happening.

Child Protection and Disability Toolkit

The 'Child Protection and Disability Toolkit' has been produced in partnership by WithScotland and the Scottish Government's Ministerial Working Group on Child Protection and Disability. It is aimed at practitioners and managers in child and family and disability services and it's the only toolkit of its kind available to practitioners in Scotland.

References

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