

Wiltshire Safeguarding Adults Board

Multi-Agency Briefing: Working with Self-Neglect



To be used in conjunction with WSAB full Self-Neglect Guidance and Risk Assessment Tool

A Case Study of Self-Neglect

Adult A

Adult A was admitted to hospital in December 2015, and paramedics raised a concern about possible self-neglect. Adult A was discharged home soon after. In mid-January, paramedics attended again. Adult A was in a situation of serious self-neglect, sitting in a cold, dark flat, with severe Hypothermia. There was no fresh food and she had not been taking her medication. Adult A died in hospital the following day. At the time of death, Adult A was suffering from several conditions, exacerbated by self-neglect. The coroner concluded that she would not have died at that time had she not been discharged home alone.

What is self-neglect?

“...a wide range of behaviour, neglecting to care for one’s personal hygiene, health or surroundings, and includes behaviour such as hoarding”.

The Care Act (2014)

There are three distinct types:

1. **a lack of self-care**
2. **a lack of care of one’s environment**
3. **a refusal of services that could alleviate these issues**

Self-neglect may occur for a range of reasons including:

- a deterioration in cognitive skills
- personal values
- decreasing social network
- a deterioration in health
- level of mental capacity
- financial hardship

Hoarding is identified as a type of self-neglect due to the impact on living conditions. Wiltshire Council have recently developed a **Hoarding Protocol** (July 2018) which can be found here:

http://www.wiltshiresab.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Final_Hoarding_Protocol-with-appendices.pdf

How can you identify someone who self-neglects?

A lack of self-care

- Poor hydration and diet, having little fresh food.
- Not actively seeking medical attention when needed.
- Not maintaining personal hygiene e.g. showering, cleaning teeth or washing clothes.
- Extreme distress or feeling ashamed / overwhelmed due to their self-neglect.
- Extensive debts due to not managing money.

A lack of care of one’s environment

- Very unclean e.g. toilet blocked by human waste, household cleaning not done at all.
- Infestations of vermin or insects.
- Neglect of household maintenance, creating hazards e.g. structurally unsound flooring.
- Obsessive hoarding of objects or pets.

Refusal of services that could alleviate these issues

- Not agreeing to any treatment or care relating to medical, household or personal hygiene needs.
- Person now requires treatment for preventable conditions.
- Aids or adaptations are refused.

The Law and self-neglect

The Care Act (2014) - defines self-neglect as a category of harm, and places a duty of co-operation on the Local Authority, police and health services.

The Human Rights Act (1998) - This is a key piece of legislation for safeguarding adults, as it addresses the issue of a person's right to make choices about their life versus professionals' duty to keep them safe.

Some laws also apply to **Environmental Health** services and **Housing** to enable power of entry, alongside a police presence.

Mental capacity and self-neglect

Mental capacity should be assessed in relation to a specific decision at a specific time, therefore it may fluctuate.

A person is considered unable to make a specific decision if they are unable to:

- **understand** the information
- **retain** that information
- use or **weigh that information up**
- **communicate** their decision

Where someone lacks mental capacity, a decision should be made in their **best interests** but they may still refuse services.

What can you do to support someone who self-neglects?

If the individual refuses to engage

- Consider a joint visit with someone the individual trusts, a professional, friend or family member.
- Take something along e.g. adaption or aid.
- Find out what has worked in the past.

Be persistent

- Be creative and make repeated attempts to engage with the individual.

Take a person-centred approach

- Where possible, work at the person's own pace.
- Found out what they want to focus on, to make sure they feel involved and consulted.

Work with other agencies

- Ensure all relevant agencies are identified and share information. This enables risk to be more accurately judged.
- There may be one person or agency better placed to work with an individual initially, even if this doesn't follow the usual systems.

Be mindful of overlooking individuals' needs

- This could be caused by perceiving self-neglect as a 'lifestyle choice', the person is a carer, desensitisation, inconsistent thresholds, chaotic lifestyles or multiple competing needs.

Consider risks to others

- You have a duty to safeguard anyone who may be at risk as a result of the person's self-neglect e.g. children.
- If you feel that a child may be at risk of serious harm, contact **Wiltshire Children's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub**
Email: mash@wiltshire.gcsx.gov.uk
Tel: 0300 4560108. After hours: 0300 456 0100

Use the WSAB Self-Neglect Risk Assessment Tool to determine the level of risk the person is at, and your next steps. This can be found at www.wiltshiresab.org.uk/professionals

Minimal Risk

- Consult your own agency's guidance initially.
- Talk to the person about your concerns.
- Promote ways of looking after themselves.
- Signpost to universal services.
- Identify a lead worker to ensure information is shared.

Moderate Risk

- Consider if there is a family or friend to support, without creating additional strain.
- Identify a lead worker to ensure information is shared.
- Seek general guidance by emailing SAT@wiltshire.gov.uk (not using names).
- Call **Adult Social Care Triage** number for professionals **01380 826510** for advice and guidance (not a referral).

High / Critical Risk

- Call emergency services where there is immediate and serious risk of harm.
- Make an urgent referral to the **Adult MASH** on **0300 4560111** or online here: <https://www.yourcareyoursupportwiltshire.org.uk/care-and-support/steps-to-care-and-support/online-referral>
- Consider holding a High Risk Professionals' Meeting (see full WSAB Self-Neglect Guidance).