

AFFLUENT NEGLECT

This refers to neglect experienced by children living in wealthy families.



What could that look like?

Affluent parents can often be emotionally disconnected from their children because they work very long hours. This means that their children are often left alone, or with a range of paid carers, resulting in the symptoms of neglect being harder to spot. The children may present as clean, well-dressed, and properly fed but they could be experiencing emotional neglect.

Affluent parents can have a more relaxed attitude towards substance misuse, sexual activity, and sexuality. As a consequence, their children could be exposed to more risks. Children living in affluent households may also be affected by parental alcohol and substance abuse and domestic abuse.

Affluent parents can become overly anxious about their child's safety, progress and development, this could result in them putting a high amount of pressure on their child to succeed at school, keeping them indoors because of stranger danger and excessive supervision and control. These can lead to psychological and emotional problems for children.

What are the impacts on the child?

The emotional neglect, exposure to substance abuse and domestic abuse, and lack of supervision sometimes faced by children from affluent families are adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). ACEs can affect brain development and change how a person's body responds to stress. They have a lasting impact on an individual and the consequences of these adverse experiences can lead to long-term mental and physical health problems, as well as substance misuse and addiction in adulthood. Childhood Trauma and the Brain | UK Trauma Council (youtube.com).

Children who feel alone may seek to find a sense of belonging with peers or people who pay them attention, this unfortunately can make them vulnerable to grooming, exploitation and harm outside of the home.

What action can be taken?

Each situation will require careful consideration of the impact, severity, and duration of possible harm a child is experiencing from neglect. It is not uncommon for other types of abuse to occur simultaneously. Professionals should consider the guidance for the threshold of need of the child and take the appropriate action. The neglect screening tool may be of assistance.

It can be challenging for affluent parents to understand the issues pertaining to their children's relational attachments and their emotional experiences of care. As a result, any questions about their parenting and the emotional home environment can be met with hostility and conflict and strongly resistance to any intervention. This can result in formal complaints to senior managers and the threat of legal action. Practitioners should be confident in their practice when they are following safeguarding procedures.

Affluent parents can purchase private health care, education provision, nannies etc. that can mask issues of neglect and make information sharing more difficult. This is because parents may not share details of the private services they have employed. There have also been concerns that some private services, for example from 'therapists', may not act in the best interest of the child, or raise safeguarding concerns appropriately.

A difficulty can arise when affluent parents pay for their children to attend private or boarding schools. If the school raises a concern, parents may choose to move their child to either another private or boarding school, or out of the country, without sharing the details of where this will be. This means that safeguarding records cannot be transferred. It is important to understand the complexities of affluent neglect, whilst feeling confident to remain child focused and not be swayed by the parents' demands.

Further information

Goldsmiths University of London Safeguarding Children in Affluent Families <https://www.gold.ac.uk/research/case-studies/social-work-with-affluent-families/>

Handling cases of affluent neglect in schools Farrer & Co <https://www.farrer.co.uk/globalassets/handling-cases-of-affluent-neglect-in-schools.pdf>