

Messages for Practice - Self Neglect

WHAT IS SELF-NEGLECT?

Self-neglect means a person is not looking after themselves properly. Anyone can be affected by self-neglect, but people with care and support needs - such as mental illness, learning or physical disabilities, or dementia - may be less able to understand the impact of their decision to self-neglect than others. Self-neglect may well involve complex issues of capacity and consent.

SOME REASONS WHY PEOPLE MAY SELF-NEGLECT

- No longer able to manage their day to day needs due to a decline in their Physical or Mental Health; or frailty due to old age
- Affected by Trauma as a child and/or adult
- Misusing substances
- Lacking a support network, or unaware how to access support/ask for help
- Exhausted their support networks/ declined support available.
- Bereavement of spouse, family who have previously helped or some other type of loss

SPOTTING THE SIGNS OF SELF-NEGLECT

When a person is unaware of the consequences of their self-neglecting behaviour and not able to keep themselves safe from harm, it is important that this is reported.

THERE ARE THREE MAIN SIGNS TO BE AWARE OF (this is not an exhaustive list)

● NOT TAKING CARE OF THEMSELVES

This typically means neglecting personal hygiene, ignoring health issues or not eating and drinking properly. Warning signs include:

- Dirty clothes, skin, hair or nails
- Not taking medication
- Skipping medical appointments
- Looking hungry
- Weight loss
- General lack of interest in themselves

● NOT TAKING CARE OF THEIR HOME ENVIRONMENT

This may mean the home becomes dirty, unpleasant or may even be unsafe. Warning signs include:

- Very dirty rooms
- Rubbish piling up in the house instead of being put out for collection
- Hoarding and refusing to throw things away
- General disrepair and lack of maintenance
- No heating or hot water
- Mice or other infestations

● REFUSING SERVICES THAT COULD HELP THEM DEAL WITH THESE ISSUES

This involves not accepting offers of help or refusing to engage with support that is available.



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KEY MESSAGES RELATING TO PEOPLE WHO SELF-NEGLECT

The following key messages are drawn from research, practitioners' experience and lessons learned from Adult Practice Reviews:

- **All agencies** have a role in supporting people who self-neglect, so please ensure you and your agency are fully committed to playing your part
- Always remember to **'Think Family'** and consider any risks to those living with or closely related to the person who is self-neglecting
- **'Think Safeguarding'** if the person has caring responsibility for others
- Try to find out **why the person is self-neglecting** - this may be connected with trauma, grief, mental health episodes or other experiences
- Try to really **get to know the person** and 'get alongside' them
- Don't just look at the current picture, but try to piece together the **person's life story** and find out what is important to them
- Be prepared for **long-term involvement** – self-neglect situations are rarely resolved quickly
- Look at the person's **family network** and any **community networks** and think about how these might help support the person (consider whether a Carer's assessment is needed)
- Communicate clearly and regularly with **all those involved with the person**
- Be clear about your **role and responsibilities** and those of **others**
- Undertake a **thorough risk assessment** and explain your concerns openly to the person who is self-neglecting
- Consider **mental capacity** in relation to the decisions which need to be made - is the person able to understand information / retain it / weigh it / communicate their decision?
- Consider whether **advocacy** is needed
- Remember that **'self-funders'** are just as entitled to a care and support assessment as others whose care is funded by the Council
- Be prepared to **challenge** decisions if you don't agree with them, and escalate them if necessary
- Don't dismiss self-neglect as a **'lifestyle choice'** or take an initial rejection of support as final
- **Don't close a case** simply because the person refuses an assessment or won't accept a plan
- Self-neglect can be found in all areas of society, but **those who are homeless or living in temporary accommodation** may be at greater risk
- Self-neglect is not always obvious with personal presentation

GETTING HELP

If you require advice or guidance, please contact your local safeguarding teams and/or your safeguarding leads. This can often benefit from a multi-agency approach.

In an emergency or if you feel someone is in immediate danger dial 999.

Cardiff & Vale Regional Safeguarding Board acknowledge and thank Surrey Safeguarding Adults Board in the sharing of this information