

# Northumberland and North Tyneside SAB Briefing - Self-Neglect



## What is Self-neglect?

Self-neglect covers many behaviours. A person may not be keeping themselves clean, neglecting to care for their own health or their surroundings, may refuse care or treatment for health and care needs, or could be hoarding various types of possessions to the point of being a risk. Someone may be unable to manage their personal affairs, for instance debt and bills.

Self-neglect is a continuum of behaviours ranging from moderate to severe. It may be unintentional, such as not eating due to memory issues. Where self-neglect gets out of control, including an inability to avoid or control self-harm, it can lead to a high risk of death or serious harm to the adult involved and to others' health and safety.

## Guidance tells us...

*"Self-neglect covers a wide range of behaviour neglecting to care for one's personal hygiene, health or surroundings and included behaviour such as hoarding. It should be noted that self-neglect may not prompt a section 42 enquiry. An assessment should be made on a case by case basis. A decision on whether a response is required under safeguarding will depend on the adult's ability to protect themselves by controlling their own behaviour. There may come a point when they are no longer able to do this, without external support."*<sup>1</sup>

## Why do people self-neglect?

Self-neglect may have links to mental disorder, trauma, adverse childhood experiences, Post Traumatic Shock Disorder (PTSD), addictions, brain injury, learning disability and significant bereavement. There may be an accumulation of events or a one-off trigger.

Hoarding, which may or may not appear with self-neglect, has been recognised as an anxiety disorder since 2013; it is no longer seen as part of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.

Self-neglect and hoarding are never a 'lifestyle choice'.

## How to recognise self-neglect?

Signs and indicators of self-neglect may be:<sup>2</sup>

- very poor personal hygiene
- unkempt appearance
- lack of essential food, clothing or shelter
- malnutrition and/ or dehydration
- living in squalid or unsanitary conditions
- neglecting household maintenance
- hoarding
- collecting a large number of animals in inappropriate conditions
- non-compliance with health or care services
- inability or unwillingness to take medication or treat illness or injury



The Clutter Rating Tool can help in the recognition of hoarding and judging its level of severity, a copy of this can be found on each of the Local Authority's websites.





## Who

That people who self-neglect always live on their own is a myth. The adult may be a parent with children or other adults living at the home. They may be living in poverty or well-off, employed, or unemployed.



## When

Self-neglect can become more apparent in later life, due to a build-up of adverse experiences, bereavement, and trauma. Hoarding can increase over time as there is longer to amass stuff. But younger people may also self-neglect and hoard in response to childhood abuse.



## Where

Self-neglect including refusal of treatment or care can occur in a person's own home, care home, hospital, hostel, or any other setting, or in the case of homeless people, on the street. Hoarding is typically in a person's own home; other settings tend to not allow severe hoarding due to the fire risk.



## A challenge for services

Managing the balance between protecting adults at risk from self-neglect against their right to self-determination is a serious challenge for services. Working with people who are difficult to engage can be exceptionally time consuming and stressful for all concerned. A failure to engage with people who are not looking after themselves, whether they have mental capacity or not, can have serious implications for the health and well-being of the person concerned and the staff of agencies involved with the individual<sup>3</sup>.

## What to do



### Self-neglect practice

At the heart of self-neglect practice is a complex interaction between knowing, being and doing:

- **knowing**, in the sense of understanding the person, their history and the significance of their self-neglect, along with all the knowledge resources that underpin professional practice
- **being**, in the sense of showing personal and professional qualities of respect, empathy, honesty, reliability, care, being present, staying alongside and keeping company
- **doing**, in the sense of balancing hands-off and hands-on approaches, seeking the tiny element of latitude for agreement, doing things that will make a small difference while negotiating for the bigger things, and deciding with others when enforced intervention becomes necessary<sup>4</sup>.

### Do ask: ✓

- What has happened to you?
- And then what happened?
- How can I make you feel safer?
- How can I make the environment safe?

### Don't ask: ✗

- What is wrong with you?

