

# Handout

## **Understanding neglect: parents'/carers' perspectives**

Whilst the child's welfare must always be the paramount consideration, of central importance in working with complex cases is to provide a "dependable, professional relationship for families and children that is educative, supportive and provides timely help" (Thoburn 2009:7)

The relationship between parents/carers and professionals when there are child welfare concerns can be both complex and difficult. However, as nearly all children remain at or quickly return home, involving the families in the child protection process is likely to be effective. Moreover, partnership working is likely to lead to better outcomes for children.

So, while there are significant demands associated with developing partnership approaches, there are also clear rewards in terms of effectiveness. This was stressed in the Department of Health summaries of research findings: Child Protection: Messages from Research (Department of Health 1995), The Children Act Now: Messages from Research (Department of Health 2001) and Safeguarding Children Across Services: Messages from research on identifying and responding to child maltreatment (Davies and Ward 2012).

The essential elements of relationship-based psycho-social casework (combining elements of care and control) are based on evidence from research studies that services are unlikely to be effective if parents and children do not consider that they are treated with honesty and respect as a minimum, and cared about as individuals with needs of their own (as required by the Principles and Practice guidance published with the Children Act 1989 (Department of Health 1995).

The task then is to empathise and work with parents (wherever possible) while retaining a focus on the child and their welfare. Forrester et al (2008:24) suggest that specific challenges will include "how to be honest and clear with parents without creating hostility; how to be empathic without colluding with unacceptable behaviour; how, in short, to reconcile the different imperatives of the role within practice with parents." This, they suggest is sometimes understood as the challenge of working in "partnership" with parents.

In 1995 the Department of Health published The Challenge of Partnership in Child Protection (Department of Health 1995). Four approaches to partnership were suggested:

- providing information
- involvement
- participation
- partnership.