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Mid and West Wales  
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

# HOARDING

## A Self Help Practical Guide

This is a brief guide for anyone who experiences, or knows anyone who experiences, difficulties with hoarding. It is a general guide and is not intended to replace any professional help or services which can be accessed through your General Practitioner.



**Carmarthen Hoarders Support Group:**  
Telephone: **0795 551 9173**  
Email: **wwhoarders@outlook.com**

**Free Home Fire Safety Check:**  
Telephone: **0800 169 1234**

# What is hoarding?

## Hoarding includes all of the following:

- A person collects and keeps a lot of items, even things that appear useless or of little value to most people.
- These items clutter the living spaces and keep the person from using their rooms as they were intended.
- The collection of these items causes distress affects the person's ability to undertake day-to-day activities.

# Who struggles with hoarding behaviour?

The onset of the difficulties with hoarding can start in early teenage years but people may not seek help for hoarding for many decades. Estimates suggest that serious hoarding problems are present in at least 2% - 5% of the population.

# What are the signs of compulsive hoarding?

- 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.

Usually hoarding begins with a number of possessions but as time goes on, people who have difficulties with hoarding continue to buy or collect or inherit more items and the situation spirals out of control. This often results in piles or stacks of possessions spread throughout the home.

# Why is hoarding an issue for fire safety?

Hoarding can cause problems for your (or other people's) personal wellbeing and safety. Trips and falls are more common. The risk of a serious fire is also escalated. This booklet is intended to provide you with tips on fire safety and also practical steps you can take to help yourself.

# Practical Tips to manage your hoarding

Some people who have difficulties with hoarding have found these tips beneficial but they may not work for everyone. If you feel that you need more support, please use the contacts found at the end of this booklet.

## 1. Get to know your thoughts:

Often people who hoard items may experience certain thoughts that lead them to hoard (e.g. 'what if it's important?', 'I can't waste it', 'It has sentimental value'). Understanding the thoughts you have that lead to you holding onto items is the first step in being able to change these patterns.

## 2. Trying to change the way we think:

Our thoughts are more powerful than we think. If we have the thoughts 'something awful will happen if I throw this item away'; If we really believe this thought, it is going to be hard for us to throw that item away. Therefore, it is important to try and change the way we think about items.

### Questions you can ask yourself include:

- What are the positives about me hoarding?
- What are the negatives about me hoarding?
- What will my life be like in 5 or 10 years time if I continue hoarding?
- What would my life be like in 5 or 10 years time if I wasn't hoarding? Is this stopping me from doing other things I would like to be doing?
- What would a friend say if I told them I had to keep hold of this so as not to waste it?
- What is the worst case scenario if I don't keep this item? Are my fears around this 100% accurate?

Make a record of what comes in and out of your home. Keep a record of the cost of the things you purchase (this can help us to see that over the longer term we may be spending more money than we expect!).

### 3. Use strategies that help you emotionally

Often, people who experience difficulties with hoarding can also feel anxious or stressed (particularly as they are trying to reduce the items that they have been hoarding).

- If you see something you want to buy, leave it for at least 10 minutes. Perhaps go somewhere to relax for that time. Ideally buy it tomorrow if you still need it. This can help us to manage buying that is driven by our emotions.
- Look after yourself by eating well, arranging treats for yourself like socialising with friends and days out.
- Try and build into your day activities that help you relax (e.g. listening to music, relaxation exercises, yoga, etc.).
- Have a sanctuary in your home (e.g. somewhere where you can relax).
- Set set short, medium and long-term goals to help you emotionally whilst you are making changes. For example, you could plan something nice in (e.g. coffee with a friend) for after you have been working on reducing the items in your home. In the longer-term you could think about what the money saved on not buying items / selling items could go towards (e.g. a meal out or a holiday).

### 4. The Three R's – Reduce, Recycle, Re-use

Ultimately, it is important to start reducing the amount of items that have been accumulated. Here are some tips that can help with that:

- Try and deal with important items first. For example, if you have been holding onto (and not dealing with) bills, start with these first.
- Don't start on the most sentimental things.
- Decide on an area you would like to clear. Take a photo of it before and after, adding dates.
- Do functional areas first, avoid starting with the draws or cupboards because you won't see the difference.
- Have three boxes labelled "Save", "Discard", "Display".
- Stay at the target area, not starting another area until you have finished.
- Set small targets per day, say 15 – 20 minutes (or longer if you feel you can manage it).
- When you have finished your target area, clean it even if it is only a small space.
- Start using the area for what it is meant for. For example, if you have cleared the cooker, make sure that this area remains clear and is only used for cooking.

## Fire Safety Tips

For a Free Home Fire Safety Check call 0800 169 1234. Other things you can do to minimise any risk include:

- Keep cooking areas clear.
- Do not place items on or close to heaters, lamps or other electrical equipment.
- If you smoke use an ashtray and never leave a lit cigarette unattended. To ensure that cigarettes are extinguished run the ashtray under the tap.
- Keep escape routes and external doors clear.
- Do not store cylinders in your home as they are a serious hazard during a fire.
- Keep candles away from anything that can catch fire. And never leave them unattended.
- Make sure you have working smoke alarms.



## Additional information

The International OCD Foundation has information on their website about different books on hoarding that you may find useful: <http://hoarding.iocdf.org>

## Contact information

If you feel that you would benefit from professional input to help with hoarding, one of the first points of contact should be your General Practitioner (GP). Your GP should be able to talk with you about the services that are available locally to help with hoarding.

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