

## How can you help an individual who may be self-neglecting?

- **Provide person-centred support** that is tailored to the person's needs, ensuring this is at a pace they are comfortable with. Always consider a trauma-informed approach.
- **Offer practical help with daily routines** including nutrition, cleaning, budgeting, and accessing services. If the individual is living in a cluttered or hoarded environment, consider what help they might want but are unable to convey i.e., removal of rubbish/personal items (this may not be a skip but additional waste and recycling bins from the council or a person with a van to help remove items to the local recycling centre).
- **Offer emotional support for mental health and behaviour change.** There is a 'virtual' hoarding group available via Kettering Mind. Please access the link to services via <https://ketteringmind.org.uk/services/>
- **Provide general support with referrals** to housing, Citizens' Advice, Community Law Service, GP, and social care services, etc.
- **Patience and perseverance are essential** – work at the person's own pace. It may take time, but the outcome may be significant.
- If you need advice on whether you should submit a safeguarding concern, contact the relevant local authority:

**North Northamptonshire Council 0300 126 3000**

**West Northamptonshire Council 0300 126 7000**

**Countywide out of hours service 01604 626938**

## Contact us

Northamptonshire Safeguarding Adults Board (NSAB)  
One Angel Square, Angel Street, Northampton, NN1 1ED

**T: 01604 527383**

**E: [nsab@westnorthants.gov.uk](mailto:nsab@westnorthants.gov.uk)**

**W: [www.northamptonshiresab.org.uk](http://www.northamptonshiresab.org.uk)**

Northamptonshire   
*Safeguarding Adults Board*

# Recognising the signs of self-neglect



## A guide for frontline workers

Northamptonshire   
*Safeguarding Adults Board*

## What is self-neglect?<sup>1</sup>

Self-neglect is an extreme lack of self-care, which is sometimes associated with hoarding, and may be because of other issues including addiction. Self-neglect may be seen as an adult's inability or unwillingness to care for themselves or their living environment. Examples include:

- Lack of self-care to the extent that it threatens personal health and safety
- Neglecting to care for one's personal hygiene, health or surroundings
- Inability to avoid harm because of self-neglect (for example risk of falls)
- Failure to seek help or access services to meet health and social care needs
- Inability or unwillingness to manage one's personal affairs

## Working with self-neglect

Chapter 14 of the Care Act 2014 Statutory Guidance states safeguarding duties apply where the adult has care and support needs and there is a risk of self-neglect as they are unable to protect themselves. The adult may lack mental capacity regarding their care needs. Assessment of the adult's executive functioning is a key component in the assessment of their mental capacity to make specific decisions.

Working with adults who are self-neglecting can be extremely challenging. The important thing is try to engage with the adult using a person-centred, strengths-based approach. This will help to build trust by understanding the adult's limitations without causing distress. A great deal of patience, tolerance and perseverance may be needed before the adult is willing to accept help and support as they may not be aware that they are self-neglecting.

1. For further information see SCIE.

## What causes self-neglect?

It may not be possible to determine a root cause for self-neglecting behaviours, but it may be because of:

- Brain injury, dementia or other mental disorder
- Obsessive compulsive disorder, or hoarding disorder
- Physical illness which has an effect on abilities, energy levels, attention span, organisational skills or lack of motivation as a side effect of medication
- Addiction
- Trauma

## Recognising the signs of self-neglect

- Unsanitary living conditions – poor cleanliness, no working toilet
- Living without hot water, heating, or electricity
- Poor eating habits that could lead to dehydration and malnutrition
- Poor personal hygiene
- Cluttered/hoarded home – not discarding/organising possessions and items, resulting in unsafe living conditions, risk of falls, fire hazard and blocked escape routes
- Untreated medical concerns – not taking prescribed medication, not changing soiled dressings, not using spectacles/hearing, or walking aids
- Living with a large number of animals in the property
- Inability or unwillingness to manage one's personal affairs
- Little or no regard to personal safety and security

## Risks of living with self-neglect

- Unable or unwilling to provide adequate care for themselves
- Unable or unwilling to accept help to support their health and safety and/or care needs such as adult social care or GP appointments
- Unable to make reasonable informed decisions, or are mentally incapacitated due to mental disorder, acquired brain injury or addiction
- Unable to protect themselves against potential exploitation or abuse
- Neglect of personal hygiene (physical factor) may lead to social difficulties and isolation (social factors), or physical/mental health breakdown and cognitive difficulties (mental factors)
- A dilapidated or run-down property or excess rubbish (environmental factor) can become infested by rodents, and can significantly increase fire risk, which is a risk to the adult, family, neighbours and others

## Self-neglect and Multiple Exclusion Homelessness

People experiencing homelessness are likely to have a background of severe multiple disadvantage which often results in poor physical health.

Multiple Exclusion Homeless (MEH) often includes a combination of addiction, poor mental health, homelessness/rough sleeping, and poor cognition. Research shows that almost 50% of homeless people have experienced trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).<sup>2</sup>

## Self-neglect and hoarding

Hoarding disorder is where a person acquires an excessive number of items resulting in unmanageable amounts of clutter that interferes with everyday living.

Adults with a hoarding disorder will experience distress at the thought of getting rid of items and may be unlikely to want to discuss it with you initially.

## How should you respond to suspected self-neglect?

No single agency can respond to an adult's self-neglect, so it's vital that agencies work together. Consider multi-agency meetings or the Adult Risk Management (ARM) process where appropriate. There should be a lead agency who takes ownership, this might be a case worker who has a good relationship with the adult, or it could be the agency with statutory responsibility such as the local authority if the adult has care and support needs. For further information, including self-neglect and hoarding toolkits, use this QR code to access the NSAB website.



2. Adverse Childhood Experiences.