



Tool 1.3: Neglect: behaviours and signs

Neglect is a term used to describe the failure of a carer or responsible person to provide the necessities of life to an older person. Some examples are adequate food, shelter, clothing, medical or dental care and neglecting to meet a person's emotional needs.⁵

Behaviours

- Failure to provide adequate: food; shelter; clean clothing; heating/cooling; medicines; medical or dental care.
- Under- or over-medicating.
- Refusal to permit others to provide assessments or appropriate care.
- Preventing the person from accessing services and/or equipment and support.
- Exposure to danger or lack of supervision.
- An overly attentive carer in the company of others; the “hovering carer”.
- Misusing the role of Guardian.

Signs

- Inadequate clothing; complaints by the person of being too cold or too hot.
- Poor personal hygiene; unkempt appearance.
- Lack of medical or dental care.
- Injuries that have not been properly cared for.
- Absence of required assistive technologies.
- Exposure to unsafe, unhealthy or unsanitary conditions.
- Unexplained weight loss; dehydration; and malnutrition.
- Poor skin integrity, e.g. pressure sores.

Self-neglect is not considered a form of elder abuse, although it can be a sign of abuse if, for example, the person is feeling hopeless or depressed from an abusive situation. Self-neglect may include living in unsafe or unhygienic conditions, refusing to seek or comply with treatment for injury or illness or failing to eat or drink adequately.

Joe's story

Joe is a 79-year-old gentleman; he has a diagnosis of dementia and other chronic illnesses. He lives in social housing with his son, Ben who is his carer and Power of Attorney.

Ben has cancelled Joe's aged-care services. Joe's clothes are soiled and dirty and he appears to have lost weight.

Behaviours – Joe's son has cancelled aged-care services.

Signs – Joe has lost weight and has soiled, dirty clothes.
