

# Child neglect and domestic abuse Workshop

Dermot Brady Senior Lecturer in Social Work  
[Dermot.brady@sgul.kingston.ac.uk](mailto:Dermot.brady@sgul.kingston.ac.uk)

# Introductions

- We have heard today that neglect most common registration category – 43% in UK and 60% Serious Case Reviews
- Youngest children most vulnerable
- Definitions not clear. Commission or omission?
- Literature reviews and govt. guidelines tell us what problems in identification and intervention look like

# Prevalence

- Neglect and domestic abuse? In one study DV present in 41% of cases (Long et al 2014)
- Difficulties in assessment – private domain and not usually one major event
- Difficulties in analysis – significant harm, reasonable parenting, persistent failure to meet child's needs, impairment of health and development
- Difficulties in action; short sprint v marathon, persistence of inter-generational neglect and abuse

# Definitions - Neglect

- Neglect

The persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment);
- protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger;
- ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate caregivers);  
or
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.
- It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs

(HM Government, 2013 p.85).

# Definitions – Domestic Violence...

- The cross-government definition of domestic violence and abuse is:
- any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:
  - psychological
  - physical
  - sexual
  - financial
  - emotional

# ...and controlling and coercive behaviour

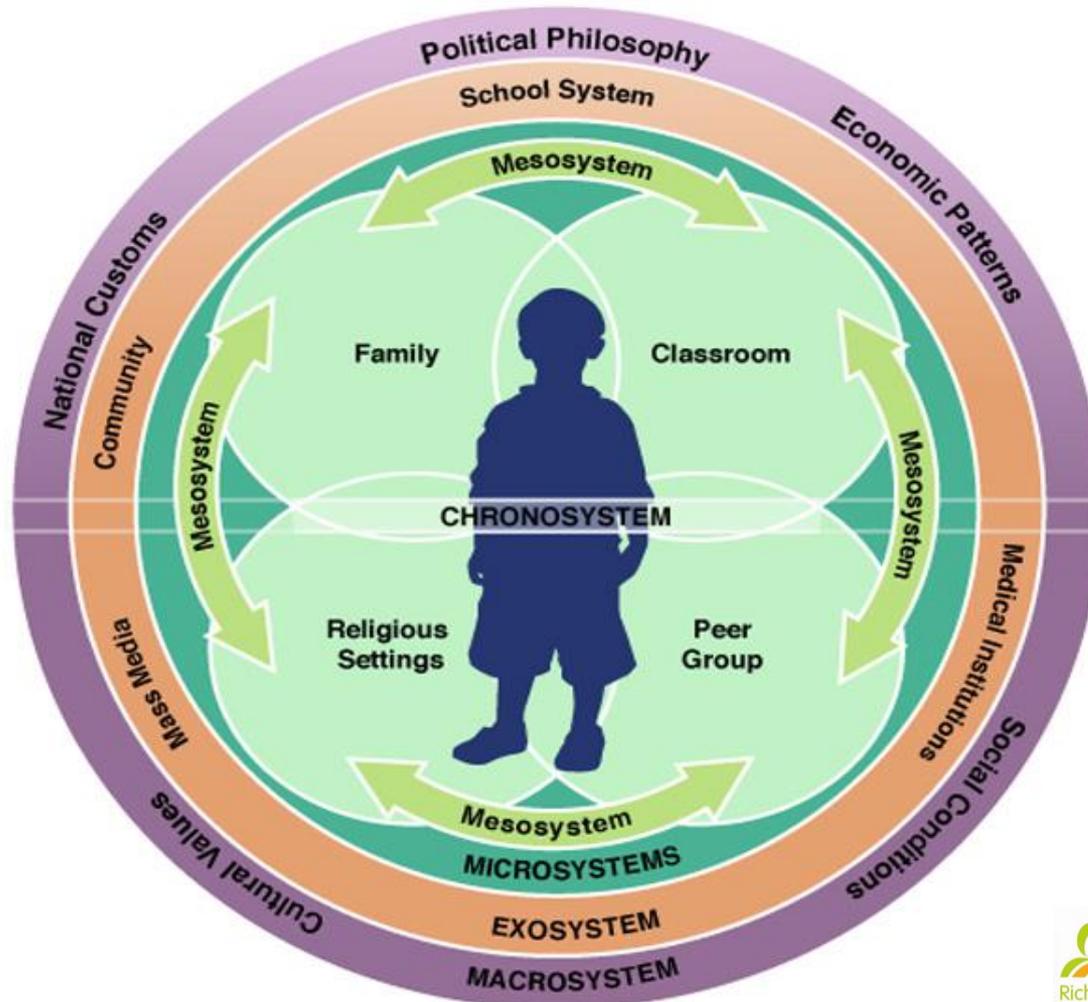
- **Controlling behaviour**
- Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.
- **Coercive behaviour**
- Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.
- This is not a legal definition.

