



Supporting people experiencing self-neglect

Training Aid 8

Supporting people experiencing self-neglect and related complexities

This guidance equips YVC managers and advocates with strategies to support individuals facing self-neglect, trauma, homelessness, substance misuse, hoarding, and challenges related to self-care.

Rooted in the Advocacy Charter, **NICE Guidance for Advocacy in Health and Social Care (2022)**, and YVC's safeguarding policies and procedures, it ensures that advocacy promotes empowerment, safety, and independence.

Section 1. Understanding self-neglect

Definitions and characteristics

Self-neglect involves behaviours where individuals fail to attend to their basic needs, such as personal hygiene, health, or living conditions. This can manifest as:

- Poor personal care and health.
- Unsafe living environments (e.g., hoarding or extreme clutter).
- Refusal of care or support, including medical treatment.

Key considerations for advocates

- **Individual autonomy:** Uphold the person's right to make decisions about their life, even when those choices seem harmful, provided they have mental capacity. Advocates align this approach with safeguarding principles and NICE guidance, emphasising the person's involvement in all decisions affecting their care.
- **Capacity assessments:** Collaborate with professionals to ensure capacity assessments are conducted when needed. Support the person to understand the implications of their decisions.
- **Building trust:** Build a relationship based on empathy, consistency, and respect, focusing on shared goals to ensure the person's voice is central in the process.

Practical steps

1. Initial introduction

- Build rapport through open-ended questions to explore the person's priorities, circumstances, and wishes.
- Collaboratively complete an **Advocacy Plan**, ensuring the person's views and goals are clearly documented.

2. Empower understanding of risks

- Assist the person in understanding any identified risks, potential consequences, and their options for addressing them.
- Use clear, accessible communication to explain safeguarding processes and their rights under frameworks such as the Care Act 2014.

3. Amplify their voice

- Represent the person's views during safeguarding or care planning discussions, ensuring they are central to all decisions.
- Support the person in expressing their preferences for services, changes, or actions they feel are most beneficial.

4. Assist in accessing support

- Help the individual navigate and access services, such as housing or health care, that address their specific needs.
- Provide ongoing support to build the person's confidence in engaging with professionals and processes.

Example in practice: An advocate supported a person living in unsanitary conditions. By collaboratively developing an Advocacy Plan, the person expressed their desire to address the living conditions without involving certain family members. The advocate ensured these preferences were respected during safeguarding meetings.

Useful guide – [Click here for the Newcastle SAR Champions 7-minute self-neglect briefing](#)



Section 2. Trauma-informed advocacy

Principles of trauma-informed support

- **Safety:** Ensure the person feels physically and emotionally safe during interactions.
- **Choice:** Empower the person to make decisions about their care and support.
- **Collaboration:** Involve the person in setting goals by creating Advocacy Plans.
- **Empowerment:** Build resilience by emphasising the person's strengths and capabilities.

Practical steps for advocates

1. Create a safe environment

- Use non-threatening language and consistent, empathetic communication to make the person feel at ease.

- Adapt interactions to the person's preferences, such as meeting in familiar locations or using preferred communication methods.

2. Empower informed decision making

- Provide information about their rights and options in manageable, straightforward steps, ensuring they can make informed choices.
- Avoid rushing the process, giving the person time to reflect and decide at their own pace.

3. Support self-help

- Encourage the person to articulate their own views and preferences where possible, offering support to build their confidence.
- Represent their voice when needed, ensuring decisions reflect their true wishes.

Example in practice: An advocate worked with a person reluctant to engage with services due to past trauma. By building trust and breaking information into small, manageable steps, the advocate helped the person attend a safeguarding meeting where they felt heard and respected.

Useful guide – [Click here for the Newcastle SAR Champions 7-minute self-neglect and trauma briefing](#)



Section 3. Supporting individuals with substance misuse challenges

Advocacy approaches

- **Holistic support:** Address interconnected issues such as housing instability, mental health, and trauma.
- **Referral pathways:** Link individuals with local support services, such as substance misuse teams or harm reduction programs.
- **Non-stigmatising language:** Use person-first language and avoid judgment about their substance use.

Practical steps for advocates

1. Empower understanding of options

- Support the person in understanding available resources and services, such as harm reduction programs, and how these align with their goals.
- Provide non-judgmental explanations about risks and benefits, allowing the person to make informed choices.

2. Build confidence for engagement

- Help the person navigate referral pathways and attend meetings with substance misuse teams or housing providers.
- Offer reassurance and practical support, such as preparing for appointments or explaining processes.

