

# Bitesize Briefing: Self-Neglect & Unmet Need

Information and Guidance: Self-Neglect



## 1 What is Self-Neglect?

Self-neglect is a safeguarding concern. It occurs when an adult is unable or unwilling to take care of themselves, putting their health, safety or wellbeing at risk. It can look like:



Poor personal hygiene.

Hoarding behaviour.



Not eating or drinking enough.

Not taking essential medication.



Unsafe and/or unsanitary living conditions.

Refusing necessary care and support.



Although they may look similar on the surface, it is important to recognise the distinction between self-neglect and lifestyle choices.

- ✓ Unable/unwilling to protect self from harm arising from failure to meet basic needs.
- ✓ Significant risk to own/others' health, safety and wellbeing.
- ✓ Often linked to underlying issues, such as trauma, cognitive impairment or illness.

Key considerations include risk, capacity, impact, and the ability to protect oneself.

- ✓ Has the capacity to understand/make choices about how they live.
- ✓ Understands the risks and consequences of these choices.
- ✓ Lifestyle choices may differ from social norms, but the adult is able to care for/protect self.

Self-Neglect

Lifestyle Choice

Did You Know?

Adults have the right to make unwise decisions, even if practitioners disagree.

## 2 Self-Neglect or Unmet Need?

Self-neglect can be complex, but it is about **risk of harm rather than absence of services.**

Triggers safeguarding duties under Section 42 of the Care Act (2014).

### Self-Neglect

The risk arises from the adult's own actions or inaction. It may involve:

- Lack of Capacity
- Executive Dysfunction
- Trauma
- Substance Use

Refusal of necessary medication, leading to decline in health.

Refusal to manage health conditions/treat wounds or sores, leading to infection.

Requires mobility aids but hasn't received them.

Requires mental health support but is on a long waiting list.

Identifies gaps in support, not behaviour. Does not automatically trigger safeguarding.

### Unmet Need

Identified through assessment, meaning:

- The adult has a need for care and support that is **not currently met** by services, support or informal help.



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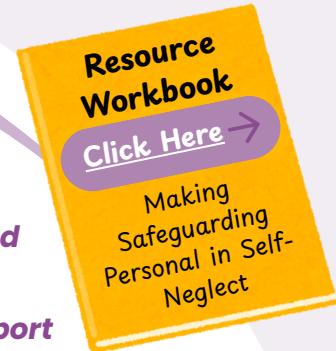


Self-neglect can involve unmet needs, but they are not the same thing. For example, if an adult is not eating properly.

*If they cannot cook due to mobility issues - and no support is in place - this is an unmet need.*

*If they refuse food, do not shop and reject support to manage their nutritional needs - despite the risks to their wellbeing - this is self-neglect.*

Unmet needs can become apparent even when an adult is actively trying to look after themselves. **The risk to the adult can vary, and they may want to be supported.** Self-neglect is **often high risk; it can happen even when services are offered and needs are technically 'met'.**



## 3 Responding to Unmet Need

Unmet needs require assessment, care planning and service provision.



**Identify and Record Unmet Needs Clearly**  
Be clear about what the need is, why it is unmet, the impact it is having on the adult's wellbeing, and what attempts have been made to meet it.

### **Offer or Arrange a Care Act Assessment**



Where unmet need is identified, the local authority has a duty to assess. Even if the adult refuses an assessment, this must be recorded. You should also consider an assessment of carers' needs.

### **Explore Potential Barriers to Meeting Needs**



Unmet needs may persist due to lack of available services, affordability, communication issues, trauma, cognitive impairment, or provider availability. Consider what can be done to overcome these barriers.

## 4 Responding to Self-Neglect

If an adult has eligible care and support needs, and is experiencing/at risk of experiencing self-neglect, **a statutory safeguarding response is required.** This requires ongoing risk management and multi-agency involvement.

If an adult **does not** have eligible care and support needs, and you suspect self-neglect, a non-statutory safeguarding response should be considered. This could include:

### **Team Around the Person**



A coordinated approach to mitigating risk. Involving other appropriate agencies to support the adult (with their consent) is good practice, and the **adult should always be involved** in this.

### **Support to Overcome Barriers**



Consider what level of practical and proportionate support you can offer. Approaches should be flexible, strengths-based and trauma-informed. Building strong relationships is key!

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Further Information on Care Assessments

[Bitesize Briefing: Safeguarding Referrals](#)



[7 Minute Guides on Self-Neglect](#)