

Neglect and Deprivation Overview

“Neglect is a complex, multifaceted problem that can have profound effects on children.”

-Maureen Black, Ph.D & Howard Dubowitz, MD

Neglect and child abuse are often combined into the overarching category of child maltreatment. Neglect, however, is a more passive form of child maltreatment that often goes without notice until a major event brings it to light. Often an event of omission rather than one of commission, neglect may be seen as a lesser endangerment for children. However, long-term and chronic neglect can seriously impact a child affecting every area of life and development including physical health, social adeptness, and educational success.

Resources in this section detail risk factors associated with neglect and the impact of chronic neglect. Also provided is information regarding the interplay between neglect and outside influences, such as poverty, domestic violence, and substance abuse. One specific childhood issue, failure to thrive, which is thought to be closely associated with neglect, is highlighted with information on differentiating when failure to thrive is secondary to neglect. Types of appropriate interventions are also included and may assist judges as they provide oversight on the challenging cases.

At each step of the dependency proceedings judges need to make findings as to reasonable efforts. A comprehensive understanding of appropriate interventions for neglect can assist judges in assessing efforts and making this very important finding. More information regarding Benchbook “reasonable efforts” best practices can be found in the Shelter Hearing (Chapter 5). “Frontloading” by ensuring services are not only appropriate but also provided as early in the case is discussed extensively in the Benchbook (Chapters 1, 5, 8, 10 and 15.3). The “frontloading” of services, especially in cases when neglect is primary, can help children safely remain in their homes or reunify in a timely fashion.

Finally, frequent judicial oversight as highlighted in the Benchbook (Chapters 1, 5, 7 and 10) helps focus services provided and should help to encourage parents to make life changes that will provide an environment that will provide a neglect-free environment for their children.

