

# Seen and now heard

Taking action  
on child neglect

[www.actionforchildren.org.uk](http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk)

*as long as it takes*



**Since October 2009, Action for Children's 'Take Your Action for Children' Neglect Appeal has strived to accurately reveal the extent of child neglect in the UK. The statistics are stark – up to 1.5 million children are affected by neglect throughout the country. However it's when the true stories of what people see, hear and feel about neglect in their own neighbourhoods and communities are told that the real picture is revealed.**

Action for Children has spoken to different groups over the last year to find out about their experiences of child neglect. We began with the general public, followed by childcare professionals, police and social workers, and now we have worked with children.

Given that child neglect affects their peer group, we felt it was vital to consult children directly. Our role is to give the most vulnerable and neglected children and young people a voice and enable them to have a direct influence on issues that affect them. So we spoke to over 3,000 eight to 12 year olds, making this one of the biggest studies of its kind.

The results were startling – even to us. They suggest that the signs of neglect are rife in classrooms, playgrounds and activity clubs the length and breadth of the country. They reinforce that the lives led by those struggling with neglect are often isolated and unhappy.

This shows that now, more than ever, it is vital that we do what we can to combat neglect. We need to work with neglected children as early as possible, offering structured, targeted solutions that help them and their families. Support and solutions can come from every part of a child's community meaning that *you* can help.

Please take time to read this information and work with us to combat child neglect.



**We believe that no child should be neglected. To find out more about neglect, and to take *your* action for children, visit [www.actionforchildren.org.uk](http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk)**

## According to the eight to 12 year olds we spoke to, neglect is worryingly common...

- almost two thirds (61%) had seen suspected signs of neglect
- on average children saw at least three children with some of the signs of neglect this year
- more than one in ten (13%) told us they'd seen suspected neglect nine times this year
- children as young as eight are seeing signs of neglect in their peers

## Eva

Eva's childhood was chaotic. Both her parents were drug dealers who often fought with each other. Neglect was a fact of life. 'I would steal food so I didn't starve. I remember going down to the supermarket with my mum and bringing home stuff out of the dustbins at the back.' As if the hunger wasn't enough, their house was often filthy: 'The house was such a mess. There was piles of washing, and I always had to do it. There were things on the side going mouldy.' Eva also recalls the emotional aspect of neglect: 'You don't have the little things that other people take for granted, like someone to tuck you in at night.' When she was 13, Eva's parents were sent to prison. She survived for two years, sleeping on sofas or staying with relatives, before putting herself up to be fostered. At 16, Eva was introduced to Action for Children and given an independent visitor, Sam, who has

helped her to turn her life around. 'Sam was the first really stable part of my life – the first person who ever really listened to me. She never let me down. She was always there.' Now, Eva is happily married with a year-old baby. She is content. Without Action for Children, she says, this wouldn't have been possible.



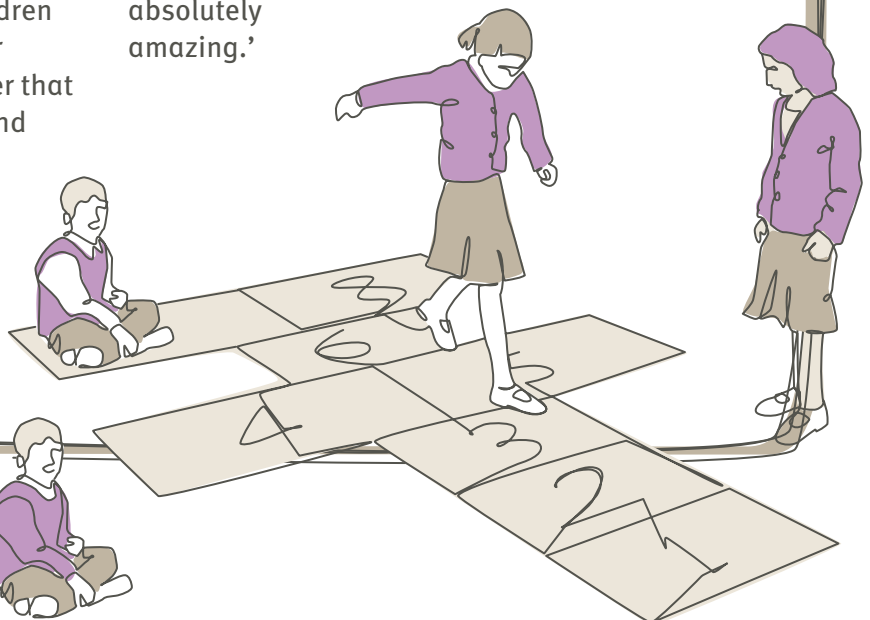
**The signs of neglect, which include children often being dirty, smelly, lonely and going hungry, have all been spotted by children we spoke to:**

