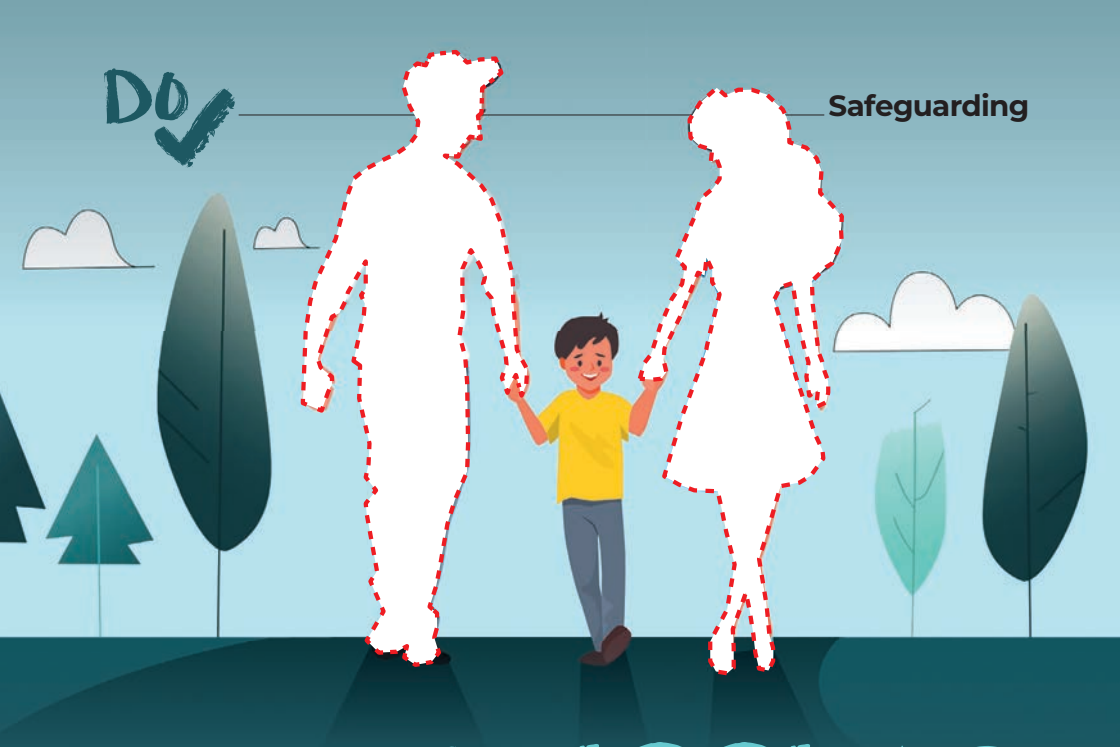


MISSING CLOSENESS

What is affluent neglect and how do practitioners spot the signs of this hidden form of abuse?

It's a common misconception that children who suffer from neglect are more likely to come from families with a lower economic status. But while it's not always easy to spot, affluent neglect is a real issue, and one all childcare providers should be aware of.

Experienced by children from wealthy families – often in the form of emotional neglect – it can have serious and long-lasting repercussions for young people's mental health and self-worth.

First highlighted by Professor Claudia Bernard in 2018, affluent neglect can lead to an array of mental health and addiction issues. Psychologist Jan Gerber named the symptoms 'Succession syndrome' after the popular TV show when he noticed a 'concerning trend' of mental health issues among his wealthy clients.

Disguised compliance

Ann Marie Christian, an international safeguarding consultant, explains: "You find it where parents are working long hours and someone else is providing their basic care, emotional warmth, guidance and boundaries. They're paying someone to raise their children.

"We call it disguised compliance, where on the

Words: Emma Bennett Image: Getty

TOP TIPS

Ann Marie Christian gives her advice for practitioners dealing with affluent neglect.

1. **Be self-aware** of the judgements you're making about a family and why. Check your biases.
2. **Remember that every child matters** and you have a duty to protect them from harm.
3. **Be professionally curious** and don't accept things at face value. If you have a doubt, follow up on it.
4. **Seek advice,** either from a professional network, a charity or local authority.
5. **Educate yourself** with regular safeguarding training.

outside families are engaging – they're usually clean and dressed appropriately. We assume that these people, who can afford everything and are providing all the toys, clothes and holidays, are treating children well. So the neglect or abuse may be more invisible."

