

Situations of increased vulnerability

“Many families under great stress succeed in bringing up their children in a warm loving and supportive environment in which each child's needs are met. Sources of stress within families may, however, have a negative impact on a child's wellbeing.”¹

Assumptions should be avoided as they are often based on practitioners previous experiences or unconscious stereotypes of families. An assessment of need undertaken in partnership with families is required in order to understand the impact of an individual families situation and the impact of the different influences existing within the context in which they are living.

Practitioners should however bear in mind the potential factors which may impact in order to discuss the families experience in practice.

Experiencing economic disadvantage including homelessness.

There is a strong association between economic disadvantage and living conditions and the chances that children will fail to thrive. Differences are clearly apparent in the health and educational development of children growing up in areas of high deprivation as identified by central government as Super Output Areas or SOAs.

Poor living conditions clearly affect health in terms of both physical and emotional wellbeing. In additional areas of high deprivation are at increased risk of having high crime rates with related drug use, vandalism, burglaries and car crime all of which can exacerbate the impact of economic disadvantage.

The causes and consequences of homelessness and worklessness can lead to a downward spiral of economic disadvantage. This is likely to be particularly relevant to economic migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, who are subject to other limits to benefit and income.

Parents drugs and or alcohol misuse negatively impacts upon their parenting

Optimal child development is dependent upon the positive role of parents or caregivers from children's birth to adulthood. Children's chances of achieving the best possible outcomes will depend upon their parents' capacity to respond appropriately to their needs at different stages of their lives.

Drug and alcohol misuse **may** inhibit parental responses to their children and prevent them from providing parenting to a level necessary to promote best outcomes in children. If drug use results in parents being physically or emotionally unavailable, if children are coerced into hiding or covering drug use, if parents behaviour is inconsistent, reckless or dangerous or neglectful children will be more likely to experience poor outcomes.

¹ Working Together to Safeguard Children
<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/files/AE53C8F9D7AEB1B23E403514A6C1B17D.pdf>

Children and young people who misuse drugs and alcohol in a manner which impacts on their health and development

Drug and alcohol misuse are likely to have a significant detrimental impact on young people leading to poor health, lack of educational achievement and poor mental health. The specific impact of particular drugs varies in type and intensity but there are common factors associated with problematic drug use such as poor school attendance, and higher risk of sexual exploitation and involvement in crime.

Children whose parents have a mental health problem and or learning difficulty which impacts upon the health and development of the child.

Children's chances of achieving the best possible outcomes will depend upon their parents' capacity to respond appropriately to their needs at different stages of their lives. Mental illness may inhibit parental responses to their children and prevent them from providing parenting to a level necessary to promote good outcomes for children. This can also be true of parents with significant learning difficulties.

Children who are young carers

Child carers will be vulnerable children as their caring role is likely to prevent them achieving or maintaining a reasonable level of development. Examples of this can include missing school or social opportunities in order to care for parents or siblings. The 1995 Carers (Recognition and Services) Act gives carers (of any age) who provide substantial and regular care the right to an assessment of their needs when the service user is being assessed/reassessed for community care services. The 2000 Carers and Disabled Children's Act gives carers aged 16 and over the right to an assessment (independently of the care receiver) and to services and to direct payments in lieu of services.

Children requiring support as a care leaver

Young people aged 16 years plus who are eligible or relevant within the meaning of the Children (Leaving Care) 2000.

Children with a disability or significant and ongoing health problems.

The basic needs of disabled children are no different to those of any other children. This category embraces children who are suffering impairment to their health and development as a result of their own intrinsic condition. The resulting needs can often require more support than is available through the capacity of their parents and carers. The use of the term "disability" embraces any illness, which causes the disability.

In contrast to this model where disability is seen as intrinsic to an individual or

condition, it is also important to note that while people may have physical, intellectual or psychological impairments, these do not have to lead to disability unless society fails to accommodate and include them. For example, many people may be prevented by their impairment from climbing steps. However, it is through society's failure to provide alternatives that these same people are often prevented from getting on a bus or going to a cafe. Society's attitude is the problem in this instance.

Children who are engaged in antisocial and/or offending behaviour.

In some instances offending behaviour may signify the presence of other needs e.g. inappropriate parental care. In these instances preventative intervention outside the formal youth justice system may be the most appropriate action. Formal intervention from the youth justice system may be required where the nature of the offending and its consequences is causing or likely to cause significant harm to the child or others.

Children who are experiencing domestic violence.

Research has emphasised the damaging effects for a child living and witnessing domestic violence between adult members of the household. Children can "witness" domestic violence in a number of ways, which extend beyond direct observation. Children might overhear incidents or in other ways be aware that violence has occurred.

Children and young people under eighteen seeking asylum.

Children and young people whose parents have died, or who have become separated from them as a result of civil or natural disaster or political events.

Children for who the social services department has a statutory responsibility

Statutory duties include reports for court, requests for post adoption counselling and support, step parent adoptions, access to files, private fostering, contributions to special educational needs assessments.

Children experiencing significant emotional difficulties or challenging behaviour.

All forms of emotional difficulties or challenging behaviour are intended to be covered in this vulnerability factor, including issues relating to the mental health of children, self-harm, bullying and discrimination as a result of racial harassment. This can also include pregnant teenagers and teenage parents, and children who's disability or learning difficulty manifests itself as emotional and / or behavioural difficulties. Studies have shown that bullying; including racist bullying causes real suffering and effects children's self-esteem and confidence. Racial abuse damages children both physically and emotionally and as such warrants professional intervention to address the effects of this form of abuse whether it comes from inside or outside the family.

Poverty can increase the risk of a child having an impairment; having a disabled child can mean that parents find it harder to maintain full-time employment, their housing can be inadequate for their child's needs, and expenditure on basic needs is increased (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit 2005).

55% of families with a disabled child are living in poverty or on the margins of poverty (General Household Survey 2002).

A survey by Mencap (2006) said that 7 out of 10 families with a severely disabled child are at breaking point. Mencap have also said (June 2007) that 8 out of 10 children and young people with learning disabilities, are bullied either in school or when they go out in the evening.

Links to:

[Improving the life chances of disabled people](#)- report by the Strategy Unit.
Refer to Chapter 5- Early Years & Family Support

[Summary of the above report](#)