***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.***

**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.**

**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**



*Self-Neglect 7 Minute Briefing*

**SELF-NEGLECT: AN OVERVIEW**

**          **

**KEY LEARNING**

**     **

**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**

**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.**

**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.**

**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.**

**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**

**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?**

****

**LINKS TO FURTHER INFORMATION**

**Making Safeguarding Personal:**

* [Local Government Association Making Safeguarding Personal resources](https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/our-improvement-offer/care-and-health-improvement/making-safeguarding-personal)

**Functional Capacity and Executive Capacity:**

* [When mental capacity assessments must delve beneath what people say to what they do - Community Care](https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2020/10/28/mental-capacity-assessments-must-delve-beneath-people-say/)
* [SCIE Report 46: Self-neglect and adult safeguarding: findings from research](https://www.scie.org.uk/publications/reports/report46.asp)

**Trauma Informed Approaches/Practice**

* [SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach](https://ncsacw.acf.hhs.gov/topics/trauma-informed-care/concept-of-trauma-and-guidance-for-trauma-informed-approach/) (USA resource)
* [Trauma-informed practice: toolkit - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/trauma-informed-practice-toolkit-scotland/pages/12/) (Scotland resource

**Local Self Neglect Guidance**

* [North of Tyne Self-Neglect Policy (2024)](https://nsafe-s3.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/18081411/NEWCASTLE-VERSION-Self-Neglect-Policy-FINAL-1.docx)

**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.**