

What is Hoarding?

Hoarding is a complex mental health disorder that is now recognised by the WHO (2018) and the ICD (International Classification of Diseases) (2018). Hoarding affects everyone from any background and from any socioeconomic status. It does not discriminate.

Hoarding is defined as: a) Failure and persistent difficulty to discard large quantities of possessions which appears to be useless or have very little value;

b) This difficulty is due to a perceived need to save the items and distress associated with discarding;

c) The symptoms result in the accumulation of possessions that congest and clutter active living areas and substantially compromise their intended use;

d) The hoarding causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

Characteristics of Hoarding

- Fear and anxiety – May have started hoarding as a learnt behaviour or following a significant event with the belief buying or saving things will relieve anxiety and fear and attempts to discard items can induce these feelings.
- Long term behaviour pattern – Possibly developed over many years or decades of ‘buy and drop’.
- Excessive attachment to possessions
- Indecisiveness – May struggle with the decision to discard items that are no longer necessary.
- Unrelenting standards – Will often find faults with others while struggling to organise themselves.
- Socially isolated – Alienated from family and friends, may be embarrassed to have visitors. May refuse home visits from professionals in favour of office appointments.
- Large number of pets – May be a self-confessed ‘rescuer of strays’.
- Mentally Capacious – Able to make decisions that are not related to hoarding.
- Extreme clutter
- Churning – Moving items from one part of the property to another, without ever discarding them.
- Self-care – May appear unkempt and dishevelled however, some people who hoard will use public facilities to maintain their personal appearance.
- Poor insight – Sees nothing wrong with their behaviours and the impact it has on them and others.



One Minute Guide

Hoarding

September 2021

Hoarding Best Practice Framework and Guidance

This Framework and Guidance has been developed by Coventry Safeguarding Adults Board (CSAB), in partnership with Enabling Spaces CIC Hoarding Therapy Service.

This framework is intended to be person-centred and is solution based focused. The framework is for multi-agency use who have clients who may be at risk of hoarding, self-neglect or living in domestic squalor.

The framework provides guidance, advice, process maps, assessments and best practice when engaging with this clientele. Professionals should also ensure they use the clutter image rating tool kit within the framework.

Types of Hoarding

Anything can be hoarded in many different areas including the property, garden or communal areas

Hoarding is generally broken down into four categories:

Specialist Hoarding: This person hoards one specific type of item, e.g. newspapers, mugs, handbags etc.

Generalist Hoarding: This person will hoard anything and everything and within this category, there are three types of saving patterns:

1. Instrumental – Believe it is useful
2. Sentimental – The item holds emotional value
3. Aesthetic – The item looks pretty and appealing

Squalid Hoarding: Squalor refers to the living conditions of a person’s property, and is not defined as a psychological condition, unlike hoarding.

Animal Hoarding: Animal Hoarding is a specific type of hoarding and may or may not be accompanied by the hoarding of other items. Individuals collect many animals for whom they are unable to provide adequate care. Whilst animal hoarding may begin as an act of compassion, eventually the needs of the animals are neglected, and compulsive care giving is pursued to fulfil the unmet needs of the person, despite this care being inadequate,

Tips for Practitioners

Do:

- Imagine yourself in the hoarding person's shoes, considering how would you want others to talk to you to help you manage your anger, frustration, resentment, and embarrassment.
- Match the person's language. Listen for the individual's manner of referring to their possessions ("things", "collections") and use the same language.
- Use encouraging language.
- Highlight strengths.
- Focus the initial discussion on getting to know the person, their safety and organisation of possessions and later work on discarding.

Don't:

- Use judgmental language.
- Use words that devalue or negatively judge possessions. "rubbish" and "junk".
- Let your non-verbal expression say what you're thinking. like frowns or grimaces.
- Make suggestions about the person's belongings. Even well-intentioned suggestions about discarding items are usually not well received by those with hoarding behaviours.
- Try to persuade or argue with the person.
- Touch the person's belongings without explicit permission.
- Try to address hoarding through a quick fix such as an enforced physical deep clean and de-clutter. It will severely impact on the person living there, in most cases causing extreme anxiety and trauma, as it's forced on the individual and without consent.

Key Questions:

- How do you get in and out of your property?
- Do you feel safe living here? How do you move safely around your home?
- Is the property at risk from fire? Do you have a working smoke alarm?
- Is there hot water, lighting and heating in the property? Do these services work properly?
- When did you last go out in the garden? Do you feel safe to go outside?
- Where do you sleep?
- Are you happy for us to share your information with other professionals who help you?

Help

Coventry has its own specialist Hoarding Therapy Service.

Enabling Spaces CIC (ES CIC) is a specialist Occupational Therapy led Hoarding Therapy Service. ES CIC works collaboratively with Coventry City Council & Coventry and Rugby Clinical Commissioning Group as part of the "Preventative and Well-being Program".

ES CIC delivers a therapeutic holistic approach for Coventry residents who are affected by the psychological condition; Compulsive Hoarding.

Referrals can only be made via GP, Mental Health Services and Adult Social Care. Individuals cannot self-refer.

West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) provide a free service called a Safe & Well check across the West Midlands. This is a person-centred home visit to identify the person's risks and vulnerabilities to fire. They will provide support and guidance with the aim to reduce the risk and vulnerability to fire. This may include recommendations, resources and equipment. Cases of hoarding with a number of complexities would be escalated to a Complex Needs Persons Officer (CNO), a fire service member of staff specially trained to deal with complex cases such as hoarding.

To make a referral please contact the WMFS Home Safety Centre on 0800 389 5525 or email contactcentre@wmfs.net or visit www.wmfs.net, quoting your partner reference number.

Key Contacts and Further Information

- [Coventry Safeguarding Adult Board](#)
- [Hoarding Best Practice Framework and Guidance](#)
- [Care Act 2014 Statutory Guidance](#)
- [West Midlands Self-Neglect Guidance](#)
- [Enabling Spaces Website](#)
- [West Midlands Fire Service Safe and Well Information Pages](#)