
1 What is hoarding

Hoarding disorder was previously considered to be a form of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD). Hoarding is now considered to be a standalone mental disorder and is included in the 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) 2013. However, hoarding can also be a symptom of other mental disorders. Hoarding disorder is distinct from the act of collecting and is also different from people whose property is generally cluttered or messy. It is NOT simply a lifestyle choice and can be caused by traumatic life experiences. The main difference between a hoarder and a collector is that hoarders have strong emotional attachments to their objects which are higher than the real value.

2 Types of hoarding

- **Inanimate objects** – this could include one type of object or a collection of a mixture of objects such as old clothes, newspapers, books, food, containers, or papers.
- **Animal hoarding** – this is the obsessive collecting of animals, often with an inability to provide minimal standards of care. The homes of animal hoarders are often eventually destroyed by the accumulation of animal faeces and infestation by insects.
- **Digital hoarding** – there is little research on this matter, but it could include data collection equipment such as computers, electronic storage devices or papers or it could include a need to store copies of emails and other information in an electronic format.

3 How to recognise hoarding

- Evidence of fear and anxiety which may have started as a learnt behaviour or a significant event such as bereavement
- Long term behaviour pattern
- Excessive attachment to possessions
- Indecisiveness
- Unrelenting standards
- Socially isolated – should also consider if they are refusing home visits and insisting on office-based appointments
- Large number of pets
- Extreme clutter
- Self-care – they may appear unkempt and dishevelled.
- Poor insight

4 A multi agency response

Self-neglect cases often require a multi-agency response, whether this is under safeguarding adults' procedures or as part of multidisciplinary working more generally. There needs to be a clear understanding of the person's needs as a whole. A team-around-the person approach often works well, with a small core group of professionals established to closely monitor risks and agree plans to manage risks. When someone is neglecting their home environment there are many organisations that are likely to be crucial to understanding and managing risks, for example: GP's, Mental Health Services, Housing, Fire & Rescue Service, Police, RSPCA / Animal Welfare etc.



6 Useful resources

As people may see clutter differently, Hoarding UK have published a [Clutter Image Tool](#) to support professional judgement. This will also help identify any deterioration of self-neglect.

- [Hoarding UK](#) – 020 3239 1600; info@hoardinguk.org
- [RSPCA](#) – 03001234999
- [MIND](#) – 0300 123 3393
- [Social Care Institute for Excellence](#)

5 Mental capacity

Learning from Safeguarding Adult Reviews in cases of self-neglect often focuses upon the lack of the practical application of the Mental Capacity Act. Understanding the mental capacity of the person is crucial to managing risks associated with hoarding. This will often require a Mental Capacity Assessment.

Practitioners should ensure that the risks around a particular decision are clearly and honestly explained to allow the person to make an informed choice. This might involve telling someone that they are putting their life at risk. Learning from cases has also highlighted the need to consider whether a person has “executive capacity” – a person's ability to implement a decision they have made.
