



Hoarding – Everyone’s Concern

Hoarding is a complex mental health issue. It can also be a safety issue. Intervention needs to take place at several levels. Hoarding cleanup can be extremely costly for property owners and local governments. Hoarding can cause a variety of complications, including:

- Unsanitary conditions that pose a health risk
- Increased risk of falls
- An inability to perform daily tasks, such as bathing and cooking
- Untreated medical or psychological conditions
- Family conflicts
- Loneliness and social isolation
- Fire hazards

Some Signs of Hoarding:

- Extreme collection and storage of items in the home and yard
- Accumulation of combustible materials (newspapers, magazines, and rubbish)
- Blocked exits (doors & windows)
- Narrow pathway in the home
- Rotting food and/or used food containers
- Insect infestations
- Long-term neglect of home maintenance
- Non-working utilities, such as heat, running water, refrigeration

Hoarding Disorder definition:

- Persistent difficulty discarding or parting with possessions, regardless of their actual value.
- This difficulty is due to a perceived need to save the items and distress associated with discarding them.
- The difficulty discarding possessions results in the accumulation of possessions that congest and clutter active living areas and substantially compromises their intended use. If living areas are uncluttered, it is only because of the interventions of third parties (e.g., family members, cleaners, authorities).
- The hoarding causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning (including maintaining a safe environment for self and others).
- The hoarding is not attributable to another medical condition (e.g., brain injury, cerebrovascular disease, Prader-Willi Syndrome).
- The hoarding symptoms are not better accounted for by the symptoms of another DSM-5 disorder (e.g., obsessions in obsessive-compulsive disorder, decreased energy in major depressive disorder, delusions in schizophrenia or another psychotic disorder, cognitive deficits in major neurocognitive disorder, restricted interests in autism spectrum disorder).

- **With Excessive Acquisition:** If difficulty discarding possessions is accompanied by excessive acquisition of items that are not needed or for which there is no available space.
- **With good or fair insight:** The individual recognizes that hoarding-related beliefs and behaviors (pertaining to difficulty discarding items, clutter, or excessive acquisition) are problematic.
- **With poor insight:** The individual is mostly convinced that hoarding-related beliefs and behaviors (pertaining to difficulty discarding items, clutter, or excessive acquisition) are not problematic despite evidence to the contrary.
- **With absent insight** (i.e., delusional beliefs about hoarding): The individual is completely convinced that hoarding-related beliefs and behaviors (pertaining to difficulty discarding items, clutter, or excessive acquisition) are not problematic despite evidence to the contrary.

Fire Safety

Know the fire-safety risks and how you can keep yourself and first responders safe.

Risks:

Personal items can crowd cooking equipment, making it unsafe to cook.

Personal items can crowd heating equipment, putting you at risk of having a fire.

Difficulties for firefighters:

Blocked windows and doors make it difficult for firefighters to get into your home to fight the fire and search for occupants.

Piles of belongings make it difficult for firefighters to move through your home quickly.

Important:

Always keep anything that can burn at least 3 feet away from cooking and heating equipment.

Keep doorways and windows clear to escape in case there is a fire. This will also prevent injuries from falling over excessive personal items.

Tips for family & friends on communicating with people that have hoarding issues:

Do not use negative comments.

Do not shame or embarrass the person – it will not stop the hoarding and will make the person defensive.

Use encouraging phrases like “I see that you are really trying to make a change in your life.”

Acknowledge that “it must be hard” to part with their possessions.

Do not give out any advice – you are not the expert.

Do not do any “clean outs” – as it does not work, and it is extremely distressing for the person.

Tell the person with hoarding issues that you are there to support them or help them find resources for help.

Tips for people with hoarding issues to make changes to their cluttered life:

Do something every day – even if it is only for 15 minutes.

Pick one small space – one area – and try to declutter it of any garbage, outdated items or anything that is broken, or you have never used.

Make sure that you have clear pathways. It is for your own safety. Paper on the floor is slippery and dangerous.

Make sure that there is nothing on the stove that can cause a fire.

Take your rubbish out at least once a week – or more if necessary.

Wash your dishes every day so that you do not get an insect infestation.

Resources to help you with hoarding issues:

Reach out to your family for support and tell them that you are taking steps to make changes in your life

Find a therapist that uses CBT (cognitive behavioral therapy) and understands hoarding issues

The 16-week “**Buried in Treasures**” or the 8-week “**Getting Unburied and Moving Forward**” work group can help you start on your road to a less cluttered life. You are not alone. Being in a support group with other people that have clutter and hoarding issues can change your life.

Karin E. Fried founded the **Missoula Hoarding Task Force** to bring people and resources together to support individuals experiencing hoarding challenges and help them live safely in their homes.

Karin works with service providers, families, and others who are navigating the complexities of hoarding. She offers consultations, educational seminars, and guidance to help individuals and organizations better understand hoarding and explore effective approaches to challenging situations.

Whether you are looking to expand your knowledge, support someone experiencing hoarding challenges, or develop a plan of action, Karin can help you identify practical strategies that promote safety, dignity, and positive outcomes for everyone involved.

Consultations and seminars are available for individuals, families, and organizations.

If you would like a hoarding situation reviewed, you can also fill out a Case Review form on our website.

Karin E. Fried, CPC, EMT-B, CTACC

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Less Clutter = Less Stress SM in your home, your business and your life

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Certificate of Study in Chronic Disorganization
Certificate of Study in Basic Hoarding Issues with the CD Client
Certificate of Study in Understanding the Needs of the Elderly CD Client
Certificate of Study in Basic ADD Issues with the CD Client
Certificate of Study in CD Client Administration
Certificate of Study in Life Transitions
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CD Specialist - Level II Certificate
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