

Livingston County Hoarding Task Force

Guidelines for Addressing Hoarding Behavior



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General Information

What is Hoarding Behavior?



According to the Mayo Clinic, Hoarding Disorder is a persistent difficulty discarding or parting with possessions because of a perceived need to save them. A person with hoarding disorder experiences distress at the thought of getting rid of the items. Excessive accumulation of items, regardless of actual value, occurs.

Hoarding often creates such cramped living conditions that homes may be filled to capacity, with only narrow pathways winding through stacks of clutter. Some people also collect animals, keeping dozens or hundreds of pets in unsanitary conditions because they can't care for them properly.

Hoarding ranges from mild to severe. In some cases, hoarding may not have much impact on your life, while in other cases it seriously affects your functioning on a daily basis.

People with hoarding disorder often don't see it as a problem, making treatment challenging. But intensive treatment can help people with hoarding disorder understand their compulsions and live safer, more enjoyable lives

How is it different from having too much clutter or collectibles?



In the homes of people who have hoarding disorder, the countertops, sinks, stoves, desks, stairways and virtually all other surfaces are usually stacked with stuff. And when there's no more room inside, the clutter may spread to the garage, vehicles and yard.

Clutter and difficulty discarding things are usually the first signs and symptoms of hoarding disorder, which often surfaces during the teenage years. As the person grows older, he or she typically starts acquiring things for which there is no need or space. By middle age, symptoms are often severe and may be harder to treat.

Hoarding disorder affects emotions, thoughts and behavior. Signs and symptoms may include:

- Persistent inability to part with any possession, regardless of its value
- Excessive attachment to possessions, including discomfort letting others touch or borrow them or distress at the idea of letting an item go
- Cluttered living spaces, making areas of the home unusable for the intended purpose, such as not being able to cook in the kitchen or use the bathroom to bathe
- Keeping stacks of newspapers, magazines or junk mail
- Letting food or trash build up to unusually excessive, unsanitary levels
- Acquiring unneeded or seemingly useless items, such as trash or napkins from a restaurant
- Difficulty managing daily activities because of procrastination and trouble making decisions
- Moving items from one pile to another, without discarding anything
- Difficulty organizing items, sometimes losing important items in the clutter

- Shame or embarrassment
- Limited or no social interactions

People with hoarding disorder typically save items because:

- They believe these items will be needed or have value in the future
- The items have important emotional significance — serving as a reminder of happier times or representing beloved people or pets
- They feel safer when surrounded by the things they save

Hoarding disorder is different from collecting. People who have collections, such as stamps or model cars, deliberately search out specific items, categorize them and carefully display their collections. Although collections can be large, they aren't usually cluttered and they don't cause the distress and impairments that are part of hoarding disorder.

What is Animal Hoarding?



People who hoard animals may collect dozens or even hundreds of pets. Animals may be confined inside or outside. Because of the large numbers, these animals often aren't cared for properly. The health and safety of the person and the animals are at risk due to unsanitary conditions.

As hard as it might be, you may also need to contact local authorities, such as police, fire, public health, child/adult protective services or animal welfare agencies, especially when health or safety is in question.

Why is it a public safety issue?

Hoarding disorder can cause a variety of health concerns, including:

- Unsanitary conditions that pose a risk to health
- Increased risk of falls
- Injury or being trapped by shifting or falling items
- A fire hazard
- An inability to perform daily tasks, such as bathing or cooking
- Could encourage insects and/or rodents in the neighborhood
- Building code violations and/or structural damage
- Could cause sanitation or odor nuisances from garbage, trash and/or animal waste.
- Signal neglect of animals or people

In addition, people who hoard often have the following characteristics.

- Poor work performance
- Family conflicts
- Loneliness and social isolation
- Financial problems
- Legal issues, including eviction

How can a concerned neighbor, friend or family member intervene?

Hoarding behavior is a mental health issue and public health concern. Usually the behavior has been occurring for a long time and requires patience and understanding. Frequently it requires the help of other people and agencies. Neglect or abuse issues associated with adults, children or animals may require emergency interventions. Code violations resulting from neglect or collections of materials may require emergency actions. It is not recommended that family members or friends intervene without the cooperation of the hoarder, as this could lead to the development of dangerous behaviors.

- If the person is willing to do a self-assessment, there is one located on pages 8 and 9 of this document.