Children from wealthy families may also be at risk from high pressure and expectation to succeed – both academically and in extracurricular activities. Parental alcohol and substance abuse, domestic violence and mental illness are often hidden due to the family's reputation or access to private hospitals.

As these children get older, a lack of parental supervision together with wider access to money, can leave them more vulnerable to drug abuse or sexual activity.

Long-lasting impact

Emotional abuse and the presence of parental separation are considered adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which featured in the Summer issue of Childcare Professional.

Professor Vivian Hill, committee member of the British Psychological Society's division of educational and child psychology, says some of the most emotionally dysregulated children she has seen are from the wealthiest families.

"Children suffering from affluent neglect don't have the same degree of contact and closeness with their parents that children in different economic environments might have," she says. "Although they are often showered with material things, what they probably crave more than any of that is time and closeness with their parents.

"That closeness might be missing because the parents are in very demanding jobs. And this can leave children feeling that they don't deserve their parents' time, they're not worthy, and it can lead to them having poor self-esteem, and pushing themselves to overachieve to gain parental attention. This all impacts on their mental health."

Practitioners need to know how to spot the signs of affluent neglect. Many symptoms will be the same as other forms of neglect, including changes in a child's behaviour such as showing inappropriately low self-esteem, becoming withdrawn, demonstrating fear of failure and striving for perfection, being anxious and having difficulty building and sustaining relationships.

SIGNS OF AFFLUENT NEGLECT

- Changes in a child's behaviour
- Having difficulty regulating emotions
- Tired and disengaged from activities
- Low self-esteem
- Pressure from parents to hit milestones

Courageous conversations

Ann Marie says practitioners should also be alert to the way parents react to concerns. "If you have a query about a mark on a child's leg, for example, the average parent will be open and understand why you're asking. But these parents might get defensive very quickly. Really reflect on how you feel with the family. If you're walking on eggshells and you get intimidated, you should question that.

"We call these courageous conversations, where you know it is going to be difficult, but you need to raise a concern with them. If you work as part of a staff team, escalate any concerns and seek further advice where needed so you have support; and always get a second opinion."

Practitioners should know and follow their setting's safeguarding policy. Claire Protheroe, PACEY's Safeguarding Lead, says this must be backed up by regular continuous professional development (CPD). "It's not just about having a policy, but keeping up to date by reading around the subject and educating yourself. The policy should be refreshed and reviewed and shared with parents for clarity of approach.

"Practitioners should learn ways to manage difficult conversations with parents. Follow your policy and, if the child's welfare is at risk, don't hesitate to make any necessary referral."

Claire adds that while childcare professionals must be alert to changes in behaviour, these do not always signify neglect, and may have another cause, such as bullying.

"Understanding the children in your care and recognising changes in behaviour and concerns is important. Be sure to keep appropriate records of concerns and conversations with parents to look back on and identify trends that may provide patterns over time. Have confidence in your own judgement as a professional, and don't be afraid to act on concerns as they arise." CP

Resources

- The Safeguarding Company on affluent neglect: b.link/TSC-affluent-neglect
- PACEY – Supporting children with trauma: pacey.org.uk/supporting-children-through-trauma
- PACEY – Spotlight on safeguarding: pacey.org.uk/Safeguarding

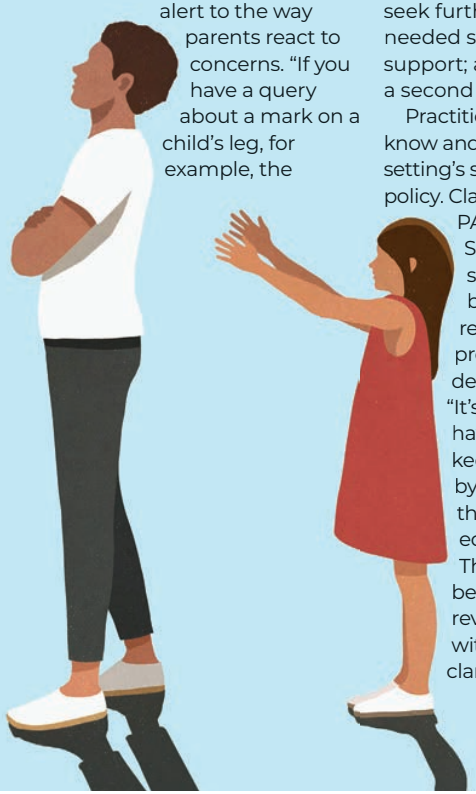


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