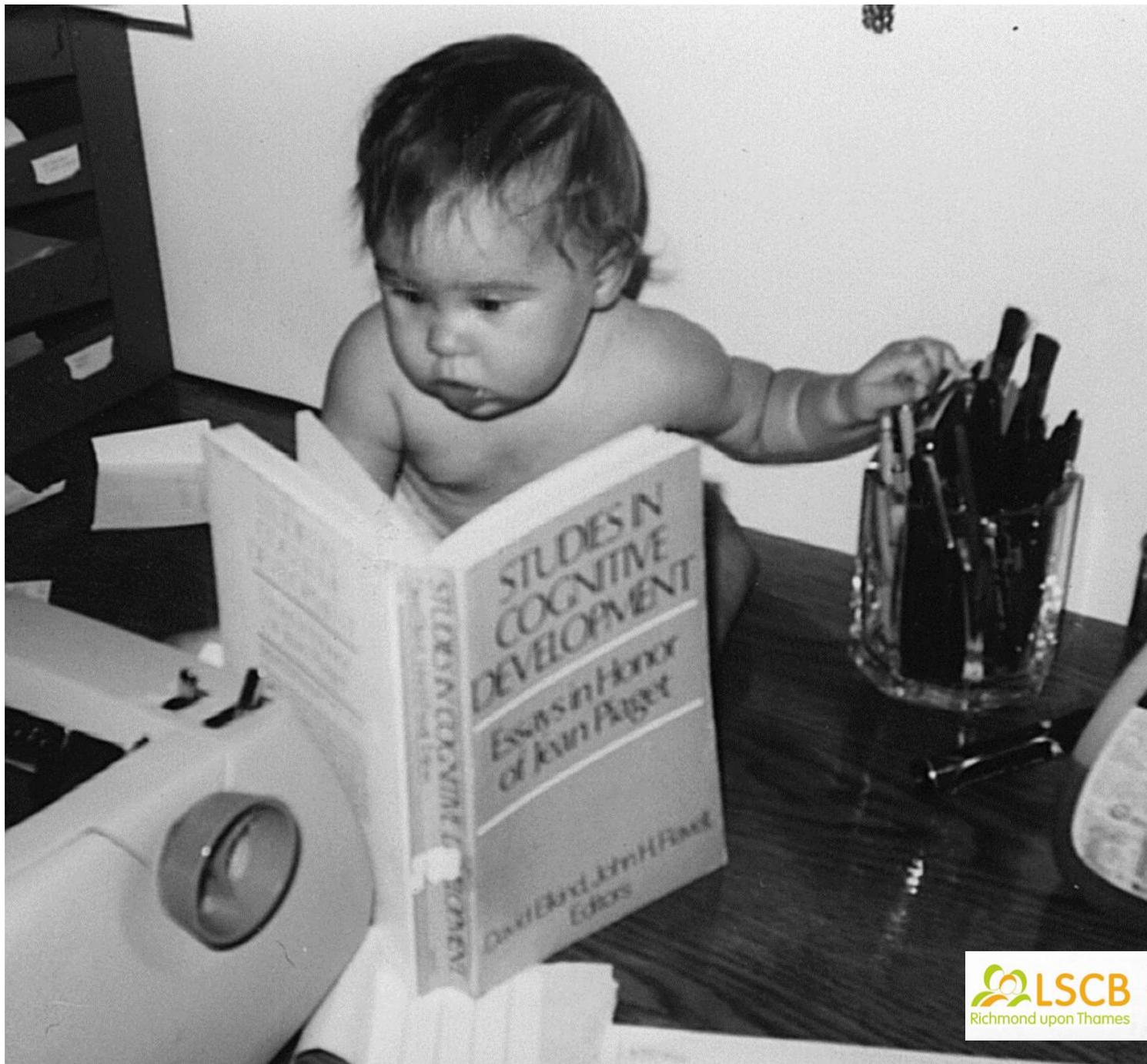
# Permission to intervene?