- You may also do an assessment by using the Clutter/Hoarding Scale located on page 7 of this document.
- Once you have begun the discussion with the person, together you can begin to identify some strategies for addressing the disorder.
- Not all Hoarding situations require emergency response
- Most hoarding situations would benefit from the support of a professional.
- Please see the list on the last page of this document for possible professionals who can assist with either the disorder or the clean-up process or both.

See Animal Control Response to Hoarding Document for more information.

Contact Child Protective Services and Adult Protective Services if there is concerns for safety and /or neglect. See last page.

How do I know if it is Hoarding?

The National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization (NSGCD) has determined 5 levels of the disorder.

1. **Hoarding Level One:** Clutter is not excessive, all doors and stairways are accessible, there are no odors, and the home is considered safe and sanitary.
2. **Hoarding Level Two:** Clutter inhabits 2 or more rooms, light odors, overflowing garbage cans, light mildew in kitchens and bathrooms, one exit is blocked, some pet dander or pet waste puddles, and limited evidence of housekeeping.
3. **Hoarding Level Three:** One bedroom or bathroom is unusable, excessive dust, heavily soiled food preparation areas, strong odors throughout the home, excessive amount of pets, and visible clutter outdoors.
4. **Hoarding Level Four:** Sewer backup, hazardous electrical wiring, flea infestation, rotting food on counters, lice on bedding, and pet damage to home.
5. **Hoarding Level Five:** Rodent infestation, kitchen and bathroom unusable due to clutter, human and animal feces, and disconnected electrical and/or water service



CLUTTER — HOARDING SCALE (CHS) QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

	Structure and Zoning	Animals and Pests	Household Functions	Health and Safety
LEVEL I	All doors, stairs and windows accessible; plumbing, electric and HVAC operational; fire and CO2 detectors installed and functional	Normal animal control (behavior/sanitation); approved number of animals; no evidence of rodents or insects	No excessive clutter; all rooms properly used; appliances functional; good housekeeping and maintenance	Safe, sanitary; no odors; medication control OK
LEVEL II	1 major exit blocked; 1 major appliance or HVAC device not working for longer than one season; some plumbing or electrical systems not fully functional; fire or CO2 detectors non-existent or non-functional	Evidence of inappropriate animal control; visible or odorous pet waste; visible pet fur/hair/feathers; light to medium evidence of common household pests/insects	Clutter beginning to obstruct living areas; slight congestion of exits, entrances, hallways and stairs; some household appliances not functional; inconsistent housekeeping and maintenance	Diminished appropriate sanitation; odors from dirty dishes, food prep, laundry, toilets; mildew present; medication control questionable
LEVEL III	Outside clutter of items normally stored indoors; HVAC devices not working for longer than one season; fire or CO2 detectors non-existent or non-functional; one part of home has light structural damage (occurring within past six mos.)	Animal population exceeds local regulations; inappropriate animal control; inadequate sanitation; audible evidence of pests; medium level of spiders; light insect infestation such as bed bugs, lice, fleas, roaches, ants, silverfish, spiders, etc.	Clutter obstructing functions of key living areas; building up around exits, entrances, hallways and stairs; at least one room not being used for intended purpose; several appliances not functional; inappropriate usage of electric appliances and extension cords; substandard housekeeping and maintenance; hazardous substances in small quantities	Limited evidence of maintaining sanitation (heavily soiled food prep areas, dirty dishes, mildew); odors obvious and irritating; garbage cans not in use or overflowing; dirt, dust and debris; dirty laundry throughout house; Rx and OTC medications hazardous control (re children, pets, mentally impaired)
LEVEL IV	Excessive outdoor clutter of items normally stored indoors; HVAC devices not working for longer than one year; CO2 detectors non-existent or non-functional; structural damage to home lasting longer than six months; water damaged floors, damaged walls and foundations, broken windows, doors or plumbing; odor or evidence of sewer backup	Animal population exceeds local ordinances; poor animal sanitation; destructive behavior; excessive spiders and webs; bats, squirrels, rodents in attic or basement (audible and visible); medium insect infestation	Diminished use and accessibility to key living areas; several rooms cluttered to extent they cannot be used for intended purposes; clutter inhibits access to doorways, hallways and stairs; inappropriate storage of hazardous/combustible materials; appliances used inappropriately; improper use of electric space heaters, fans or extension cords	Rotting food, organic contamination; expired, leaking cans or bottles, buckled sides and tops; dishes and utensils unusable; no linens on beds; sleeping on mattress; chair or floor; infestation of bedding and/or furniture; medications Rx and OTC medications easily accessible to anybody
LEVEL V	Extreme indoor/outdoor clutter; foliage overgrowth; abandoned machinery; ventilation inadequate or nonexistent; HVAC systems not working; water damaged floors, walls and foundation; broken windows, doors or plumbing; unreliable electrical, water and/or septic systems; odor or sewer backup; irreparable damage to exterior and interior structure	Animals at risk and dangerous to people due to behavior, health and numbers; pervasive spiders, cockroaches, mice, rats, squirrels, raccoons, bats, snakes, etc.; heavy infestation of insects such as bed bugs, lice, fleas, cockroaches, ants, silverfish, etc.	Key living spaces not usable; all rooms not used for intended purposes; entrances, hallways and stairs blocked; toilets, sinks and tubs not functioning; hazardous conditions obscured by clutter; appliances unusable; hazardous and primitive use of kerosene, lanterns, candles, fireplace/woodstove as primary source of heat and/or light	Human urine and excrement present; rotting food; organic contamination; cans or jars expired, leaking or buckled; dishes and utensils buried or nonexistent; beds inaccessible or unusable due to clutter or infestation; pervasive mold and/or mildew; moisture or standing water; Rx and OTC medications easily accessible to anybody; presence of expired Rx

