

Neglect is Child Abuse.

An information sheet for the public.

DISABILITY, CHILD, YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES

What is child neglect?

Neglect is about what parents and caregivers **don't do** for their children. Neglect is a breakdown in providing for the child's basic needs.

Neglect can be physical, educational, or emotional. **Physical neglect** can include not providing adequate food or clothing, appropriate medical care, supervision, or proper weather protection (heat or coats). It may include abandonment. **Educational neglect** includes failure to provide appropriate schooling or special educational needs, allowing excessive truancies. **Psychological neglect** includes the lack of adequate emotional support and love, never attending to the child, spousal abuse, or abuse including allowing the child to participate in drug and alcohol use.

We all understand that parents are not able to meet all their child's needs all the time, but persistent neglect, or the failure to deal with something which is life-threatening for the child, causes harm to the child – both in the short term and in the future.

Is neglect considered to be 'child abuse'?

- YES – despite the fact that many people think that neglect is not really very serious and they tend to think of sexual or physical assault when they hear about 'child abuse'.
- Neglect is a very serious form of child abuse and can have devastating consequences for children and young people, such as severe physical, emotional, social and psychological problems.
- Neglect can take many forms and research tells us that more children die from serious neglect than from other kinds of child abuse. Survivors are often left with permanent physical or intellectual disabilities or suffer significant and chronic long-term damage.

Does the law in Tasmania also include 'neglect' in the definition of 'child abuse'?

YES. The Tasmanian child protection legislation, the *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997* repeatedly uses the terms 'abuse' and 'neglect' together. Both legal intervention and Court action can result from notifications of neglect as well as allegations of physical, sexual and emotional abuse

The Act states that:

'abuse or neglect includes sexual abuse or physical or emotional injury, or neglect, to the extent that

- the injured, abused or neglected person (child) has suffered, or is likely to suffer, physical or psychological harm detrimental to the person's wellbeing; or
- the injured, abused or neglected person's physical or psychological development is in jeopardy'

This means that children should be protected from the risk of future neglect as well as the risk of future sexual, physical or emotional abuse.

Earlier in this information sheet it stated that neglect ‘can take many forms’. What does this mean?

Child neglect is the failure to meet a child’s essential needs through inadequate parenting and lack of responsibility which may have an impact on the child’s development. The following brief descriptions cover the main categories of neglect:

- Physical neglect is the failure to provide the necessities to sustain the life or health of the child: the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter
- Medical neglect occurs when the adult in the parenting role fails to provide adequate health care. It includes refusing or delaying in seeking medical treatment, failing to give regular medication for chronic conditions such as diabetes or asthma, and failing to take normal preventative measures
- Supervisory neglect occurs when carers fail to supervise their child, or to arrange for proper supervision in their absence. Supervisory neglect often occurs where children are left in the care of another child who is not old or mature enough
- Emotional neglect is failing to provide adequately for a child’s emotional and psychological developmental needs. This includes not spending enough time with the child, or not providing the experiences a child needs for their mind and emotions to develop in a healthy and balanced way
- Educational neglect occurs when the child is not provided with learning opportunities. Even before a child goes to school, some parents or carers do not provide the stimulating objects and experiences which very young children need
- Abandonment involves leaving a child alone or without arranging appropriate care

How and where should I seek advice about child neglect or report serious concerns?

In cases of actual or suspected neglect contact:

Child Protection Intake

Ph: 1300 737 639 Fax: 62 307 821

Email: CPAARS@dhhs.tas.gov.au

This telephone number is switched through to an emergency service outside of business hours. If it is safe and practical to do so, please make contact during business hours whenever possible.