3. Advocate for holistic approaches

- Amplify the person's voice when working with professionals, ensuring their broader needs, such as housing or mental health, are part of the discussion.
- Support the person in identifying and prioritising steps toward stability and recovery.

Example in practice: An advocate supported a person who was at risk of losing their home due to substance misuse. By helping them access harm reduction services and advocating during housing meetings, the person maintained their tenancy while working toward recovery.

Useful guide – [Click here for the Newcastle SAR Champions 7-minute self-neglect and alcohol and substance misuse briefing](#)



Section 4. Navigating homelessness

Advocate's role

- **Service connection:** Support individuals in connecting with housing, benefits, and healthcare services.
- **Knowledge of legislation:** Use the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 to advocate for the person's housing rights.
- **Collaborative working:** Work with housing providers and outreach teams to develop sustainable solutions.

Practical steps for advocates

1. Empower informed choices

- Create comprehensive Advocacy Plans that outline steps toward stable accommodation.
- Provide clear information about available housing options, enabling the person to make informed decisions.
- Assist the person in articulating their housing preferences during meetings with housing providers.
- Recognise the emotional toll of homelessness and advocate for trauma-informed care.

2. Assist with housing access

- Support the person in understanding their housing rights under frameworks like the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

- Help the individual navigate housing applications or appeal decisions that do not meet their needs.

3. Advocate for integrated support

- Ensure the person's voice is central in discussions involving professionals, such as outreach teams or social workers.
- Work to secure access to holistic support, including benefits and healthcare services.

Example in practice: An advocate supported a person transitioning from temporary housing. By helping them navigate benefit systems and attend housing assessments, the person successfully secured a long-term home.

Useful guide – [Click here for the Newcastle SAR Champions 7-minute self-neglect and homelessness briefing](#)



Section 5: Engagement strategies

Overcoming barriers

- **Rapport building:** Use patience, consistency, and attentive listening to establish trust.
- **Cultural sensitivity:** Respect cultural differences and tailor approaches accordingly.
- **Understanding resistance:** Recognise resistance as a possible response to past trauma or mistrust in systems.

Practical steps for advocates

1. Build trust and rapport

- Use patient, consistent communication to establish a relationship where the person feels safe and respected.
- Tailor approaches to the person's preferences, such as meeting in familiar settings or using alternative communication methods.

2. Promote self-reflection and confidence

- Use motivational interviewing, focus on the person's abilities and achievements and encourage self-reflection to empower the person to take steps toward identifying their goals and to consider steps toward achieving them.
- Focus on the person's strengths, emphasising their ability to overcome challenges.

3. Enhance accessibility

- Use clear, simple language or visual aids to ensure the person fully understands processes and options.
- Adjust communication methods to meet individual needs, such as using interpreters or assistive technology where necessary.

Example in practice: An advocate worked with a person resistant to engaging in safeguarding due to distrust in services. By using a pictorial guide to explain the process and listening to their concerns, the person agreed to attend a meeting where their priorities were heard and addressed.

Useful guide – [Click here for the Newcastle SAR Champions 7-minute self-neglect and engagement briefing](#)



Section 6. Addressing aspects of self-care

Key issues

Neglecting self-care includes avoiding personal care, missing medical appointments or essential hygiene, often endangering health or safety.

Advocate's role

- **Collaborate:** Work with the person to facilitate multi-agency responses involving GPs, community nurses, and safeguarding teams.
- **Capacity:** Ensure mental capacity assessments consider executive capacity and informed consent.
- **Connections:** Connect with family, friends and informal carers to address gaps in care.

Practical steps for advocates

1. Empower understanding of risks

- Support the person in recognising potential health or safety risks linked to their self-care habits.
- Use accessible language to explain the importance of self-care while respecting their autonomy.

2. Support access to care

- Help the person access services such as GPs, community health teams, or personal care providers.
- Collaborate with professionals to ensure the person understands available care options and how these align with their preferences.

3. Advocate for individual needs

- Ensure the person's views and priorities are central during discussions about their care.
- Support the individual in creating practical plans for self-care improvements that they are comfortable with.

Scenario in practice: An advocate worked with a person avoiding medical care, helping coordinate a multi-agency response that reduced risks and supported the individual's independence while respecting their autonomy.

Useful guide – [Click here for the Newcastle SAR Champions 7-minute self-neglect and self-care briefing](#)



Section 7. Supporting individuals with hoarding disorder

Understanding hoarding

Hoarding involves difficulty discarding possessions, resulting in clutter that impacts safety and wellbeing. Types include:

- **Inanimate objects:** Cluttered spaces.
- **Animal hoarding:** Overwhelming numbers of animals.
- **Digital hoarding:** Excessive data storage.

