

Background: OSAB's Thematic Self-Neglect Review

Following four deaths Oldham Safeguarding Adults Board (OSAB) commissioned a Thematic Self-Neglect Safeguarding Adult Review (SAR) in 2019/20. These complex cases combined self-neglect with addiction, homelessness, long term health conditions and the removal of children. In all cases the adults refused or struggled to engage with services to reduce their level of risk of harm. The cases highlighted a lack of flexibility by services, multiple services but no overall coordination and the need for a more empathetic, person centred approach.

This briefing provides a summary of the overall learning. More information about the individual cases is available in the Summary of the SAR [here](#). Read the OSAB Strategy and Guidance for Self-Neglect and Hoarding [here](#). For practical resources, take a look at the Self-Neglect Toolkit [here](#), it is designed to help you make defensible decisions, give suggestions about what you can do in difficult situations, based on the experience of other professionals, and to make sure you, and all other agencies, have tried everything you possibly can.

SAR

Recommendations

- ◇ Convene multi-agency meetings to agree lead agency and key worker to coordinate practice
- ◇ Share information lawfully in line with the OSAB Information Sharing protocol
- ◇ Routinely review risk assessments for adults who self-neglect
- ◇ Improve legal literacy and application of Mental Capacity Act assessments
- ◇ Review the Think Family offer when children are removed from parental care
- ◇ Ensure Making Safeguarding Principles are embedded in practice

Learning for Teams

Please reflect on the findings as a team and share any ideas with the Board using the email address below to help embed the lessons and improve practice. Consider the following questions:

- ⇒ How do we balance Making Safeguarding Personal principles and an adult's right to refuse a service whilst the adult still poses a significant risk of harm to themselves?
- ⇒ When does a 'lifestyle choice' stop being a choice?
- ⇒ What legislation can be used to share multi-agency information in order to understand self neglect histories and mental capacity?
- ⇒ How do we identify issues of coercion or chaotic lifestyles?
- ⇒ How useful is the Self-Neglect Toolkit?
- ⇒ Is there anything else that would help you to identify and manage self-neglect cases?
- ⇒ What actions, ideas and solutions have you found to be best practice with people who self-neglect or don't want to engage with agencies?
- ⇒ What actions, ideas and solutions have you found to be best practice when recognising, assessing and responding to needs and risk?

What is Self-Neglect?

Self-neglect is a range of behaviours linked to the lack of self-care. These can include the refusal or failure to eat, dress and/or take medication. It can also include neglecting personal hygiene, healthcare and living in squalid accommodation.

Often associated with older people and hoarding, self-neglect can equally apply to younger adults with an addiction and/or mental health issue where chaotic lifestyles result in the refusal or inability to accept help, manage personal affairs or respond to appointments.

In order to prevent self-neglect, it is essential to understand the wider complexity and possible underlying factors, which may present as, or include:

- ⇒ History of trauma or domestic abuse
- ⇒ Bereavement or a life changing event
- ⇒ Depression and low self esteem
- ⇒ Social isolation

Why does it matter?

The term 'self-neglect' can be perceived as very stigmatising and emotive. Practitioners should be careful how it is used.

Without early intervention, neglecting personal hygiene can lead to physical health issues and social isolation. Neglecting the home can lead to pest infestations, health and fire hazards. A combination of all these factors can result in serious harm to the adult and others around them and can result in debt and homelessness.

When working with people who self-neglect consideration should also be given to potential risk to other adults, such as neighbours and other tenants, children and animals and pets.

Key Issues to Consider

For practitioners, there is a challenge to balance the rights of the individual with the level of risk posed to self and others. If agencies are satisfied that the individual has the mental capacity to make an informed choice on an issue, then it is their right to make this choice, even if it considered to be unwise.

This does not mean that services walk away. Where the adult is vulnerable **there should be continuing engagement** and review of the risks. Application of the Mental Capacity Act (2005) is key. Section 1-5 and Section 16 (2)(a) outline the Court of Protection Powers in relation to people who self-neglect.

It is important for practitioners to recognise repeated referrals for an adult, which individually may not meet criteria, but collectively indicate self-neglect and require agencies to think differently and offer a joint response.

In order to support change, it is important for practitioners to take a strengths-based and person centred approach with people who self-neglect and to work at a pace that the person is comfortable with.

Safeguarding & Self-Neglect 7-Minute Briefing

Organisational Learning

Agencies to **audit standards of recording** to ensure clear decision making about how the decision was reached, when and who was consulted.

Agencies to routinely consider multi-agency escalation to assess capacity and understand self-neglect factors.

Wherever possible the adult should be involved in meetings along with significant others or **an independent advocate where appropriate**.

Where self-neglect poses serious concerns but an adult refuses support an assessment can be considered under section 11 of the Care Act (2014) and **proportionate multi-agency** intervention can be undertaken based on legal advice.

Agencies to review how staff are **supervised and supported** to work with people who self-neglect making any adjustments necessary to remove barriers to best practice.

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