

When its Hard to Discard: The Challenge of Hoarding Behavior

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What is Hoarding Disorder?

Must Have all Three

1. A large number of possessions that fill up and clutter active living areas of the home, yard, automobile, or workplace to the extent that the living areas, yard, automobile or workplace cannot be used as intended.
2. Persistent difficulty discarding or parting with possessions, regardless of the value others may attribute to these possessions
3. This difficulty is due to **strong urges** to save items and/or **distress** associated with discarding

Proposed Criteria for Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition (DSM V)

Signs of Hoarding Disorder

- Difficulty getting rid of items
- Clutter in the home, office, car, yard, entry way, that makes it difficult to use appliances, furniture, or move around
- Losing important items like money or bills in the clutter
- Feeling like the items have “taken over”

Adapted from Bratjotis, et al., International OCD Foundation

Signs of Hoarding

- Being unable to stop taking free items
- Buying lots of items simply because they are “bargains” or just to “stock up”
- Not inviting friends or family over because of embarrassment or shame
- Refusing to let people into the home to make repairs

Adapted from Bratjotis, et al., International OCD Foundation

Why is it Hard to Discard?

- Difficulty organizing
- Unusually strong positive feelings when getting new items
- Strong, negative feelings when considering letting possessions go

Adapted from Bratiotis, et al., International OCD Foundation

Why is it Hard to Discard?

- Strong beliefs that items are “valuable” or “useful” even when other people don’t want them
- Feeling personally responsible for objects and sometimes thinking objects have feelings
- Denial of problem even when clutter or acquiring clearly interferes with life

Adapted from Bratiotis, et al., International OCD Foundation

People who Struggle with Hoarding

- Usually begins in teens
- Becomes clinically significant in their 30's
- People most likely to be in their 50's when they seek help
- Often live alone
- May have a family member who also struggles with hoarding & clutter
- Serious problems occur in as much as 5% of the population

Adapted from Bratnotis, et al., International OCD Foundation

Hoarding and other Mental Disorders

- 75% people with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) do NOT have a problem with hoarding
- 80% people with hoarding disorder do NOT have OCD
- Hoarding Disorder occurs more often with:
 - Depression
 - Anxiety Disorder
 - Social Phobia
 - Bi-Polar Disorder
 - Attention Deficit Disorder
 - Dementia
 - Schizophrenia

Adapted from Bratnotis, et al., International OCD Foundation

Effects of Hoarding

- Health & Safety Issues
 - Health problems
 - Safety risks
 - Structural damage
 - Fire
- Evictions
- Conflict
 - Family members
 - Friends
 - Authorities

Adapted from Bratiotis, et al., International OCD Foundation

Hoarding Behaviors & the Great Depression

- Link not supported by research
- Trauma can lead to worse hoarding behavior

Adapted from Bratiotis, et al., International OCD Foundation

Can Hoarding be Treated?

Therapeutic Strategies include

- Addressing thoughts & feelings
- Going out without purchasing or picking up new items
- Recycling and/or getting rid of clutter by practicing with clinician and then alone

Adapted from Bratiotis, et al., International OCD Foundation

Can Hoarding be Treated?

Therapeutic Strategies include

- Finding and joining a support group or teaming with a coach to sort & reduce clutter
- Increasing skills in organizing
- Understanding relapses occur
- Developing plan to reduce future clutter

Adapted from Bratiotis, et al., International OCD Foundation

Helping a Friend De-clutter

- Until a person is internally motivated they may not accept your help
- Motivation cannot be forced
- Everyone has a right to chose how they live
- People who hoard are often ambivalent about accepting help and letting go of their belongings

Adapted from Bratiosis, et al., International OCD Foundation

Usual Family Interventions

- Arguing, prodding, pleading, threatening
- De-cluttering/organizing with the person who hoards
- De-cluttering/organizing without the person who hoards
- Cleanups without the person
- Clandestine/Surprise cleanouts

Cleaning Solution?

- Attempts to clean out the clutter of a person who hoards without addressing the underlying issues usually fail in the long run
- Families and communities can spend thousands of dollars cleaning out a home only to find that the problem reoccurs
- Hoarders whose homes are cleared without their participation often experience severe distress

Adapted from Bratiotis, et al., International OCD Foundation

Recommended Family Interventions

- Recognize it's a *Disorder*—not a decision
- Educate yourself & loved ones
 - Its not your fault
 - Its not your responsibility to cure the person who hoards
 - Learn more about the disorder
 - Read Michael Tompkins & Tamara Hartl's book: *Digging Out: Helping your loved one manage clutter, hoarding and compulsive acquiring*

Recommended Family Interventions

- Reach out for professional guidance
 - Mental Health Professionals
 - Adult Protective Services
 - Code Enforcement
 - Medical Professionals
- Find emotional support
 - Counseling
 - Support groups
 - In person
 - On-line

Neglect?

Hoarding is neglect

- if a dependent person
 - or a person 65 or older
- is living in a hazardous or unsafe environment

OC Elder/Dependent Adult Abuse

Hotline: 800-451-5155

OC Child Protective Services Hotline:

800-207-4464

Self Perceptions - Negative

- Ashamed
- Embarrassed
- Overwhelmed
- Out of Control
- Am I crazy/sick?
- Fearful of being found out – especially through emergency situations
- Why can't I do this? Why is this so hard?

Ostrom

Don'ts

- Work with a person who hoards if you are not emotionally healthy
- Belittle, talk down to them, or about them as if they are not there.
- Don't focus on their "stuff"
- Overwhelm them
- Underestimate their intelligence
- Do not, do not, do not conduct "surprise" clean-ups or take things without their permission

Ostrom

Do's

- Establish a relationship of trust
- Be concerned about their health and safety
- Try to see their POV; use their language
- Watch *your* language, especially “mental illness, crazy, worthless, junk, hoarding”
- Appeal to their intelligence and wanting to do the right thing
- Offer emotional support
- Praise any and all efforts

(Ostrom)

Medication?

- No medication for hoarding disorder
- Can be used to reduce related symptoms that may accompany hoarding behavior
 - Depression
 - Anxiety
 - Compulsions

Adapted from Bratiotis, et al., International OCD Foundation

Conclusion

Compulsive Hoarding is Treatable

- Simply throwing away or organizing a hoarder's possessions will not solve their problems
- All people with significant hoarding behaviors need assessment/evaluation
- Mental health treatment can be effective
- Collaboration with traditional and non-traditional service providers improves likelihood of positive outcomes

Adapted from: Saxena et al, 2004



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