

Safeguarding Scenario 17 - He's always like this

🔥 "He's always like this on a Monday. I think things are just a bit chaotic at home."

A Year 4 pupil has arrived at school hungry and wearing the same clothes as Friday.

He tells a teaching assistant that he didn't have much to eat over the weekend and that he was looking after his younger sister for some of Saturday because his mum was asleep.

Staff have noticed other things too.

His attendance has become increasingly irregular. He is often tired, sometimes asks classmates for food and has recently started taking food from the breakfast club to put in his bag.

Would your team know what to do?



The Scenario

As a former Headteacher and now Safeguarding Consultant, this is exactly the type of situation where individual concerns can easily be explained away.

- “He’s always hungry.”
- “The family are struggling financially.”
- “Mum has a lot going on.”
- “He seems happy enough.”

But safeguarding requires us to look beyond the individual incident and consider patterns, context and the child’s lived experience.

DON'T WAIT FOR PROOF OF NEGLECT

Staff do not need to decide whether a child is being neglected before sharing a concern.

Neglect is often cumulative. One incident may appear relatively minor, but several concerns viewed together can present a very different picture.

- Repeated hunger
- Poor hygiene or inappropriate clothing
- Persistent tiredness
- Poor or deteriorating attendance
- Inadequate supervision
- Unmet medical needs
- A child taking on responsibilities that are inappropriate for their age
- Changes in behaviour or emotional wellbeing

These should not automatically be treated as evidence of neglect individually, but they may form part of a wider safeguarding picture.

DON'T NORMALISE WHAT YOU KEEP SEEING

- “We’ve known the family for years.”
- “They’ve always struggled.”
- “That’s just how things are at home.”

Repeated concerns should never become less significant simply because staff have become familiar with them.
Ask instead:

What is daily life actually like for this child?

BE PROFESSIONALLY CURIOUS

The teaching assistant should listen carefully to what the child says without conducting an investigation.
If appropriate, they might use open prompts such as:

- “Tell me a little more about that.”
- “What happens when you are hungry at home?”
- “Tell me about looking after your sister.”

Avoid leading questions or trying to establish whether neglect has occurred.

Record the child’s words accurately and distinguish clearly between what the child said, what staff observed and any professional concerns.

REPORT THE CONCERN

The concern should be passed to the DSL or deputy without delay, following the school's child protection procedures. KCSIE 2026 is clear that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, children need the right help at the right time, and staff should act immediately when they have a safeguarding concern.

The DSL can then consider the information alongside the child's safeguarding chronology and any previous concerns.

- Are there repeated reports of hunger?
- Has attendance deteriorated?
- Have other staff noticed changes?
- Are there concerns about supervision?
- Have there been previous conversations with the family?
- Are other children in the household affected?
- Does information need to be shared with other agencies?

Looking at the whole picture can be crucial when neglect is suspected.

CONSIDER THE RIGHT LEVEL OF HELP AND PROTECTION

The response should be proportionate to the child's circumstances and follow local safeguarding procedures. Depending on the concerns, this could include support for the child and family, multi-agency involvement or a referral to children's social care.

If there is reason to believe the child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, this must be responded to through the appropriate statutory safeguarding procedures.

The Safeguarding Question

The teaching assistant thinks:

“There isn't enough here to say he's being neglected. Should I wait and see whether anything else happens?”





The teaching assistant does not need to diagnose neglect or gather enough evidence to prove it.

They need to **recognise the concern, record what they have seen and heard, and report it in line with the school's safeguarding procedures.**

The DSL can then consider this information alongside everything else known about the child and family.

Neglect is not always one dramatic incident.

Sometimes it is the **accumulation of smaller concerns that tells the story of a child's daily life.**

Strong safeguarding cultures ensure that staff remain professionally curious, notice patterns and ask:

“What is life like for this child when they leave our school?”

Notice the signs. Record the facts. Join the dots. Act on concerns.

