

# Self-Neglect Guidance on a Page

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**WHAT**  
is self-neglect?

Self-neglect is a general term used to describe a person living in a way that puts their health, safety or wellbeing at risk. A person who self-neglects may be unable or unwilling to carry out self-care.

**WHO**  
is likely to self-neglect?

Adults who self-neglect are more likely to:

- Live alone
- Be an older person
- Experience mental ill-health
- Have alcohol or drug problems
- Have a history of poor personal hygiene or living conditions

**HOW**  
to spot the signs

Home environment:	The individual:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not enough food, or the food available is rotten</li><li>• Filthy, odorous, hazardous or unsafe</li><li>• Major repairs/maintenance required e.g. improper wiring, no indoor plumbing, no heat source</li><li>• Human and/or animal faeces</li><li>• Animal or insect infestation</li><li>• Hoarding, accumulation of possessions, including food, waste, newspapers and unopened post</li><li>• A large number of pets, and/or abuse or neglect of pets</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dirty hair, nails and skin</li><li>• Smells of urine and/or faeces</li><li>• Skin rashes or bed sores (pressure ulcers)</li><li>• Poor diet and/or hydration leading to weight loss, or significant weight gain/obesity</li><li>• Increased confusion, disorientation or dementia</li><li>• Deteriorating health</li><li>• Isolation</li><li>• Unwillingness to accept intervention or medical treatment</li></ul>

**WHY**  
is it important to act in cases of self-neglect?

In most cases early intervention and preventative actions can result in positive outcomes. When working with individuals who self-neglect it is important to:

- Consider how to positively engage the person from the beginning of your involvement
- Understand the individual's wishes and needs
- Informed consent should be obtained, but if this is not possible and others are at risk of abuse or neglect, it may be necessary to override this
- Consider whether a mental capacity assessment is required
- Use descriptive 'plain English' when recording information, words such as 'unkempt' or 'dishevelled' do not describe the extent or impact of self-neglect
- Collect and share information with a wide variety of sources, including other agencies
- Don't assume someone else is addressing the issue
- Consider convening a multi-disciplinary meeting to agree an approach to minimise risks - this should involve the person, where appropriate, and an advocate if required
- The case should not be closed simply because the person refuses an assessment or to accept a plan to minimise risk

**WHEN**  
a safeguarding concern should be raised

Responding to self-neglect will depend on the level of risk/harm posed to the individual and/or others, and whether the adult is able to protect themselves and determine their own action. Workers should refer to the threshold guidance to determine whether a safeguarding concern should be raised.

**WHERE**  
to access further reading

- [SSAB Self-Neglect Guidance](#)
- [SSAB Information Sharing and Confidentiality Agreement](#)
- [Care Act Statutory Guidance](#)
- [Self-Neglect at a Glance](#)