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For a record of all amendments and updates, see the [Amendments & Archives \(amendments.html\)](#).

Specific definitions of key concepts used by safeguarding practitioners are available through the [Glossary](#).

(<https://www.proceduresonline.com/resources/glossary/cs/>).

AMENDMENT

This document was updated in September 2023.

1. Introduction

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children can be defined as:

- Protecting children from maltreatment;
- Preventing impairment of children's health or development;
- Ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care;
- Taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.

[Working Together to Safeguard Children](#)

(<http://www.workingtogetheronline.co.uk/>) sets out a clear expectation that local agencies will work together and collaborate to identify children with additional needs and provide support as soon as a problem emerges.

Providing early help is far more effective in promoting the welfare of children – and keeping them safe – than reacting later when any problems, for example neglect, may have become more entrenched. The importance of using a child-centred approach in following the child's journey is also emphasised. All services which are provided must be based on a clear understanding of the needs and views of the individual child in their family and community context.

This document provides a framework for professionals who are working with children, young people and families.

It aims to help identify when a child may need additional support to achieve their full potential. It introduces a continuum of help and support, provides information on the levels of need and gives examples of some of the factors that may indicate a child or young person needs additional support. By undertaking assessments and offering services on a continuum of help and support, professionals can be flexible and respond to different levels of need in different children and families. The framework recognises that however complex a child's needs, universal services e.g. education and health, will always be provided alongside any specialist additional service.

Along the continuum of need services become increasingly targeted and specialised according to the level of need. Children's needs are not static, and they may experience different needs – at different points on the continuum – throughout their childhood years.

This document should be used in conjunction with The [London Child Protection Procedures \(index.html\)](#).

The continuum of need matrix does not provide an exhaustive list but provides examples that can be used as a tool to assist assessment, planning and decision making when considering the needs of children and their safeguarding needs in particular. Any safeguarding indicators of concern should always be considered alongside any related needs. It should be remembered that some children will have additional vulnerability because of their disability or complex needs and the parental response to the vulnerability of the child must be considered when assessing needs and risks.

For some areas of need there may be specialist tools available to assess those needs such as the Neglect toolkit and the CAADA DASH domestic violence risk assessment tool. These are available on the [London Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)

website (<http://www.londonscb.gov.uk/>).

Remember – *where there is an urgent and immediate need to protect a child, dial 999 to contact the Police. Otherwise for all other children who may be at risk of significant harm, contact the relevant Local Authority, Children's Social Care Service as soon as possible.*

2. The Four Levels of Need

Level 1: No additional needs

These are children with no additional needs; all their health and developmental needs will be met by universal services. *These are children who consistently receive child focused care giving from their parents or carers.* The majority of children living in each local authority area require support from universal services alone.

Level 2: Early help

These are children with additional needs, who may be vulnerable and showing early signs of abuse and/or neglect; their needs are not clear, not known or not being met. *These children may be subject to adult focused care giving.*

This is the threshold for a multi-agency early help assessment to begin. These are children who require a lead professional for a co-ordinated approach to the provision of additional services such as family support services, parenting programmes and children's centres. These will be provided within universal or targeted services provision and do not include services from children's social care.

Level 3: Children with complex multiple needs

These children require specialist services in order to achieve or maintain a satisfactory level of health or development or to prevent significant impairment of their health and development and/or who are disabled. They may require longer term intervention from specialist services. In some cases these children's needs may be secondary to the adults needs. This is the threshold for an assessment led by children's social care under Section 17, Children Act 1989 although the assessments and services required may come from a range of provision outside of children's social care.

