



One minute guide

Hoarding



Date: October 2025;
Version: 1

What is hoarding?

*“Hoarding isn’t about how much stuff someone has, it’s about how they process those things”
(The Secret Lives of Hoarders by Matt Paxton)*

Hoarding is having so many things that it is hard to manage clutter in the home, and it may be difficult or impossible to throw things away. People hoard because they feel a strong need to keep things however the connection to these things can cause distress. The impact of hoarding can affect day-to-day life.

Hoarding disorder is a mental health problem that a psychiatrist or other mental health professional can diagnose. But hoarding can also be experienced as part of another mental or physical health problem. Certain behaviours such as hoarding are often a way of coping with distress or trauma. It is important to recognise that individuals experiencing hoarding are not alone and support is available.

Common things to hoard include: paperwork and receipts, empty bags and containers, sentimental items, books and magazines, digital items such as photographs, emails and files, expired or unused medication, old and unworn clothes or broken appliances.

Why hoard?

- Items may be kept 'just in case' - even if they have not been used in a long time or never used at all.
- There is a fear that important information or memories will be lost if certain items are thrown away.
- Disposing of possessions can be emotionally challenging and difficult to cope with.
- Throwing things away might feel wasteful or raise concerns about environmental impact.
- There can be a strong need to organise or dispose of items perfectly, or not at all.
- Possessions may provide feelings of happiness, comfort or safety.
- Each item may be seen as unique and special, even when they appear very similar.

Hoarded possessions often have specific values:

- Aesthetic or intrinsic value (lovely or precious things)
- Instrumental value (I might need this one day – or someone else might)
- Sentimental value (associated with memories or feelings)

The stigma of hoarding

The word 'hoarding' is sometimes used in the wrong way. The media refer to 'panic buying' as hoarding; people call themselves 'hoarders' because they collect items or have more clutter than usual. Hoarding is often shown in the media in a very extreme way which can reinforce stereotyping and create stigma. In the past, doctors viewed hoarding as a type of obsessive-compulsive disorder; now 'hoarding disorder' is recognised as a unique mental health problem.

People make hurtful assumptions about hoarding, thinking it means being unclean or lazy. Hoarding does not mean you need help tidying up – it is unhelpful and traumatic if people try to do this for you. It can feel frustrating and upsetting if people do not understand this and makes it harder to talk to people about your experiences. People who hoard often feel shame or embarrassment, leading them to withdraw from friends, family, and community. Fear of judgment can prevent them from seeking help or allowing others into their homes.

The impact of hoarding on children and family members

Loved ones often struggle to understand hoarding behaviour which can lead to conflict or strained relationships. Neighbours or landlords can respond with complaints or eviction threats rather than compassion. Piles of possessions may mount up, making it difficult to access some parts of the home such as sleep on the bed, cook a meal in the kitchen or get a bath or shower. Losing important paperwork can lead to money problems. Items can block access, create trip or fall hazards or fire risks. The impact of hoarding on children can be profound and complex, affecting their emotional, physical, and social development:

- Children may experience chronic stress, anxiety, or depression due to the chaotic and cluttered environment. Feelings of shame or embarrassment are common, especially if they're unable to invite friends over or talk about their home life. They may develop low self-esteem or internalise blame for the situation. They can take on an adult or 'carer' role to support their parent or carer.
- Clutter can pose health and safety risks, such as fire hazards or unsanitary conditions. Limited space may affect sleep, play, and study areas, impacting development and achievement in school or college.
- Children may become socially withdrawn due to stigma or fear of judgment. They might struggle to form or maintain friendships and feel excluded from normal childhood experiences.

Responding to hoarding

Hoarding is complex and requires a multi-agency response. Professionals working with an adult who has or appears to have a hoarding disorder, should complete the Practitioners Hoarding Assessment and the Clutter Image Rating to inform decision making. Organisations should gather as much information as they can, prior to making any referral. The HEATH (Home Environment Assessment Tool for Hoarding) covers five domains of risks that can occur with a high volume of clutter in the home: safe pathways, fire safety, structural integrity, health and wellness and sanitation. Any response should be trauma-aware and follow the principles of harm reduction [Harm Reduction Principles](#) | [National Harm Reduction Coalition](#). If children are significantly affected, a referral to children's social care is needed.

Further information:

[Holistic Hoarding | Hoarding Training and Consultancy](#)
[hoarding academy](#)

[The Hoarding Hub](#)
[Mind - About hoarding](#)