

What is self-neglect?

The Care Act 2014 Statutory Guidance defines that self-neglect is a “wide range of behaviour” including “neglecting to care for one’s personal hygiene, health or surroundings” and can include certain behaviours such as “hoarding”. Often this is a situation in which someone demonstrates a “lack of care for themselves and or their environment and refuses assistance or services”.

Within the Care Act 2014 regarding self-neglect, it is stated that specific duties are placed onto local authorities to carry out a needs assessment *even if the adult in question refuses* if it is believed that:

- ❖ The adult may be in need of care and support
- ❖ The adult is experiencing or is at risk of abuse or neglect, including self-neglect

Types of self-neglect



Lack of self-care to an extent that it threatens personal health and safety



Neglecting to care for one’s personal hygiene, health or surroundings



Inability to avoid self-harm



Failure to seek help or access services to meet health and social care needs



Inability or unwillingness to manage one’s personal affairs

Indicators for self-neglect

- ❖ Very poor personal hygiene,
- ❖ Unkempt appearance
- ❖ Malnutrition/dehydration
- ❖ Lack of essential food, clothing or shelter
- ❖ Living in squalid or unsanitary living 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



One Minute Guide

Self-Neglect

April 2023

Practitioners should enquire

- ❖ What is the person’s own view of the self-neglect?
- ❖ Is the self-neglect intentional, or an unintended consequence of something else?
- ❖ Is the self-neglect a recent change or a long-standing pattern?
- ❖ What strengths does the person have – what are they managing well and how can this be built on? What motivation for change does the person have?
- ❖ Are there links between the self-neglect and health, disability, substance misuse or the person’s life history, family or social relations?
- ❖ Does the self-neglect play an important role as a coping mechanism? If so, is there anything else in the in the person’s life that might play this role instead?



Reasons for self-neglect



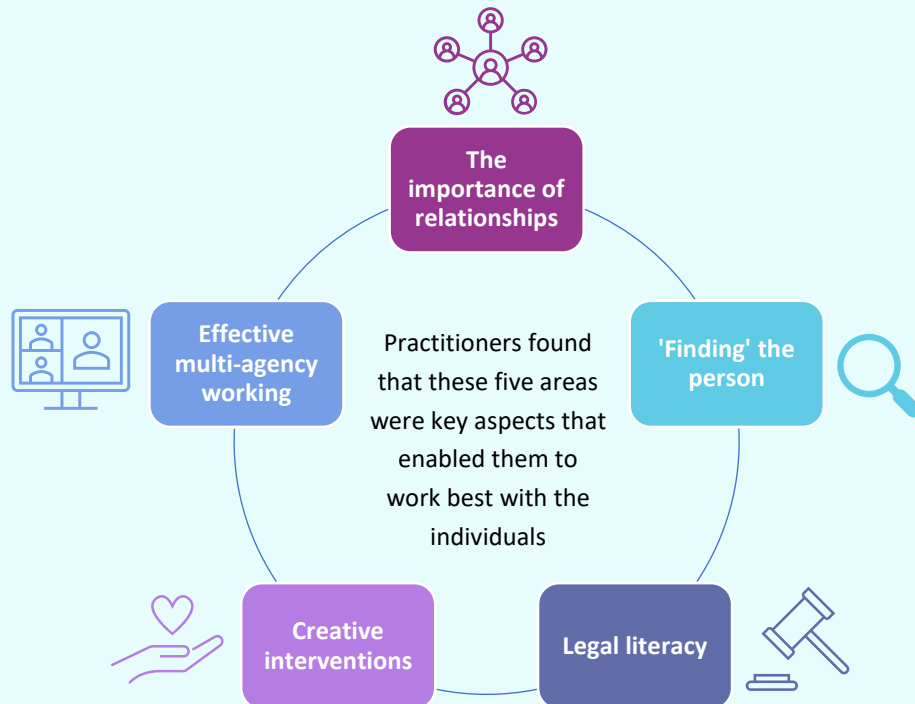
- ❖ Self-neglect can be a result of a diverse range of issues and challenges faced by individuals, so it is important to look at the neglect or hoarding in the context of the individual’s life.
- ❖ Self-neglect can be a conscious decision made by the individual to live in a way that can have a negative impact on a person’s health, wellbeing or living conditions and on other people’s environments. It can also be the result of an inability or incapacity to care for themselves, their environment, or to prevent themselves from self-harm.
- ❖ Often the reasons for the self-neglect have stemmed from problems such as health difficulties, homelessness, loss or social isolation. These can have a large impact on self-image and create further negative connotations and demoralisation.
- ❖ Self-neglect can also be an indicator for other problems. These include: the deterioration of either physical or mental health, a response to trauma or a change in social networks or income.

Challenges for practitioners

Self-neglect can be a challenging area for practitioners to work with due to:

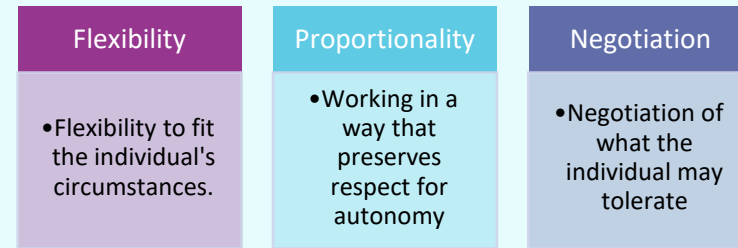
- ❖ The varying presentation which can be influenced by a complex mix of physical, mental, social and environmental factors.
- ❖ The high risks posed by self-neglect not just to the individual but to others around them.
- ❖ Situations where the adult social care intervention is not wanted or welcomed by the individual: this can make engagement challenging.
- ❖ Assessing mental capacity can be a difficult subject area.
- ❖ Ethical dilemmas between respecting autonomy and fulfilling a duty of care
- ❖ The need for coordinated interventions from a range of agencies.

Key aspects of making a positive difference



Best Practice Guidance

There are several key themes that ran through successful interventions, these include:



Other key themes or areas that were shown to be more effective in helping individuals suffering from or at risk of self-neglect include:

- ❖ Taking a person-centred approach.
- ❖ Building rapport and trust; showing empathy, persistence, honesty and continuity whilst working at the individual's pace.
- ❖ Understanding the person's history and particular circumstances.
- ❖ Collecting and sharing information collaboratively with other agencies in order to create a clearer picture of the extent of the self-neglect and working together to best support the individual.
- ❖ An assessment should include the person's understanding of the overall cumulative impact of a series of small decisions and actions as well as the overall impact. Repeat assessments ensure that professional curiosity and appropriate challenge is embedded.
- ❖ Home visits are important, and a professional from a multi-agency group such as Fire Service may be able to gain access. Use tools such as Clutter Image Rating (CIR) scales to assess hoarding concerns.

Key Contacts and Further Information

[Coventry Safeguarding Adult Board](#)

[West Midlands self-neglect guidance](#)

[Statutory Guidance on Self-neglect](#)

Research in Practice Self-Neglect Practice Tool (this is at a cost to non-subscribers of Research in Practice) [Click here](#)

[Mental Capacity Act 2005](#)

[The Care Act 2014](#)