

Guide for service providers: **understanding and responding to carer neglect**

What is neglect?

Neglect is when a person's basic needs are not being met, either by someone else who has a responsibility to help, or by the person themselves (self-neglect). Neglect can be intentional or unintentional, and it can seriously impact a person's health, safety, and dignity.

Who may be at increased risk

- Older people
- People living with disability
- People who rely on others for care or support
- People experiencing isolation, mental health issues, or cognitive decline
- People who experience chronic health conditions

What neglect might look like

When someone else who has a responsibility to help (caregiver) is:

- failing to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, heating or cooling, hygiene, or medical care (including dental care)
- not assisting with mobility or daily care needs
- intentionally withholding care, medication, or access to services
- ignoring calls for help or requests for assistance
- under or over medicating
- exposing a person to danger or not providing supervision
- ignoring medical advice or failing to seek medical help when needed.

When a person does not care for themselves in a way that puts their health, safety, or wellbeing at risk, this is referred to as self-neglect (refer to the **Self-Neglect Information Sheet**).

How to identify signs of neglect

Look out for:

- unexplained weight loss, dehydration and malnutrition
- poor personal hygiene, body odour, or unwashed clothing
- untreated medical conditions or injuries, including poor skin integrity (pressure sores)
- unsafe or squalid home environment
- withdrawal, anxiety, or confusion
- lack of medical or dental care, including missed appointments
- lack of access to essential medications or necessary equipment, including assistive technologies.

What to do if you suspect carer neglect

If you are concerned about someone's immediate health or safety, please call:

- ☎ **000** (emergency services) or
- ☎ **131 465** (SA Mental Health Triage).

If you are an NDIS provider or aged care worker:

- Report internally according to your organisation's safeguarding or incident management policy.

Consider whether to make a report to:

- **NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission** (if person is an NDIS participant)
- **Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission** (if person is in aged care).

Work with adult and caregiver to plan next steps

- If safe to do so, talk to the person, as well as their caregiver, and ask if they are okay or need help, while being non-judgemental and respectful.
- With consent, make appropriate referrals such as:
 - » carer support agencies
 - » local community services
 - » health or mental health services
 - » NDIS/Aged care support services
 - » counselling and therapeutic services.
- Continue to engage with the person and their caregiver and monitor the situation.
- Document your observations and actions.

What to do if help is declined

- Respect their choice but stay connected.
- Let them know you are available if they change their mind.
- Provide information about support services they can access later.

If there are serious risks to health and safety if support is declined:

- Speak with your manager about the situation and consider your agency's safeguarding policies and incident management procedures.
- Consider whether Information Sharing Guidelines apply to seek help from or share information with other agencies without consent.
- Refer to the **Contacts for Safeguarding Assistance Information Sheet** for more information about who to contact.



If you are unsure the Adult Safeguarding Unit can provide free, confidential information, advice and support.

A copy of the **Contacts for Safeguarding Assistance Information Sheet** is available for agencies.

Contact us:



1800 372 310

(weekdays 9:00am to 4:00pm)



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Remember: safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Your actions can protect a person from ongoing harm and help restore their dignity, rights, and safety.



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