

## Hoarding Q&A

**What is hoarding?** Hoarding is (1) The acquisition of, and failure to discard a large number of possessions that appear to be useless or of limited value; (2) living spaces sufficiently cluttered so as to preclude activities for which those spaces were designed; and (3) significant distress or impairment in functioning caused by hoarding.<sup>2</sup>

### What are the signs of hoarding?

- Difficulty discarding or getting rid of items.
- A large amount of clutter in the office, at home, in the car, or in other spaces (i.e., storage units) that make it difficult to use furniture or appliances or move around easily.
- Losing important items like money or bills in the clutter.
- Feeling overwhelmed by the volume of possessions that have “taken over” the house or workspace.
- Acquiring free items, such as advertising flyers or sugar packets from restaurants, compulsively.
- Purchasing objects because they are “a bargain” or to “stock up” at home.
- Avoidance of inviting family or friends into the home due to shame or embarrassment.
- Refusal to let workpeople into the home to make repairs.<sup>3</sup>

### What are the characteristics of hoarding?

- Difficulty organizing possessions.
- Unusually strong positive feelings (joy, delight) when acquiring items.
- Strong negative feelings (guilt, fear, anger) when considering discarding items.
- Strong beliefs that items are “valuable” or “useful” even when other people do not want them.
- Feeling responsible for objects and possibly thinking of inanimate objects as having feelings.
- Denial of a problem even when the clutter or acquiring clearly interferes with a person’s life.<sup>3</sup>

### Who experiences hoarding behavior?

Hoarding behavior can begin as early as adolescence, although the average age of a person seeking treatment for hoarding is about age 50. People who hoard often endure a lifelong struggle with hoarding. They tend to live alone and may have a family member with the problem. It seems likely that serious hoarding problems are present in 2-5% of the population.<sup>3</sup>

### What are the effects of hoarding?

- Risk to the health and safety of those living in or near the home, including health problems, structural damage to the home, fire, and even death.
- Expensive and emotionally devastating evictions or other court actions, hospitalization and homelessness.
- Conflict with family members and friends who are frustrated and concerned about the state of the home and/or excessing acquiring.<sup>3</sup>

### Can hoarding be treated?

Yes, hoarding can be treated. Strategies include:

- Challenging thoughts and beliefs about the need to keep items and about collecting new things.
- Curbing acquisition by practicing restraint with non-shopping trips and non-acquiring excursions.
- Discarding and recycling clutter: practicing the removal of clutter, first with the help of a clinician or coach and then independently.
- Finding and joining a support group or teaming up with a coach to reduce clutter.
- Understanding that relapses can occur and developing strategies to prevent future acquiring and clutter.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tolin, D., Frost, R., & Steketee, G., (2014). Buried in Treasures: Help for Compulsive Acquiring, Saving, and Hoarding.

<sup>2</sup> Frost, R., & Hartl, T. (1996). A cognitive-behavioral model of compulsive hoarding, Behavior Research and Therapy, 34(4), 341-350.

<sup>3</sup> Bratiotis, C., Otte, S., Steketee, G., Muroff, J., Frost, R. (2009) Boston University School of Social Work Compulsive Hoarding Research Project Hoarding Fact Sheet.

## Helping Resources for Clutter Reduction

**How can I help a friend or family member with hoarding behavior to declutter?** Well-intended people who are seeking ways to offer their assistance often ask this question. While these attempts to help with decluttering are sincere, they may not be well received by the person who hoards. Keep in mind:

- Motivation cannot be imposed.
- Everyone, including people who hoard, has a right to make choices about their belongings and how they live.
- Until the person is motivated to change, they may not accept your offer of help.
- People who hoard are frequently ambivalent about accepting help and discarding objects.
- Resource: How to Talk to Someone with Hoarding: Do's and Don'ts (presentation handout)<sup>1</sup>

### **MassHousing Hoarding Resources** (<https://goo.gl/wGsJpy>)

This page features a host of links, organizations and other resources to help you address hoarding. The following resources listed with a □ are included on the MassHousing list. MassHousing maintains a list of upcoming events, trainings and opportunities here.

#### □ **Children of Hoarders** ([www.childrenofhoarders.com](http://www.childrenofhoarders.com))

- Raising awareness of the impact of hoarding on children, families and communities.
- Providing educational materials and programs and access to practical support.
- Advocating for public policies to address the needs of children of hoarders.
- Building reciprocal relationships with clinicians and key professionals.

#### □ **Massachusetts Hoarding Resources Directory** (to download PDF document: <https://goo.gl/ftOHjC>)

This directory, prepared by MassHousing and the Massachusetts Statewide Steering Committee on Hoarding (SSCH), includes:

- Hoarding clinical mental health services (e.g., LICSW, LMHC, PHD, and LCSW supervised by LICSW)
- Social & medical services addressing hoarding other than clinical mental health (e.g., a social worker, nurse, occupational therapist trained to assist in sorting/discarding as they provide other services.)
- Hoarding informed sorting, organizing, and cleanup services
- Hoarding emergency clean-out services

#### □ **Hoarding Best Practices Guide** (<https://goo.gl/noFjU7>)

This handbook includes comprehensive information about social agencies serving elders in Massachusetts and guidelines for effectively addressing hoarding behavior among elders while respecting their dignity and self-worth.

### **Facebook Groups**

As “closed groups” these online communities are not visible to the Facebook friends of those who participate. Each group includes a facilitator who monitors conversation and provides resources and feedback where helpful.

For individuals: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/TheClutterMovementGroup/>

For family members: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/TheClutterMovementFamilySupport/>

### **Books**

Digging Out: Helping Your Loved One Manage Clutter, Hoarding & Compulsive Acquiring (Tompkins & Hartl, 2009)

Overview video: <https://goo.gl/0r9LvZ>

□ Hoarding bibliography list (On MassHousing Hoarding Resources page, listed under “Publications and Research” in right column) <https://goo.gl/EAm7TO>

### **North Shore Center for Hoarding and Cluttering**

(<http://nselder.org/north-shore-center-for-hoarding-decluttering/>)

The Center, located in Danvers, Massachusetts, offers safe and non-judgmental support for families and individuals struggling with clutter. Information about hoarding and programs provided are detailed on the website.