- **over a third (34%)** said they had seen children who don't seem to have friends either at school or at home
- **a quarter (25%)** had seen a child wearing clothes that didn't fit them or that might be smelly
- **almost one in five (19%)** had seen a child who looked unwashed or dirty
- **nearly 10% (7%)** had seen a child who might not be getting meals at home

# Nadia

Before Nadia became involved with Action for Children, she admits to neglecting her four children. The victim of domestic violence, with her own childhood ruined by neglect, Nadia suffered acute depression. 'I'd just lie on the couch. There was nothing to stop them getting hurt – I never had no safety gates or nothing.' Nadia recalls that her home often unclean and her children often went unwashed. She also says her children received no love or attention. Action for Children had a dedicated project worker that worked with Nadia. 'It was coming in and cleaning, getting the little ones into nursery,' Nadia says, 'she used to come every day to support me and take the kids to school and then to take me shopping. She taught me how to cook proper meals for the kids.' Nadia went on parenting and

assertiveness courses, eventually followed by her partner. 'The children have completely calmed down. They're all in routines. Their school reports are brilliant! I've loved every minute of it. Action for Children respect you, they challenge you – everything. When I was feeling down I only had to phone and she would just say the right words and stuff like that, it were just absolutely amazing.'



Names have been changed to protect the identity of the people concerned.

**According to the children we consulted, the effects of neglect include bullying, being ignored, or being laughed at – all of which can cause lasting damage to a child’s self-esteem and lead to major problems later in life.**

- ▶ **almost half (46%)** of the children thought children showing signs of neglect are likely to be bullied
- ▶ **more than four in ten (41%)** said they would be laughed at
- ▶ **around half (48%)** said they would be ignored
- ▶ **44%** said children would talk about other children they thought might be neglected to their friends

## Emily



Emily is the eldest of four. She never remembers an act of love or kindness from her mother.

By the age of seven she was often responsible for the other children – cooking meals, doing the laundry, and getting them to school each day. Emily’s home was particularly difficult, ‘We got a bath once a week,’ she says. ‘In my bedroom there was wallpaper peeling off the walls – probably the same bedding on the bed for months. I look back and see what we lived in and I’m shocked.’ But for Emily, it was the emotional neglect

that affected her the most. ‘It’s not material things. I crave that emotion and that love, you know. I missed out on a loving, supporting family and that’s what I’ve always wanted.’ From the age of 11, Emily was in and out of foster care, then, at 16, Action for Children took over. Initially she was sceptical, but not anymore: ‘I love them all to bits, you know. It’s more than a project – it’s a family, anyone that comes in here, it’s family. They’ve never given up on me. They’ve believed in me and they’ve helped me achieve my potential.’

**We’ve also helped Emily tell her story through a national TV advert. Look out for it on screens now.**



## When it comes to where neglect happens, the children we spoke to see the signs of it all around them...

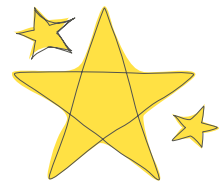
- ▶ **80% of those children** spotted the signs in classrooms and playgrounds
- ▶ **nearly half (47%)** saw the signs in their neighbourhood
- ▶ **around one in four (23%)** saw them at a club or group

# The solution

Sadly, there is no quick-fix way to tackle neglect. Just as the issue itself is complicated, so are the solutions. They demand intensive work from dedicated professionals – starting as soon as possible and lasting for as long as it takes. The earlier problems like neglect are spotted, the easier it is to fix them – for the children and families themselves, for the people doing the fixing, and for society as a whole. This is called early intervention. It's what Action for Children does and it's

what we're trying to raise awareness of – and money to pay for – through our 'Take Your Action for Children' Neglect Appeal. But we can't do this alone. We need *your* help. Whether it's making a small monthly donation, signing a petition, volunteering or even just telling your friends about us and our work, it *will* make a difference. So please, take your action for children today. Visit [www.actionforchildren.org.uk](http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk) to find out more.

**Take your action for children and help us to be there for as long as it takes [www.actionforchildren.org.uk](http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk)**



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Action for Children is committed to helping the most vulnerable children and young people in the UK break through injustice, deprivation and inequality, so they can achieve their full potential.



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