Advocate's role

- **Empower informed decision-making:** Help the individual understand the potential risks associated with their hoarding, such as fire safety, health issues, or eviction, while respecting their autonomy.
- **Amplify the person's voice:** Ensure their views and preferences are central to any discussions or decisions about their living situation.
- **Support access to services:** Assist the individual in understanding and accessing relevant services, such as housing or mental health support, to address their needs holistically.

Practical steps for advocates

1. Build understanding

- Work collaboratively with the person to explore the reasons behind their hoarding behaviours without judgment.
- Use accessible tools, such as the [Clutter Image Rating Scale](#), to help the person visualise and understand their living situation.

2. Empower informed choices

- Support the person in understanding available options, such as housing services, fire safety measures, or mental health support.
- Encourage them to articulate their goals and preferences during meetings or assessments.

3. Facilitate practical steps

- Collaborate with services to implement agreed-upon actions, ensuring the person remains central to decision-making.
- Provide reassurance and advocacy during processes such as decluttering or property assessments.

Scenario in practice: An advocate supported an individual whose hoarding posed fire risks. By involving fire services and housing providers, the advocate facilitated a safe and supportive resolution while ensuring the person's preferences were respected.

Useful guide – [Click here for the Newcastle SAR Champions 7-minute self-neglect and hoarding briefing](#)



Section 8: Advocacy in safeguarding

Advocate's role

- **Awareness-raising:** Educate individuals about safeguarding processes and their rights.
- **Intervention support:** Attend safeguarding meetings and ensure the person's voice is heard and their priorities are represented.
- **Proactive follow-up:** Monitor safeguarding outcomes and work with managers to address unresolved issues.

Practical steps for advocates

1. Empower understanding

- Support the person in understanding safeguarding processes and their rights under frameworks such as the Care Act 2014.
- Provide clear, accessible explanations to ensure the person feels informed and engaged.

2. Advocate for the person's voice

- Represent the person's views and preferences during safeguarding meetings, ensuring these are at the centre of all decisions.
- Collaborate with professionals to address any gaps in safeguarding processes.

3. Monitor outcomes

- Follow up on safeguarding plans to ensure actions are completed and the person's safety is maintained.
- Escalate unresolved issues to managers for further action, aligning with YVC's safeguarding procedures.

Key tools

- **Safeguarding guides:** Provide accessible information to help individuals understand safeguarding processes.
- **Escalation plans:** Collaborate with YVC managers to resolve challenges, ensuring safeguarding concerns are addressed effectively.

Example in practice: Billy was referred after a sudden escalation in behaviour, posing a risk to his housing. The advocate:

1. Engaged with Billy using his preferred communication method: texting.
2. Supported him through safeguarding meetings to express his needs.
3. Ensured Billy was rehoused in a ground-floor flat.
4. Maintained involvement during his move, encouraging stability and independence.

Section 9: Data collection and monitoring

Capturing data

- Use Charity Log and designated tools to record safeguarding concerns, low-level risks, and patterns of behaviour, ensuring alignment with YVC's safeguarding policies.
- Use the data as a prompt for action by advocates and managers to address identified risks and themes.

Using data

1. Capture actionable data

- Use designated tools like Charity Log to document the person's concerns and the support provided, ensuring alignment with YVC safeguarding policies.
- Regularly review data to identify risks or themes that require follow-up.

2. Collaborate on analysis and action

- Work with managers to review data during monthly meetings, using insights to plan next steps or refine strategies.
- Use data as a prompt for advocates to revisit cases and ensure progress is being made.

Section 10: Learning points

- Tailored communication methods build trust.
- Collaborative Advocacy Plans empower individuals to participate in safeguarding processes.
- Continued engagement promotes stability and positive outcomes.

This guidance aligns with the **Advocacy Charter**, NICE guidance, and YVC's safeguarding policies. By embedding these principles into daily practice, advocates ensure that individuals facing complex challenges are supported to make their voices heard, achieve their goals, and remain central to all decisions affecting their lives. This approach not only meets statutory obligations but exemplifies Your Voice Counts commitment to compassionate, impactful advocacy.



Your Voice Counts

Greenesfield Business Centre

Mulgrave Terrace

NE8 1PQ

0800 048 7856



mail@yvc.org.uk



www.yvc.org.uk