Hoarding Rating Scale

Please use the following scale when answering items below:

0 – no problem

2 – mild problem, occasionally (less than weekly) acquires items not needed, or acquires a few unneeded items

4- moderate, regular (once or twice weekly) acquires items not needed, or acquires some unneeded items

6 – severe, frequency (several times per week) acquires items not needed, or acquires many unneeded items

8 – extreme, very often (daily) acquires items no needed, or acquires large numbers of unneeded items

1. Because of the clutter or number of possessions, how difficult is it for you to use the rooms in your home?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at all Difficult		Mild		Moderate		Severe		Extremely Difficult

2. To what extent do you have difficulty discarding (or recycling, selling, giving away) ordinary things that other people would get rid of?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Not at all Difficult		Mild		Moderate		Severe		Extremely Difficult

3. To what extent do you currently have a problem with collecting free things or buying more things than you need or can use or can afford?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
None		Mild		Moderate		Severe		Extreme

4. To what extent do you experience emotional distress because of clutter, difficulty discarding or problems with buying or acquiring things?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
None/ Not at all		Mild		Moderate		Severe		Extremely

5. To what extent do you experience impairment in your life (daily routine, job/school, social activities, family activities, financial difficulties) because of clutter, difficulty discarding, or problems with buying or acquiring things?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
None/ Not at all		Mild		Moderate		Severe		Extremely

Criteria for clinically significant Hoarding: (Tolin et al., 2008)

A score of 4 or greater on questions 1 and 2, and a score of 4 or greater on either question 4 or question 5.

References:

Tolin DF, Frost RO, Steketee G, Gray KD, Fitch KE. (2008.) The economic and social burden of compulsive hoarding. *Psychiatry Research*. 160:200–211.

Tolin DF, Frost RO, Steketee G.(2010). a brief interview for assessing compulsive hoarding: The Hoarding Rating Scale-Interview. *Psychiatry Research*. 178:147–152.

Suspicion of Potential Hoarding Behavior

Is there a possibility of child neglect or cruelty?

Refer to Child Protective Services
855-444-3911

Is there a possibility of adult neglect or cruelty?

Refer to Adult Protective Services
855-444-3911

Is there a possibility of animal neglect or cruelty?

Refer to Animal Control
517-548-9111

Are there accumulations of garbage or animal wastes? Is there an odor? Are there insects or rodents?

Refer to the Public Health
517-546-9850

Are there structural problems, tall grass, or non-garbage accumulations?

Refer to Liv. County Building Department
517-546-3240

Are there fire code violations in a building with less than three residential units?

Refer to the local Fire Department

Brighton - 810-229-6640
Fowlerville - 517-223-8561
Green Oak - 810-231-1333
Hamburg - 810-222-1100
Hartland - 810-632-7676
Howell - 517-546-0560
Putnam - 734-878-6788
Unadilla - 734-498-2551

Are there probable mental health issues?

Refer to Community Mental Health
517-546-4126

Are you ready to clean up?

See list of professionals on the last page

How Can I help?

Once it is determined that it is not an emergency situation (abuse, neglect, infestation, structural dangers), then there are a few things you can do to help.

