

Sensitive Solutions to Help with Hoarding

Compulsive hoarding (or **pathological hoarding** or **disposophobia**) is the excessive acquisition of possessions (and failure to use or discard them), even if the items are worthless, hazardous, or unsanitary. Compulsive hoarding impairs mobility and interferes with basic activities, including cooking, cleaning, showering, and sleeping.

It is not clear whether compulsive hoarding is an isolated disorder, or rather a symptom of another condition, such as obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Source: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compulsive_hoarding

Understanding Hoarding

Helping people who hoard understand how their problem interferes in living the life they desire can be a powerful motivator, especially as it pertains to being able to live independently. Here are some sensitive solutions to help.



- **Don't use judgmental language.** Like anyone else, individuals with hoarding will not be receptive to negative comments about the state of their home, their character, or their possessions (e.g., "What a mess!" "What kind of person lives like this?" "This is nothing but junk!").
- **Use motivational language.** In communicating with people who hoard about the consequences of hoarding, use language that reduces defensiveness and increases motivation to solve the problem (e.g., "I see that you have a pathway from your front door to your living room. That's great that you've kept things out of the way so that you don't slip or fall.")
- **Don't try to persuade or argue with the person.** Efforts to persuade individuals to make a change in their home or behavior often have the opposite effect—the person actually talks himself into keeping the items.



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- **Highlight strengths.** All people have strengths, positive aspects of themselves, their behavior, or even their homes. A visitor's ability to notice these strengths helps forge a good relationship and paves the way for resolving the hoarding problem (e.g., "I see that you can easily access your bathroom sink and shower." "What a beautiful painting!" "I can see how much you care about your cat.")
- **Attend to the meaning of important objects.** Attention to objects with sentimental meaning or memorabilia from past experiences and life events can assist in establishing and maintaining the trust necessary for continued work addressing a hoarding problem.
- **Focus the intervention initially on safety and organization of possessions and later work on discarding.** Discussion of the fate of the person's possessions will be necessary at some point, but it is preferable for this discussion to follow work on safety and organization.

Professional organizers, trained home care aides or nurses, and geriatric care managers can also provide help with de-cluttering and organizing. Contact **Care Response** at **(734) 662-2207** to learn more.

Sources: Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency/Boston University School of Social Work, International OCD Foundation