

Scenario for Safeguarding Champions

This case study and discussion prompts can be used in a team meeting to promote discussion and awareness of safeguarding.

Mary

Mary is 57, she lives alone following the death of her husband last year and has increasing mobility difficulties. She receives support from your service to attend a weekly activity group. Staff notice she is increasingly unkempt, often wearing the same clothes, and appears to have lost weight. She sometimes smells strongly of urine.

She refuses offers of help with laundry or shopping and becomes defensive when anyone asks how she is managing at home. She has missed two medical appointments and shrugs it off with “it’s too much hassle”.

Discussion Prompts

1) What could be happening in this situation?

Mary is showing signs of **Self-neglect**. Self-neglect covers a wide range of behaviour neglecting to care for one’s personal hygiene, health or surroundings and also includes behaviour such as hoarding. The person often does not recognise the risks they are living with. They may often decline help from others, in many cases they do not feel that they need it.

2) What signs of self-neglect can you identify here?

- Unkempt appearance and wearing the same clothes
- Weight loss (possible poor nutrition)
- Strong smell of urine (possible continence issues and/or poor self-care/laundry)
- Refusing help with laundry/shopping despite apparent need
- Missing medical appointments and minimising it (“too much hassle”)
- Defensiveness when asked about coping at home (possible avoidance, fear, lack of insight, or shame)

3) What can cause self neglect?

Discuss the teams thoughts. Self-neglect can be caused by:

- Traumatic life change and adverse childhood experiences – in Mary’s case this could be the loss of her husband
- A person’s brain injury, dementia, or other mental disorder
- Obsessive compulsive disorder or hoarding disorder
- Physical illness which influences abilities, energy levels, attention span, organisational skills, or motivation – in Mary’s case, this could be her increasing lack of mobility
- Reduced motivation as a side effect of medication
- Addictions

4) Is self-neglect a safeguarding concern?

Yes. Self-neglect is a category under the Care Act 2014 and can be reported as a safeguarding adults concern **if the person is over 18 and has care and support needs, they are at risk of self-neglect and they are unable to protect themselves because of their care and support needs.** Adults may have with care and support needs if they:

- Have a learning disability
- Have a mental health need or dementia or a personality disorder
- Have a long or short-term illness
- Have an addiction to a substance or alcohol
- Are elderly and frail due to ill health, disability or ill mental health

5) How can you work to support Mary? What might trauma-informed practice look like in this situation?

Discuss how Mary’s trauma (grief from losing her husband or other circumstances), could be part of her self-neglect. Trauma-informed practice can respond to individuals’ experiences by listening to and valuing people’s stories by creating safe spaces to talk, by showing an understanding of the traumas people have experienced, and by responding to their needs without creating new traumas.

Approach Mary calmly and respectfully, using open questions and choice. For example:

- “I’ve noticed you seem to be finding things harder lately. Would it be okay to talk about what’s been going on?”
- “What feels like the biggest hassle about appointments at the moment?”

- “What support has felt helpful in the past, and what hasn’t?”
- “Would you prefer we look at one small thing together, like shopping delivery or a GP call, rather than lots at once?”

Avoid judgemental language, go at her pace, explain why you’re asking, and prioritise trust and safety.

Further support:

Refer staff to the Self-neglect tool kit here: <https://safeguardingadults.co.uk/self-neglect-practice-guidance-north-yorkshire-and-city-of-york/>

Free NYSAB safeguarding e-learning course here: [NYSAB](#)

Raise a safeguarding concern here: [Report adult abuse \(safeguarding\) | North Yorkshire Council](#)