## Key Messages

- Support people to maintain connections with communities and agencies
- Make use of Fire and Rescue Service Safe and Wellbeing Visits
- Be aware of impact on others e.g. children, other residents
- Housing are key agencies as they see inside homes in emergencies
- A well-meaning big clean up, or removal to another property, does not address the underlying causes and may make it worse
- Ask "what happened to you?" Build a trusted relationship, get to know the person and what matters to them.

## If there are children involved with the adult in cases of self-neglect

- In all cases of adult self-neglect, you must find out if there are children in the household who may need support or are at risk.
- If so, you must make a referral to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)
- Ensure there is a proactive interface between children's and adults' services; don't assume other services are involved.
- Adult and children's services must work together to consider risk and cumulative harm, using a whole family/think family approach.
- An adult's right to make unwise decisions (as assessed under the Mental Capacity Act) does not remove the responsibility of the adult, staff and family to ensure the child's needs are paramount; to 'see' the child.



*"Treatment for self-neglect can include addressing the underlying cause of the condition, whether this is depression or a more severe learning disability. Home care is another good solution for self-neglect cases. Carers can attend to cleaning, dressing, or feeding the individual in a way that does not interfere with their independence or autonomy".<sup>7</sup>*

## Learning from Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs)



*"When working with people who self-neglect, multi-agency working is essential. It provides an opportunity for increased collaboration, shared decision-making and provides potential for a more creative approach to engaging with the person".<sup>8</sup>*

The 2017 London study of 27 SARs found two key areas of practice improvement:

- Use of Mental Capacity Act, in particular: capacity assessments, best interest decisions, and (respectful) challenge of decisions
- Information sharing, passing on concerns.

## Severe self-neglect and capacity



- Severe self-neglect is life threatening.
- A multi-agency response is essential. Do not keep information to yourself or your agency, including if your service is ceasing involvement. Seek support and advice.
- Your concern may be the only chance to safeguard someone; don't assume everyone else is dealing with it.
- If a decision seems unwise find out more. Is it based on a valid difference in values, or, is it based on lack of understanding of the risks or the inability to weigh information and understand consequences?
- Consider if the person has capacity; use the Mental Capacity Act to assess.
- Where someone has been assessed as having capacity to refuse services or support, that is not a reason to walk away. The safeguarding duty and your duty of care remain.
- Consider other ways of engaging with someone to explore more options.
- Co-production should be at the heart of working with self-neglect.

The importance of relationships

'finding' the person

Research interviews with people who self-neglect identified five key themes<sup>5</sup>

Effective multi-agency working

Legal literacy

Creative intervention

## Reporting

- Follow your own agency procedures

### Concerns about an Adult:

North Tyneside: Gateway 0191 6432777

Northumberland: Onecall 01670 536 400

### Concerns about a child due to adult self-neglect:

North Tyneside: Front Door 0345 2000 109

Northumberland : Onecall 01670 536400



## Further Information

### Useful Contacts

These are just some contacts for advice and support; many more are available.

| Agency                                 | 📞             | ✉   |
|--|---------------|---|
| Hoarding UK                            | 020 3239 1600 | info@hoardinguk.org   |
| Making Room                            | 0330 088 5684 | <a href="http://makingroom.co.uk/">http://makingroom.co.uk/</a>   |
| RSPCA                                  | 0300 1234 999 | <a href="https://www.rspca.org.uk/utilities/contactus/reportcruelty">https://www.rspca.org.uk/utilities/contactus/reportcruelty</a>   |
| MIND                                   | 0300 123 3393 | <a href="https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/hoarding/causes/#.XKdxJ0xFwdU">https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/hoarding/causes/#.XKdxJ0xFwdU</a> |
| Alcohol Change UK                      |               | <a href="https://alcoholchange.org.uk/help-and-support/get-help-now/for-practitioners">https://alcoholchange.org.uk/help-and-support/get-help-now/for-practitioners</a>   |
| Ann Craft Trust Advice and information | 0115 9515400  | <a href="https://www.anncrafttrust.org/what-is-self-neglect/">https://www.anncrafttrust.org/what-is-self-neglect/</a>   |
| SCIE                                   |               | <a href="https://www.scie.org.uk/self-neglect/policy-practice">https://www.scie.org.uk/self-neglect/policy-practice</a>   |

