



## *Self-Neglect 7 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
- Refusal of services that could alleviate the above

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

Adults who self-neglect are 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 filthy, 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
  - Have deteriorating physical or mental health e.g. diabetes, dementia
  - Be socially isolated

## 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. Please see links below for further information on executive capacity.

The Care Act Statutory Guidance recognises it can be difficult to distinguish between whether a person is making a capacitated choice to live in a particular way (which may be described as an unwise choice or decision) or whether:

- The person lacks mental capacity to make the decision; or
- There is concern regarding the adult's ability to protect themselves by controlling their own behaviour.



# 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 interventions.

## 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 services work together to identify solutions and look at a person's needs as a whole. While things like cleaning interventions may provide a short-term 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 individuals 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 self 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 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 GAIN A GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF SELF-NEGLECT

- All agencies should remind staff of their obligations to comply with their local Safeguarding Adults Board's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Adults Procedures.
- Ensure that where adults need assistance to address the risks associated with self-neglect, professionals work together to support people to make decisions about their wellbeing, providing this help in a timely and consistent way.
- Ensure that the aims of Making Safeguarding Personal are embedded in all interventions.
- Make yourself aware of local self-neglect guidance and resources, as well as the Regional Safeguarding Adults Network resources on self-neglect.

## 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

