

Hoarding: Helping someone who isn't ready to change.

People generally don't change until they are ready to change, no matter how much others might want them to. Trying to convince or force a person to change when they aren't ready will just invoke defensiveness and resistance, which will make them less likely to change. This is especially true for people who hoard. So what can be done to help someone who isn't ready to change?

The key to helping someone who isn't ready to change is to try to enhance their own motivation to change. This means rather than trying to convince them or force them to change, we help them to reach the decision to change themselves.

The decision about whether to change or not rests on the balance of pros and cons – the reasons to change versus the reasons to stay the same. If the reasons to stay the same outweigh the reasons to change, a person will not change. If the reasons to change outweigh the reasons to stay the same, the person will decide to change. The aim of working with someone who isn't ready to change is to try to tip the balance in favour of change by encouraging them to recognise the problems caused by the current situation and the benefits of making a change.

People who hoard generally have mixed feelings about their situation. Most people who hoard recognise the negative aspects of having so many possessions, but they find it extremely difficult to stop acquiring new things and to discard the things they already have. They usually don't like the clutter, lack of space, strain on their relationships, or the guilt and shame they feel from having so many possessions, but this is outweighed by the urges to acquire more and the need to keep the things they have. The key to helping someone who isn't ready to change is to explore and build on their ambivalence.

The keys to enhancing motivation in someone who isn't ready to change are:

- Respect autonomy – the person has a right to change or not to change – it's their choice
- Develop and maintain a positive relationship – a positive relationship built on respect, empathy, non-judgement and acceptance is critical in enhancing motivation
- Explore ambivalence – help them explore the disadvantages of their current situation and the advantages of making a change. Explore five areas:
 1. The positives of overcoming hoarding
 2. The negatives of the current situation
 3. The past – what their life was like before the problem
 4. The future – what they want life to be like
 5. Values and goals – what is important in life and how hoarding fits with this
- Enhance self-belief – explore their past successes and help them recognise their strengths

The most important factor in helping someone increase their motivation to change is the quality of your relationship with the person. When the person feels accepted, respected and understood they will be more likely to explore their ambivalence about their hoarding behaviour.

Helpful questions to ask someone who isn't ready to change

What do you think about your collecting?

What do other people think about your collecting?

Who thinks your collecting is a problem and who doesn't?

How is your collecting affecting your relationship with these people?

What are the benefits to having a house without clutter?

What are the problems with having a cluttered house?

What are the reasons for you to change or not change?

Was there a time when you didn't collect as much?

What was your life like before?

How would your life be different without the clutter?

What do you want your life to be like?

What will happen if you do nothing?

How will that affect your family?

Is this the way you hoped your life would turn out?

What is most important to you?

What are your hopes and dreams?

How does your collecting affect these?

The important thing to remember when asking questions is to avoid judgement. If you ask questions in a tone that is caring and curious rather than one that is critical and judgemental, the person is more likely to open up and discuss their situation with you.