# Parental Capacity to Change

## What is the background?

A number of Child Safeguarding Reviews have identified that assessing and understanding parental capacity to change is a key factor in reducing risks to children – this is especially true where neglect has been a major factor.

## What is available?

- Utilise the Neglect Toolkit
- Read the 7-minute briefing about neglect
- Read the research report Assessing Parental Capacity to Change when Children are on the Edge of Care
- Complete a 'Pathway to Change' discussion with the family to understand what is stopping change from happening

## What is the definition?

'Parental capacity to (or for) change' is the established terminology for describing parents' willingness and ability to make the changes required for them to meet the needs of their children. This could be about improving their parenting skills, their understanding of child development, alcohol or substance misuse or making changes to protect their children from domestic abuse.

## What else should I consider?

- Resistance may also be the result of fear, stigma, shame or ambivalence
- Parents may also be resistant to the involvement of social workers rather than resistant to change in itself
- Consider false compliance, failure to cooperate & denial as these are common features of parents involved in the child protection process.

## What has research told us?

An extensive body of evidence shows how factors such as domestic abuse, substance misuse, mental health problems and learning disability undermine parenting capability and increase the likelihood of significant harm, particularly when they occur in combination. Change is different for everybody, and it is extremely hard for parents who are struggling with a range of their own difficulties.

## What should I do?

Think about parents' ability to change & how you might address any difficulties. Formal assessment of parental capacity to change requires specialist skills, normally to be led by a social worker. It's a dynamic process in which strengths and weaknesses are identified, targets set and agreed, effective interventions identified & implemented. The progress of the change needs to be monitored over a specific time period with all the people supporting the family.

## What are the other factors?

Remember, parenting does not take place in isolation. Parents are also influenced by stressors within the wider environment and family, such as poor housing, poverty and unemployment that make parenting more challenging and increase the likelihood that difficulties will arise.