

HOARDING DISORDER

Factsheet

A hoarding disorder is where someone acquires an excessive number of items and stores them in a chaotic manner, usually resulting in unmanageable amounts of clutter. The items can be of little or no monetary value. Hoarding is complex. It usually requires multi-agency support, for example, from fire safety, mental health and housing services. Supporting somebody to recovery or to a reduction in their hoarding takes time and patience.

Hoarding is considered a significant problem if:

- the amount of clutter interferes with everyday living
- the clutter is causing significant distress or negatively affecting the quality of life of the person or their family

Why do people hoard

Nobody knows the exact causes of hoarding but it often starts during adolescence and becomes a significant problem for most during their thirties. There are many theories as to why people do it. Some of the reasons might include, but are not limited to:

- **Difficult feelings** - some people say hoarding helps them cope with other mental health problems, such as depression or anxiety, or distracts them from feeling upset or afraid.
- **Perfectionism and worrying** - someone might find it hard to make decisions, plan ahead or work out how to do tasks, and might feel very worried about making mistakes. The idea of sorting through their things is too difficult or upsetting so it is easier to just avoid trying.

- **Childhood experiences** - experiences like childhood poverty, or emotional abuse or neglect, might make somebody feel more connected to their belongings, or make it hard for the person to organise them.
- **Family history or habits** - it is common for somebody who hoards to have family members who share this behaviour.
- **Trauma and loss** - the start of hoarding might be linked to a traumatic period in a person's life such as bereavement, a relationship breakdown or abuse.

Spotting the signs

The following information will help to identify whether somebody may be dealing with a hoarding disorder. These are some of the signs to look out for but there are more:

- difficulty 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 makes 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
- being unable to stop taking free items, such as advertising flyers or sugar packets from restaurants
- buying things because they are a "bargain" or to "stock up"
- not inviting family or friends into the home due to shame or embarrassment
- refusing to let people into the home to make repairs

The effects of hoarding

Hoarding can affect people in a multitude of ways. This includes but is not limited to:

- Struggling to find important things or belongings at home.
- Avoiding inviting people into the home or difficulty answering the front door.
- Difficulty maintaining personal hygiene because the bathroom is inaccessible.
- Difficulty preparing and eating meals because the kitchen or food preparation area is inaccessible, or there is no room inside the fridge.
- Being unable to quickly and safely vacate the premises in an emergency due to things blocking doorways or escape routes.
- Feelings of shame and loneliness which can lead to feelings of isolation, in turn affecting levels of self-esteem.

It is important to bear in mind that somebody living with a hoarder may also experience these effects.

How to offer support

Attempts to help with decluttering may not be well received. It will be helpful to keep the following in mind:

- The person will need to realise they have a problem with hoarding.
- The situation cannot be forced and the person has to be motivated to deal with their situation.
- The person has the right to make choices about their objects and how they live.
- Use respectful language and do not refer to the person's possessions as 'rubbish'. They will be far less likely to engage.
- Not everyone will be open to completely clearing up their space. The main focus should be the welfare and safety of the person often referred to as a 'harm reduction strategy'.
- Listen carefully to what the person wants and ask them what they think will be helpful.
- The person should not be pressured into letting people into their space.

Find out more

The following list is a small selection of the wide range of organisations which publish information about hoarding disorder. *The MCF does not endorse or recommend any of the organisations listed.*

- **Hoarding Disorders UK**
Provides practical help and support to people who are affected by hoarding and disorganisation.
0330 133 2310
www.hoardingdisordersuk.org
- **Hoarding Support**
Provides information, support and advice for people who hoard and their loved ones.
0203 239 1600
www.hoarding.support
- **Hoarding UK**
Supports people affected by hoarding, aiming to empower individuals experiencing this to achieve spatial and personal change to improve their health and wellbeing.
www.hoardinguk.org
- **Independent Age**
Provides information and signposting to specialist organisations.
www.independentage.org/get-advice/health-and-care/mental-health/hoardingdisorder

- **Local Authority**
Each Local Authority should have hoarding guidance documents and protocols.
www.gov.uk/find-local-council
- **Mind**
Provides advice and support to anyone experiencing a mental health issue.
0300 123 3393
<https://www.mind.org.uk/>
- **OCD Action**
Delivers frontline services to assist people with OCD, their families, carers and friends.
0300 636 5478
www.ocdaction.org.uk

Other information

Masonic Charitable Foundation

The MCF provides grants and support for Freemasons and their family members. A wide range of help is available for daily living costs; health, care and wellbeing; and education-related costs for children and young people. Call 0800 035 60 90 or visit www.mcf.org.uk

MCF Factsheets

You may also be interested in the following factsheets:

- **Addiction**
- **Bereavement**
- **Dementia**
- **Loneliness**
- **Mental health**
- **Trauma and PTSD**

Guides

- **Alternative sources of support**
- **Advice and Support**
- **Can we help you?**

Scan the QR code below or visit mcf.org.uk/resources/almoner-resources



Whilst every care has been taken to verify accuracy, the information in this factsheet is for guidance only.

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