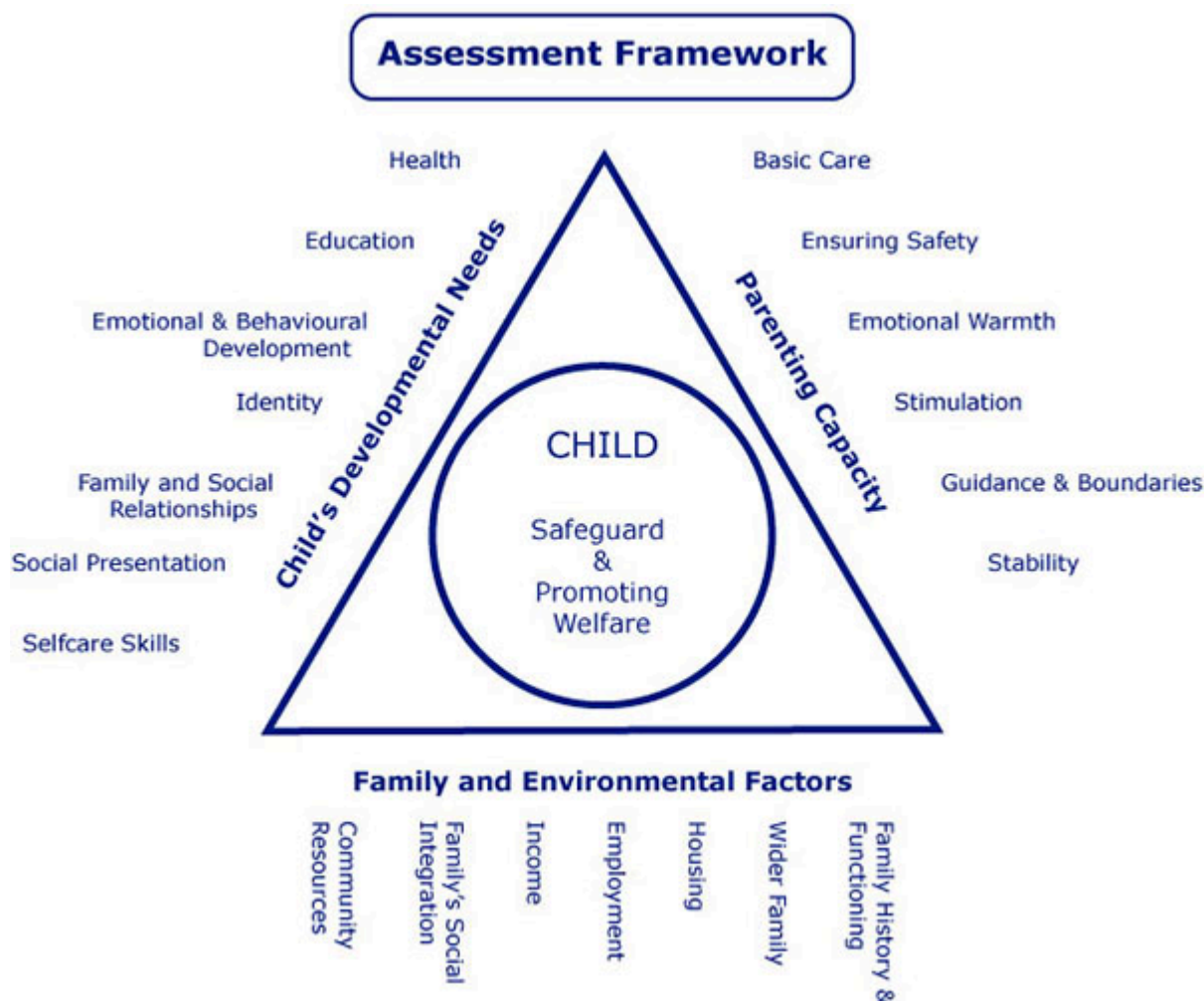
Level 4: Children in acute need

These children are suffering or are likely to suffer significant harm. This is the threshold for child protection. These children are likely to have already experienced adverse effects and to be suffering from poor outcomes. Their needs may not be considered by their parents. This level also includes Level 4 health services which are very specialised services in residential, day patient or outpatient settings for children and adolescents with severe and /or complex health problems. This is likely to mean that they may be referred to children's social care under section 20, 47 or 31 of the Children Act 1989.

This would also include those children remanded into custody and statutory youth offending services.

3. The Assessment Triangle

The assessment triangle below should be used to identify the interplay between the three domains to assess the child's needs and form a judgement regarding the level of need.



4. Neglect

It can be particularly difficult for practitioners to recognise the signs of neglect because there is unlikely to have been a significant incident or event that highlights the concerns; it is more likely that there will be a series of concerns over a period of time that, taken together, demonstrate that the child is in need or at risk.

Children (including those who are unborn) need adequate food, water, shelter, warmth, protection and health care in order to thrive. They also need their carers to be attentive, dependable and kind. Children are neglected if these essential needs (the things they need to develop and grow) are persistently not met.

There are many signs that may indicate neglect as outlined below:

- Neglect may occur during or after pregnancy as a result of parental substance abuse (drugs or alcohol);
- A chaotic family environment which can include an absence of boundaries or routines;
- A parent / carer who has mental health difficulties or learning disabilities such that impacts on their ability to meet the needs of any children;
- Inadequate parenting and/or understanding of what it means to look after a child safely including ensuring adequate supervision or using inadequate caregivers;
- Ensuring access to appropriate medical care or treatment;
- Ensuring that educational needs are met;
- It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Signs of neglect can include poor physical appearance, bad hygiene, lack of appropriate clothing, the child being withdrawn or exhibiting antisocial or sexualised behaviours, and the child not meeting physical or emotional development milestones.

In considering whether or not a child has been neglected, it is important to consider the quality of care they have received over a period of time, as this could vary to the extent in which it impacts on their development. It is also important to consider the age of the child in relation to the nature of the neglect and the length of time for which the concerns have existed.

The above signs in isolation would not necessarily indicate for certain that a child is being neglected, however, children who are severely and persistently neglected may be in danger and neglect can also result in the serious impairment to their health or development.

Some adults lack the resources and support to properly care for their children, but some have more complex problems. In both cases help and support from professionals is essential.

Deciding if a child is neglected can be very hard – even for a trained professional – and it's natural to worry that you may be mistaken. For more information about neglect, go to:

- [NSPCC, Neglect](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/neglect/)
(<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/neglect/>);
- [NSPCC Learning, Child abuse and neglect](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect)
(<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect>);
- [GOV.UK, Childhood neglect: training resources](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/childhood-neglect-training-resources)
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/childhood-neglect-training-resources>).

5. The Indicators of Possible Need

The indicators on the following pages are designed to provide practitioners with an overarching view on what level of support and intervention a family might need.

This is not intended to be a 'tick box' exercise, but to give a quick-reference guide to support professionals in their decision-making, including conducting further assessments, referring to other services and understanding the likely thresholds for higher levels of intervention.

Remember that if there is a combination of indicators of need under Level Two, the case may be a Level Three case overall.

Also remember that need is not static; the needs of a child/young person/family will change over time. Where a plan has been agreed, this should be reviewed regularly to analyse whether sufficient progress has been made to meet the child's needs and on the level of risk faced by the child. This will be important in cases of neglect where parents and carers can make small improvements, but an analysis will need to be undertaken on whether this leads to significant improvements for the child/young person.

If you have child protection concerns, you must also consult the [London Child Protection Procedures \(index.html\)](#), and you must inform your safeguarding lead or line manager.

Appendix 1: Threshold - Continuum of Need Matrix

[Click here to view Appendix 1: Threshold - Continuum of Need Matrix \(files/threshold.pdf\).](#)



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