

Affluent Neglect

Insight

What is affluent neglect?

Affluent neglect refers to the form of neglect experienced by children in wealthy or affluent families. Characterised by areas such as emotional neglect, pressure to succeed, lack of supervision, material indulgence, exposure to substance use or engagement with risky behaviours.

Possible signs and indicators:

Be curious about the child's behaviour:

- Emotional presentation – poor self-worth or struggling with pressure around expectations placed upon them
- Hyper-vigilance or independence beyond what is usual / typical in our expectations of their age or stage of development
- Acting out or difficulty socially with peers due to areas such as lack of empathy
- Drawn to or engaging with risky behaviours or poor impulse control

Why is affluent neglect so overlooked?

Children from affluent homes who experience abuse, neglect, or domestic abuse face unique barriers to accessing support. Emotional neglect in these families can be harder to identify, as children often appear well cared for due to hired help, masking underlying issues. Staff training often focuses on neglect in poorer families, leaving professionals less prepared to identify concerns in wealthier households.

Additionally, affluent families are less likely to be on the radar of social services and may display hostility toward protective agencies, complicating intervention efforts. Unconscious bias can also lead to assumptions that wealth equates to safety, causing warning signs to be overlooked. Boarding school arrangements or parents living overseas add further complexity, making it harder to identify issues and engage with families to improve outcomes.

Tips to responding effectively:

- Be Professionally curious and share any concerns with your organisations DSL or Safeguarding team
- Build trust and rapport with children and their families
- Explore parental / care giver engagement strategies and strength based approaches
- Raise awareness to staff, explore training and reference in policies