- Talk with the person
- Use a gentle approach and let them share their story
- Respect the attachment to possessions by the person
- Remain calm and factual, but caring and supportive
- Evaluate for safety using the guidelines below
- Involve the person in seeking solutions, don't force interventions
- Don't be critical or judgmental about the environment

Start the discussion with Safety Codes:

- Help them establish 36 inch paths throughout their homes. This is standard for getting a gurney into the residence. Also meets fire code. These paths must be from doorways and windows. Use a tape measure and paint tape on the floor.
- Help them establish 24 inches from all ceilings. Tape measure and paint tape can help with this as well
- Help them establish a 36 inch barrier around heating elements (water heater, stove, and refrigerator) and electrical lights.
- Help them establish a 24 inch square around every window. Floor to ceiling.
- Help them make sure they have working smoke detectors in each bedroom and on each floor of the home.
- Help them secure a portable fire extinguisher for each floor of the home
- Help to remove any combustible materials (paper, magazines, and flammables) from boiler rooms, mechanical rooms etc.
- Help to remove any gas or propane equipment or vehicles from inside the home (mopeds, lawn mowers, etc.)

Connect them with resources:

See the list of local resources on the next page.

Local Resources

Suspected Child Abuse/Neglect – 855-444-3911

Suspected Adult Abuse/Neglect – 855-444-3911

Suspected Animal Cruelty/Neglect – 517-546-9111

Livingston County Hoarding Task Force Website -

<https://www.livgov.com/hscb/Pages/LC-Hoarding-Task-Force.aspx>

Livingston County Hoarding Task Force Facebook Page –
livingstoncountyhoardingtaskforce@lchscb

Professionals to help with the disorder:

- Hoarders Anonymous - Terrance Daryl Shulman (JD,LMSW,ACSW,CAADC,CPC) at The Shulman Center – 248-358-8508
- Antonia Caretta (PhD.) – 248-553-9503
- Diversified Counseling and Consulting Services in Howell – 517-481-4085
- Brighton Office Ann Arbor Consultation Services – 734-396-0219
- Anxiety and OCD Treatment Center of Ann Arbor – 734-368-9691

Professionals to help with the clean-up process:

- ServPro – (810) 220-3711 in Brighton
- Sharon McRill at Betty Brigade (service@bettybrigade.com) or 734-994-1000
- Ron Brendahl at Caring Transitions (rbrendahl@caringtransitions.net) or 517-489-3827
- Janet Kester (LMSW) at Hoarding Pros – 855-655-5800
- Hoarder Help Services at hoarderhelpline.com or 855-791-3900
- Address our Mess at 855-676-7848 or addressourmess.com



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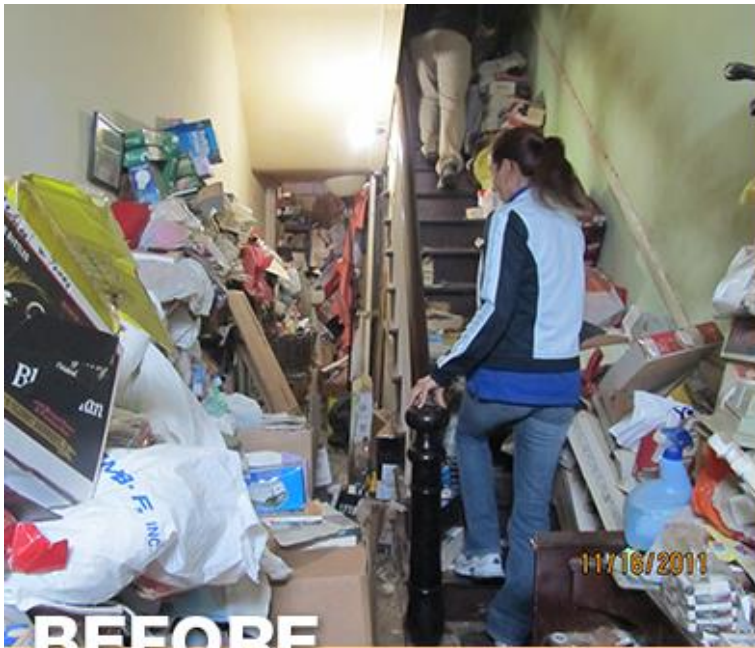
BEFORE



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AFTER

Remember this Disorder takes time!
Together we can help keep our loved
ones safe!



BEFORE



AFTER