



Hoarding: Disorganization or Something More?



Who is a Hoarder?

A hoarder is not simply a pack rat. A pack rat gets rid of some "collectibles" when he or she runs out of room in the garage or basement. A hoarder simply moves the stuff into the bathtub.

Why do They Hoard?

Hoarding is a symptom of a mental illness, an anxiety disorder -- some experts say obsessive compulsive disorder, while others say it's a category unto itself. It's defined by three primary traits:

- The obsessive collection of objects that seem useless to almost everyone else
- The inability to get rid of any of them and
- A resulting state of distress or peril.

How does it Start?

Like most obsessive behaviors, hoarding starts small. Someone thinks that maybe the information in today's newspaper could be useful at some later date -- and tomorrow's newspaper and the next day's. Or she begins to wonder if she may have accidentally tossed something valuable in the trash can, and keeps that bag of trash just in case. And the next bag of trash. Maybe collecting books, or dogs, or records or mail, and living with them every day, so eases symptoms of anxiety that these things become indis-

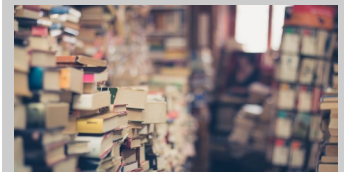
pensible -- sort of an extreme case of a favorite blanket or a grandmother's locket or the family photos on the wall.

A hoarder might be afraid to waste anything. Or he may be such a perfectionist that he simply can't start sorting through piles of useless things for fear he may not do it exactly right. Hoarding can be an indicator of an intense sense of responsibility or fear of making a mistake. Over time, hoarders' relationships with people may be replaced with their relationship to their things.

(From Layton, Julia. "Hoarding Signs and How to Get Help")

Signs of a Problem

- Collecting and being unable to get rid of things other people throw away every day
- Unsanitary conditions
- Being unable to use rooms for their intended purpose (kitchen for cooking, bathroom for washing up, bedroom for sleeping) because they are too cluttered
- Having too many animals to care for them properly
- Attempts to sort junk from valuables only results in moving things from one pile to another
- Many people have suggested there might be a problem
- Access to the home is blocked
- No visitors



Impacts of Hoarding

Physical Threats:

- Being trapped under fallen piles and stacks of hoarded items or debris
- Exposure to poisons and/or biohazards (feces, vomit, urine, etc.)
- Exposure to spoiled or rotten food products
- Insect infestation
- Self-neglect

Mental/Emotional Issues

- Stress
- Social Isolation
- Strained family relationships
- Depression
- Loneliness
- Underlying trauma

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Caring Hearts/Helping Hands

News You Can Use to Change Your Community
A Community Care Team Newsletter

CONLEY OUTREACH COMMUNITY SERVICES / COMMUNITY CARE TEAM

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Impacts of Hoarding (continued from pg 1)

Financial/Legal Impacts

- Ruined credit due to lost bills and important documents
- Debt from compulsive shopping
- Fines and tickets for not properly maintaining the property
- Lawsuits from neighbors if clutter encroaches on their property or odors emanating from the property hinder their everyday life
- Children removed from the home
- Eviction

Local Resources

Remedease, Inc. 630/940-0440
Elite Care Management 630/548-9500
The International OCD Foundation www.ocfoundation.org
Messies Anonymous www.messies.com
www.challengingdisorganization.org

Find back issues of our CCT Newsletters at:

www.conleyoutreach.org

Am I a Hoarder???

All of us, at one point or another have clutter. Does this mean we are hoarders? Fran Piekarski from *Remedease* says there are differences between chronic disorganization, situational disorganization, collecting and hoarding.

Chronic Disorganization

- A history of disorganization
- Efforts to get organized have not been maintained
- Does not necessarily include clutter
- Impaired ability to function
- Is not a collector
- Understands that it is an issue and recognizes the need for help

Situational Disorganization

- Chaos and/or clutter that has gotten out of hand due to life circumstances
- Can turn into Chronic Disorganization

Collecting

- Intentional acquiring
- Purpose to showcase or invest in a certain genre such as artwork or dolls
- Collection shared with others
- Doesn't interfere with daily living or relationships
- Could be an obsession, but not hoarding

Hoarding

- Collecting uncontrollably
- Secretive; often deceptive
- Cannot distinguish between what is important and what is not
- Have no organizational skills
- Real fear of getting rid of items
- Does not see their behavior as problematic

How do I Help?

- **Educate yourself about the disorder.** Hoarding is more than messiness and treatment includes much more than just cleaning the house.
- **Help the person find a professional in the area.** Look for therapists that specialize in cognitive behavioral therapy and professional organizers that have worked successfully with hoarders.
- **Avoid common traps,** like rushing the person or doing it for them rather than with them. Cleaning out a person's house without permission will result in feelings of betrayal, anger, anxiety and grief. Be patient. They are learning new skills, which takes time and practice.
- **Reward progress.** Celebrate small successes.
- **Show kindness.** Remember hoarding is just one aspect of this person. Balance your time together doing enjoyable activities.



From:
www.ocfoundation.org