



DORSET & WILTSHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE

Hoarding

A guide





What is a Hoarding Disorder?

In June 2018, the World Health Organisation (WHO) published a revised edition of International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), which now includes Hoarding Disorder as a distinct mental health condition.

ICD-11 will be presented at the World Health Assembly in May 2019 for adoption by Member States, to come into effect on 1 January 2022.



Hoarding disorder is characterised by accumulation of possessions due to excessive acquisition of or difficulty discarding possessions, regardless of their actual value.

Excessive acquisition is characterised by repetitive urges or behaviours related to amassing or buying items.

Difficulty discarding possessions is characterised by a perceived need to save items and distress associated with discarding them.

Accumulation of possessions results in living spaces becoming cluttered to the point that their use or safety is compromised.

The symptoms result in significant distress or significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning.



Why do people hoard?

It is well documented that hoarding tendencies can be triggered by certain life events.

Research indicates that trauma, as well as learnt behaviour from being raised in a hoarded home, can contribute to hoarding tendencies.

The death of a loved one, divorce, eviction or losing one's possessions in a fire can all contribute. Other examples include:

- Crime-related
- PTSD
- Abuse
- Trauma
- Empty Nest Syndrome
- Long-term illness
- Redundancy
- Miscarriage
- Childhood issues
- Collector
- Chronically disorganised
- Physical disability
- Chronically overwhelmed

ADHD, OCD, depression, autism amongst other mental health issues can all contribute to hoarding behaviours.

Hoarding Disorder is a mental health concern that manifests itself physically and impacts not only on other family members, children and pets, but also has social, health and safety implications for neighbours and the wider local community.

Reasons for not discarding items:



Hoarding myths

1

Removing clutter from the property will remove the issue of hoarding.

The truth: large-scale clean-ups without the person's permission do not work – it is likely to have a long-term, negative impact on their mental health.

2

Fires in hoarding properties will behave in the same way as they do anywhere else.

The truth: fires were contained to the room of origin in 90% of all residential fires. In hoarding homes, however, that percentage dropped to 40%, indicating that hoarded materials promote the spread of fire through a dwelling.

3

People with hoarding issues can't see all the stuff and dirt; they don't mind it.

The truth: they can see it but they mentally block it out. It is called 'clutter blindness'. When they do start to talk about it, it can be a sign they are ready for change and help.

4

There is nothing we can do about it.

The truth: with the proper support help and guidance, hoarding problems can be resolved.

5

People with hoarding issues love their belongings more than their family.

The truth: the person has extended their personality into everything in their lives, so they will shut down if pushed too much by loved ones to discard things that all have an equal value to them.

People with hoarding issues are just dirty and lazy.

6

The truth: usually the opposite is true but they have often undergone a traumatic experience or had a huge period of instability in their lives. They experience shame and fear which paralyses them and makes it very difficult to understand how they can return to the way they were before.

All people with hoarding issues have OCD.

7

The truth: OCD and Hoarding Disorder are distinct conditions, which were once linked when studies first started, but Hoarding Disorder is now linked with ADHD.

People only hoard things at home.

8

The truth: hoarding in offices and other business premises is not uncommon and can lead to blocked escape routes and increased risk of a fire.

Hoarders are unmotivated.

9

The truth: stereotyping hoarding is an unfair stigma. People who hoard may have cognitive deficits in the brain, impairing their ability to make decisions as well as keeping things organised.

Hoarders are collectors.

10

The truth: hoarding, collecting and accumulating are different things. Collectors tend to keep their items organised and proudly display their collection. People who hoard will rarely display their possessions, usually keeping their belongings in complete disarray.

Visiting Hoarded Properties

✓ DO ask the person you are visiting before touching things.

✓ DO use available support groups.

✓ DO establish 'red route' and no parking areas.

✓ DO ask them how you can help.

✓ DO mirror language.

✓ DO establish rapport and trust.

✗ DON'T call a 'Hoarder' a Hoarder, unless they call themselves it first.

✗ DON'T suggest getting rid of all their rubbish.

✗ DON'T suggest having a car boot sale or taking valuable items to an auction house.





✗ **DON'T** focus on the whole issue or house.

✗ **DON'T** feel you are on your own.

✗ **DON'T** play down their hoarding issue – 'I have seen far worse'.

✗ **DON'T** ignore the health hazards.



✗ **DON'T** suggest a one-day clear out with a skip.



✗ **DON'T** use judgemental language.

✗ **DON'T** be negative or use words that devalue or negatively judge possessions.

✗ **DON'T** do it for them/take control and start to remove items for them.

✗ **DON'T** randomly suggest items for removal.

Clutter Rating Scale

People have very different ideas about what it means to have a cluttered home. We have different perspectives about what constitutes clutter and what is considered tidy.

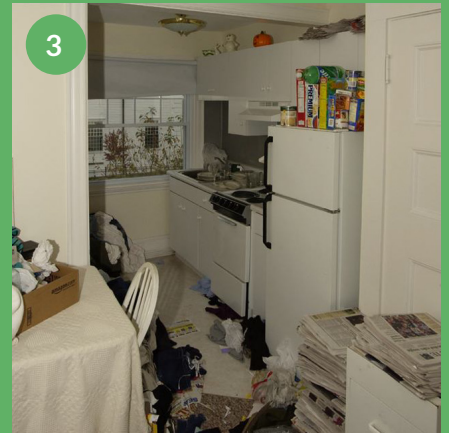
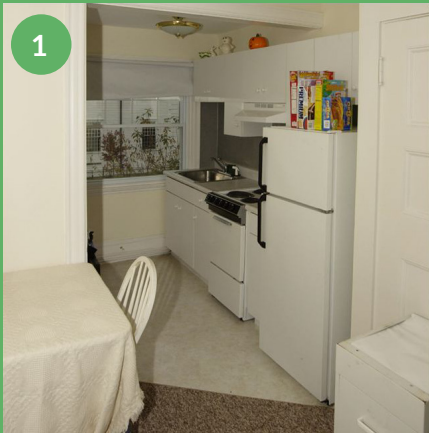
The Clutter Rating Scale is used internationally as way to give agencies a clearer definitive guide to measure hoarding in the home.

In general, clutter that reaches level 4 or higher in the images below is considered a concern.

Living room images



Kitchen images



Bedroom images



Useful resources

Click the image below to watch 'Keith's story: a personal and touching film about hoarding' on YouTube.



Click the images below to view more information about hoarding disorders and organisations that can help people with hoarding disorders.

