

Hoarding: Supporting someone who is ready to change

What to do:

- Respect their right to make their own decisions – whether you agree with their decisions or not, they have a right to make the decisions that affect them.
- Work as a team – work together rather than telling them what to do or doing things for them.
- Help the person stay focused on the task – people who hoard can be easily distracted so remind them of what they are supposed to be doing and their motivation for doing it.
- Provide emotional support – sorting, discarding and resisting urges to acquire can be extremely difficult and stressful and they will need emotional support, so be there for them and listen when they need to talk.
- Help them make decisions – encourage them to think through decisions out loud, and help them to consider the pros and cons of any decision.
- Provide encouragement – show them that you believe in them and praise their achievements.
- Help them to sort and discard - work with them on one small area at a time – the process of sorting and discarding can be overwhelming, so help them to set small goals and work on those. Help the person to develop a plan, which should include: categories for sorting, where kept items will be placed, and how unwanted items will be disposed of.
- Accompany the person on non-acquiring trips - for people to overcome hoarding they need to build up a tolerance for triggers and urges to acquire new items. The only way they will be able to overcome them is by gradually exposing themselves to the urges and learning to resist them.

What NOT to do:

- DO NOT judge or criticise them – this will only make them defensive and less likely to change.
- DO NOT argue with them about their hoarding– this will also make them defensive and less likely to change.
- DO NOT try to make decisions for them – they have a right to make their own decisions and if you make decisions for them they will not learn to make decisions for themselves.
- DO NOT touch or move anything without permission – this could cause them to become angry and resentful, which could damage your relationship with them and make it more difficult to support them in the future.
- DO NOT tell them how they should feel – you might not understand why they feel the way they do about their possessions, but their feelings are legitimate.
- DO NOT try to do too much – it is important to take care of yourself so you don't become overburdened with the problem.

Helpful questions to ask someone who hoards

Do you really need this?

Do you already have this?

Have you used this in the past year?

Do you have a plan to use this?

Will you actually use this within the next month?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of acquiring or keeping this?

Will getting / keeping this be good or bad for you?

Do you have enough space for this?

Do you want this taking up space in your home?

Is this how you want to use the space in your home?

How will not getting / keeping this help you overcome the hoarding problem?

Will you regret getting this later?

Are you buying this because you feel bad?

Could you manage without it?

Can you really afford this?

How does this fit with your values?

How does this compare with things you value highly?

Is it current?

Does it work?

Would you buy it again if you didn't already own it?

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.