



## Self-Neglect 1 Minute Briefing

# SELF-NEGLECT: AN OVERVIEW

*This briefing is part of a series on self-neglect. Each briefing should be read alongside your Safeguarding Adults Board multi-agency policy, procedures, and practice guidance.*

## SELF-NEGLECT: DEFINITION

Self-neglect covers a wide range of behaviour relating to care for one's personal hygiene, health or surroundings, and includes behaviour such as [hoarding](#). Three recognised forms of self-neglect include:

- Lack of self-care – this may include neglecting personal hygiene, nutrition and hydration or health (e.g., non-attendance at medical appointments).
- Lack of care of one's environment – this may result in unpleasant or dirty home conditions, and increased risk of fire due to hoarding.
- An inability or unwillingness to accept essential care and support and services or necessary medical treatment to avoid harm to self.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

Adults who self-neglect maybe more likely to live alone, be an older person, experience mental ill-health, have alcohol or drug problems and have a history of poor personal hygiene or living conditions.

Signs include:

- Not enough food, or food is rotten
- The home is odorous, hazardous or unsafe
- Major repairs/maintenance to the home is required
- Presence of human or animal faeces in the home
- Accumulation of possessions
- A large number of pets and/or abuse or neglect of pets
- The adult may:
  - Have dirty hair, nails and skin
  - Smell of urine and/or faeces
  - Have skin rashes or pressure ulcers
  - Have a poor diet and/or hydration
  - Show increased confusion or disorientation Poor cognition/ increase in confusion or disorientation.
  - Have Unmet or deteriorating health needs
  - Social isolation

## MENTAL CAPACITY

One of the first considerations should be whether the person has mental capacity to understand the risks associated with the actions/lack of actions. Any action proposed must be with the person's consent, where they have mental capacity, unless there is a risk to others (such as a fire risk due to hoarding, or public health concerns).

In extreme cases of self-neglect and/or hoarding behaviour, the very nature of the environment should lead professionals to question whether the person has capacity to consent to the proposed action or intervention and trigger a mental capacity assessment. Consider if the person has the functional capacity to make a particular decision and executive capacity which is the ability to carry out the decision.



# KEY LEARNING



## PROFESSIONAL CURIOSITY

Professional curiosity is about exploring and understanding what is happening with an individual and/or within a family. It is about:

- Enquiring deeper and using proactive questioning and appropriate challenge
- Understanding one's own responsibility and knowing when to act, rather than making assumptions or taking things at 'face value'
- Thinking 'outside the box', beyond a practitioner's usual professional role, considering all of the individual's/family's circumstances holistically and using a trauma-informed approach.
- Being curious, engaging with individuals and families through visits, conversations, asking relevant questions – gathering historical and current information

## LANGUAGE

Language (both that which is written/typed and spoken words) used by professionals about individuals who self-neglect should be respectful of the person, not judgemental, and should also follow Making Safeguarding Personal principles. Using positive, respectful language can build trust and lead to better outcomes for the individual, as they are more likely to engage with any suggested changes, services or intervention

## ENGAGEMENT

Individuals who self-neglect often decline support and may not identify that they need support. Due to the nature of self-neglect, be mindful that engagement may take time and fluctuate.

## MULTI-AGENCY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Successful intervention is more likely when different partners work together to identify solutions and look at a person's needs as a whole. There may be a need for short term interventions to manage things like cleaning as a solution to self-neglect and/or hoarding, longer-term solutions should be sought as part of an integrated multi-agency plan. The aim is to prevent serious injury or death of the individual by ensuring that:

- The person is empowered as far as possible to make their own decisions and to make changes to their circumstances that lead to positive outcomes
- There is a shared, multi-agency understanding and recognition of issues
- There is effective and practical multi-agency working, which challenges practice and ensures that concerns/risks receive appropriate prioritisation
- All interventions to work with an individual who has self-neglecting and/or hoarding behaviours are based on the principles of Making Safeguarding Personal
- All agencies and organisations uphold their duties of care
- There is a proportionate response to the level of risk to the individual and others

## RAISING A SAFEGUARDING CONCERN

Responding to self-neglect depends upon the level of risk or harm posed to the person and/or others, and whether the person is able to protect themselves and determine their own action. Workers should refer to their local safeguarding adults' guidance or speak to their Safeguarding Lead to determine whether a safeguarding concern should be raised





# QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER



- Do you know what self-neglect is?
- Do you know what the key signs of self-neglect are?
- Are you aware of your responsibilities under the Care Act 2014 in relation to self-neglect, and the available safeguarding actions that can be taken as a result of this?
- Do you know that self-neglect is a qualifying factor for an assessment of care and support needs under the Care Act 2014?
- Do you know what your local Safeguarding Adults Board's Multi-Agency Self-Neglect and Hoarding Policy, Procedure, Guidance and Briefings are, and how to make best use of these?

## WHAT YOU AND YOUR STAFF CAN DO TO ACHIEVE POSITIVE OUTCOMES

- Build a relationship with the adult
- Understand the meaning and the context of their self-neglect
- Work collaboratively with the adult and their carers and encourage motivation to change
- Use a systematic multi-agency approach
- Provide practical input
- Consider advocacy
- Seek access to psychological and mental health issues to tackle deep rooted issues
- Knowledge of legal remedies
- Avoid being judgemental
- Understand cognition and mental capacity

## LINKS TO FURTHER INFORMATION

### Making Safeguarding Personal:

- [Local Government Association Making Safeguarding Personal resources](#)

### Functional Capacity and Executive Capacity:

- [When mental capacity assessments must delve beneath what people say to what they do - Community Care](#)
- [SCIE Report 46: Self-neglect and adult safeguarding: findings from research](#)

### Trauma Informed Approaches/Practice

- [SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach](#) (USA resource)
- [Trauma-informed practice: toolkit - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#) (Scotland resource)

### Local Self-Neglect Guidance

- [4LSAB Guidance on responding to self-neglect and persistent welfare concerns.](#)
- [4LSAB Self-Neglect Learning Briefing](#)
- [One Minute Guide to Self-Neglect](#)

With thanks to Newcastle Safeguarding Adults Board and

