

Child Matters – a training package for identifying child neglect

Increasing capability in recognising and recording incidents of child neglect.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Organisational
Topic	Vulnerability and safeguarding Child sexual exploitation and abuse Drugs and alcohol Operational policing
Organisation	South Yorkshire Police
HMICFRS report	PEEL assessment 2021/22: Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy
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Region	North East

Key details

Partners	Police Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services) Education Health services Local authority Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	September 2021
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Children and young people Families General public Workforce

Aim

The aims of the Child Matters training are to:

- understand and identify what neglect is and the potential impact
- identify and explain potential concerning neglectful situations
- understand how to respond appropriately using the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children's (NSPCC) safety, hygiene, attachment, responsiveness, environment, diet, and discipline (SHARED) tool

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the Child Matters training are:

- equipping the workforce to be confident and informed
- protecting children from neglect and abuse
- preventing the deaths of children linked to neglect and abuse
- an initial increase in the number of child neglect cases, but over time sustainable reductions

Description

The training raises awareness in assessing risk using the NSPCC risk assessment. Child Matters is a unique course designed and created by South Yorkshire Police (SYP) in partnership with the NSPCC, Diabetes UK, British Paediatric Dental Association and Dr Jodie Howarth-Beal.

The following needs were identified to implement the Child Matters training:

- to be able to understand and tackle neglect which is vital for child protection as well as reducing vulnerabilities
- understanding that neglect is a serious criminal offence in itself and the consequences mean that children are even more vulnerable to other forms of abuse and exploitation

The learning outcomes for all staff at the end of the training are:

- improved understanding of neglect to describe what it is, why it happens and its impact on babies, children and young people
- an ability to demonstrate competency in using the NSPCC's SHARED tool and SYP vulnerability child form to recognise and collect evidence for neglect
- an ability to assess the SHARED Tool benefits to practice, families and SYP

The benefits of the newly created and unique SHARED tool are:

- improved skills, knowledge and judgement in recognising neglect
- better and broader understanding of neglect
- improved partnership working
- improved quality of referrals
- reduced number of repeat and return visits
- a tool to help frame concerns
- a consistent and corporate approach

- a common language between agencies
- improved short and long-term outcomes for children

The course runs for one day. It will be attended in the first phase by all staff of all ranks who have contact with public, either in person or by other means. This includes specialist departments and senior leadership teams.

The day covers the following areas:

- why police need to identify safeguarding concerns better
- an understanding of the nature and impact of trauma and abuse
- a focus on presenting concerns
- interviews – the best way to understand from a child's view
- communication and information sharing
- interagency understanding
- sole focus on criminal investigation
- criminalisation of children and young people – have exposure to neglect impacted?

The benefits of using the SHARED tool are:

- improved response to neglect across the force
- improved quality of investigations into neglect
- reduced under-reporting of neglect
- improved partnership working with social care colleagues
- reduced number of children left at significant risk
- improved organisational culture regarding neglect
- earlier intervention to reduced risk of missing from home and criminal and or sexual exploitation
- earlier intervention to encourage cost savings
- reduced number of police protection orders (PPO's)
- reduced number of neglected children across South Yorkshire
- for SYP to become leading force in child protection

A Child Matters logo has been created with the focus:

Every pair of child shoes should be filled with a child who is happy and safe – if we do not act to protect and ensure the safety of children in South Yorkshire we will have empty shoes. The voice of the child is key.

DS Kath Coulter KPM

Evaluation

Phase one of the training was evaluated by the NSPCC. The first phase of the evaluation was designed to provide learning from the roll out of SHARED in South Yorkshire, where it was piloted.

Interviews and surveys were conducted with senior police who led on the implementation of the tool, frontline police who used the tool in practice and practitioners from multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) teams who receive referrals where SHARED is referenced.

The evaluators wanted to find out:

- the barriers and facilitators associated with using and rolling out the tool
- how the police have found using the tool in practice and explore what difference they think tool may have made to the families they support in South Yorkshire
- what MASH practitioners think about SHARED, for instance if it has made any difference to the quality of referrals they receive from South Yorkshire police

In summary, the findings showed the change had been well received and embedded in South Yorkshire.

Overall impact

The overall impact of the Child Matters training is:

- 76% of officers and staff gathered quality information used for evidence of child neglect
- 76% increase in the quality of referrals for child neglect
- 72% of officers and staff were more aware of the child's voice
- 66% of officers and staff felt more confident in the decisions they made about a child
- 59% of officers and staff felt more confident in considering the needs of non-verbal children

- 52% of officers and staff felt confident to communicate with the family about concerns
- 38% of officers and staff time was spent assessing the risk posed to a child

Overall numbers of recorded neglect crimes significantly increased following the training. This has now levelled off to what is believed the new normal level of neglect crimes. There was a significant increase in the number of protection orders issued.

Learning

The following learnings and recommendations have been made:

- there was initial pushback from the multi-agency partners, who believed that the police should not be involved in neglect cases
- anticipate a sharp increase in neglect related crimes following training, this will level off to a new normal level
- utilise a small credible, passionate training team, even if most of the force are receiving the training
- receiving support and endorsement from the chief officer team is key
- when delivering training utilise local cases as this will receive more buy in from staff and officers

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Tags

Child abuse Vulnerable people Operational policing