- Failure to protect? Still struggling with this.
- Domestic abuse mostly appearing under category of neglect. So who is neglectful?
- What are fathers doing because we are not talking to them. Perpetrator programmes part of the answer
- Caring Dads yet another part

# A developmental perspective

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Child Development





# Piaget's Cognitive Development Stages

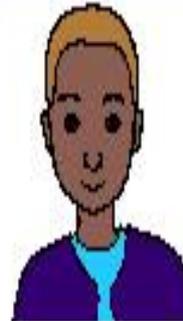
1  
Sensorimotor  
(birth - 2 years  
old)



2  
Preoperational  
(2 - 7 years old)



3  
Concrete  
Operational  
(7 - 11 years old)



4  
Formal Operational  
(adolescence -  
adulthood)



# What does it feel like?

## What is neglect ?

- Not enough love
  - Parents and step-parents not spending time with me
  - Parents and step-parents having no interest in me
  - Not being able to confide in my mum or dad
  - Having to look after brothers and sisters – you end up doing your parents' job, the responsibility is passed to you
  - Parents have no interest in school and not going to parent's nights; not helping with homework
  - Parents have no control
  - Parents neglect themselves
  - The parent can't care – they may be stressed from moving around a lot
  - Messy hair and clothes – you get judged for your appearance
  - It's one thing to say they love you but they have to do things to show it
  - There are no guidelines for parenting
  - Love is a doing word
- 
- Children's views from Action on Neglect – A Resource Pack. (2014) Accessed at <http://stir.ac.uk/9b> and <http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk> 28.09.2015

Children seek and accept help

Parents seek and accept help

The public reports concerns about child neglect

Professionals are able to identify neglect and help children at the earliest possible stage

Local authorities know the scale of the problem in their areas and commission effective services to tackle it

National legislation, guidance and regulations enable a joined-up, long-term approach to help neglected children

Neglected children get the help they need

Adapted from - Action for Children. (2014) Child Neglect: The scandal that never breaks. London. AFC.

# Working together

Working together to safeguard children. A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children March 2015 HM Gov

Children have said that they need

- **Vigilance:** to have adults notice when things are troubling them
- **Understanding and action:** to understand what is happening; to be heard and understood; and to have that understanding acted upon
- **Stability:** to be able to develop an on-going stable relationship of trust with those helping them
- **Respect:** to be treated with the expectation that they are competent rather than not
- **Information and engagement:** to be informed about and involved in procedures, decisions, concerns and plans
- **Explanation:** to be informed of the outcome of assessments and decisions and reasons when their views have not met with a positive response
- **Support:** to be provided with support in their own right as well as a member of their family
- **Advocacy:** to be provided with advocacy to assist them in putting forward their views

# What to do?

- Suggestions from you?
- In particular what about the intersections between neglect and domestic abuse?
- Remember that some things do work!

Harry Ferguson; *What social workers do in performing child protection work: evidence from research into face-to-face practice*. Child and Family Social Work 2014  
Wiley 2014

This worker practised in a self-consciously relationship-based manner that was informed by a strength perspective. Her relational style with children and parents was motivational, playful, tactile, yet authoritative *and this example typifies how the atmospheres of encounters in such cases were often positive, caring, creative and joyful*

- ▶ HF: Well you got through a lot there didn't you?
- ▶ SW: Yes .Well that was my, well you have to don't you? I mean if you think about the reality of the job, timescales, caseloads, you have to. It's quite task-centred at times and lots of people argue that it shouldn't be that way, but in the reality of the job I mean – Jesus.

The worker spoke of how she would use more time if she had it:

- ▶ I would rather have half a day where I could talk to mum and dad separately, then talk to them together, then take the kids out to the park, have a nice hour chat with them, play with them, get to know them, bring them back home. But that's not real is it? We don't get to do that, you have to work with what you've got and because it's short you have to, you have to have a plan

# References

- Action for Children. (2014) *Child Neglect: The scandal that never breaks*. London. AFC
- Harry Ferguson; *What social workers do in performing child protection work: evidence from research into face-to-face practice*. Child and Family Social Work 2014 Wiley 2014
- Horwath, J., and Tarr, S. *Child Visibility in Cases of Chronic Neglect: Implications for Social Work Practice*. British Journal of Social Work (2015) 45, 1379–1394
- Long, T., Murphy, M., Fallon, D., Livesley, J., Devitt, P., McLoughlin, M., Cavanagh, A. *Neglect. Four-year longitudinal impact evaluation of the Action for Children UK Neglect Project: Outcomes for the children, families, Action for Children, and the UK*. Child Abuse & Neglect 38 (2014) 1358–1368
- Lutman, E., and Farmer, E. *What Contributes to Outcomes for Neglected Children Who Are Reunited with Their Parents? Findings from a Five-Year Follow-Up Study*. British Journal of Social Work (2013) 43, 559–578