

Self-neglect resources for practitioners



What is self-neglect?

The [care and support statutory guidance 2025](#) defines self-neglect as:

'... a wide range of behaviour neglecting to care for one's personal hygiene, health or surroundings and includes 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.'

Self-neglect can be challenging for practitioners to address, because of the need to find the right balance between respecting an adult's autonomy and fulfilling a duty to protect the adult's health and wellbeing.

Indicators of self-neglect

- Poor personal hygiene
- Unkempt appearance
- Lack of essential food, clothing or shelter
- Social withdrawal from family/ community/ support networks
- Malnutrition and/or dehydration
- Living in squalid or unsanitary conditions
- Neglecting household maintenance
- Hoarding
- Non-attendance at health or other care appointments
- Unable to take medication or treat illness or injury
- Unable to protect self from harm or abuse
- Morbid obesity where there may be links to self-neglect and trauma, resulting in less ability to self-care.

What can lead to self-neglect?

Adults may self-neglect and/or hoard for a number of reasons and there can be a variety of triggers (this list is not exhaustive):

- Brain injury, dementia or other mental disorder
- Self-care is one of many competing priorities
- Obsessive compulsive disorder or hoarding disorder
- Addiction to substances impacting on executive functioning
- Childhood neglect/ childhood trauma/ adverse childhood experiences with trauma lasting through to adulthood which impact upon their current decision making
- Trauma or life changing events experienced during adult hood e.g. bereavement
- Physical illness which has an effect on abilities, energy levels, attention span organisational skills or motivation
- Reduced motivation as a side effect of medication
- The loss of independence as a result of an accident, trauma, major ill health or frailty



The challenge...

Self-neglect is a pressing issue both locally and nationally, affecting a wide range of individuals, including older adults and those experiencing mental health challenges. It is characterised by an inability or unwillingness to care for oneself in ways that threaten health, safety, and overall well-being. This can present in various forms, such as poor personal hygiene, hoarding behaviours, and refusal of care or support.

Effectively addressing self-neglect requires a coordinated, multi-agency response—one that carefully balances respect for individual autonomy with the duty to protect. Understanding the root causes of self-neglect is essential to developing meaningful interventions.

Self-neglect is one of the most frequently identified concerns in Safeguarding Adults Reviews (SARs) and is recognised as a common form of abuse or neglect. Its consequences can be severe, leading to deteriorating health, extreme social isolation, and even death. Manifestations may include declining physical health, unsafe living conditions, poor nutrition, and withdrawal from social contact.

Learning identified

The Torbay and Devon Safeguarding Adults Partnership undertook a [Thematic Review on Self Neglect](#) which was published in 2023 and highlighted learning for all partner agencies when working with adults who present with self-neglect behaviours.

Refreshed guidance has been produced which can be accessed here:

[TDSAP Guidance to support partnership working with adults who present with self-neglect behaviours](#)

[TDSAP Guidance to support partnership working with adults who present with hoarding behaviours](#)

The guidance includes helpful appendices and tools to promote person-centred, proportionate responses aligned with the Care Act 2014 and draws on learning from local Safeguarding Adults Reviews.

When working with an adult who may be displaying self-neglect or hoarding behaviours you can follow the guidance and practice tools to support your practice. You must always consider whether anyone else is at risk as a result of the adult's self-neglect behaviours. This may include children or other adults with care and support needs. A [safeguarding adult concern referral](#) can be made via the Torbay and Devon Safeguarding Adults Partnership website as required.

Self-neglect has continued to be a complex and challenging area of practice resulting in continued SAR referrals, where self-neglect is a significant feature.

Recognising the need for a more impactful approach to learning and improvement, the partnership adopted a different methodology for a number of SARs by convening a multi-agency in-person self-neglect conference in June 2025. This event brought together frontline practitioners to explore both practice-based and systemic issues, fostering open dialogue and collaborative problem-solving.

The aim was to move beyond traditional review formats and create a dynamic space for shared learning, reflection, and continuous improvement across the partnership.

Learning briefs developed following the self-neglect conference:

[Drew](#)

[Audrey](#)

[Lyla](#)

[Jade](#)

Additional resources:

[TDSAP self-neglect screening tool](#)

[Solution-focussed approach to self-neglect](#)

[Professional curiosity – a map through difficult terrain](#)

[Trauma awareness and self-neglect](#)

[TDSAP self-neglect animation](#)

[TDSAP principles of engagement to improve communicating and working with adults](#)

[Lambeth Safeguarding Adults Board Self-neglect animation video](#)

[Newcastle Safeguarding Adults Board Eight Principles of Engagement animation](#)