



# Hoarding

Explains what hoarding is, possible causes and how you can access treatment and support. Includes tips for helping someone who is hoarding, as well as helping yourself.

If you want to contact us with any feedback, email [contact@mind.org.uk](mailto:contact@mind.org.uk).

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# About hoarding

To give you an introduction to hoarding, this page covers:

- [What is hoarding?](#)
- [Other types of hoarding](#)
- [Hoarding and other health problems](#)
- [Effects of hoarding](#)
- [Hoarding and stigma](#)

## What is hoarding?

Hoarding is having so many things that you cannot manage the clutter where you live, and find it difficult or impossible to throw things away.

You might hoard because you feel a strong need to keep things. But your connection to these things can cause you distress. And the impact of hoarding can affect your day-to-day life.

**Hoarding disorder is a mental health problem** that a doctor can diagnose. But you might also experience hoarding as part of another mental or physical health problem.

If you hoard, you might:

- Feel the need to get more things, even if you have a lot already
- Have very strong positive feelings whenever you get more things
- Feel very upset or anxious at the thought of throwing or giving things away because of your emotional attachment to them
- Find it very hard to decide what to keep or get rid of
- Find it hard to organise your things
- Have so many things that you can't use parts of the place you live in – like not sleeping on the bed or using the sink
- Have lots of disagreements with the people close to you about your things
- Find it hard to pack for trips away, like a holiday – you might pack many more things than you really need, because you can't decide what's important

“I tried to throw away things that I found on the floor, but couldn't because of emotional attachment. Whether it be for practical, sentimental or aesthetic reasoning, I couldn't do it.”

## Why might I hoard?

Many of us have belongings we consider special and things we save. But this is different from hoarding. When you hoard, it's because you might have emotional connections or beliefs about all your things. This makes it very hard to get rid of anything.

For example, you might believe the following:

- You need to keep items 'just in case'. Even if it's been a long time since you last used the item or if you've never used it at all.
- You'll forget important information or memories if you throw things away.
- You won't cope with how you'll feel if you throw things away.
- Throwing things away will harm other people or the environment.
- If you throw anything away, you are being wasteful.
- You should arrange or dispose of things perfectly, or not at all.
- Your things make you feel happy or keep you safe.
- Your things are all unique and special, even if they're very similar.
- You simply need more storage space, or more time to sort your things out.

Lots of us share some of these beliefs about certain belongings. But we don't feel as strongly about them. And we don't experience these beliefs and feelings as part of hoarding.

## How is hoarding different from collecting?

The main difference between collecting and hoarding is:

- How you organise the items
- How much it affects your life

Collecting normally involves saving certain types of items, such as vinyl records or stamps. You'd carefully choose them and normally order them in some way, such as in display cases or folders.

Hoarding is not normally as selective. It doesn't involve organisation in a way that makes the items easy to access or use. Someone who doesn't recognise they have a hoarding problem might call themselves a 'collector'. They might not see their behaviour as any different to collectors.

## Other types of hoarding

Hoarding does not only involve keeping objects in the place you live. There are other types which you might not [recognise as hoarding](#) at first. But they can make you feel the same way, for the same reasons.

## Digital hoarding

Digital hoarding is when you make and keep a large number of digital files. Deleting files can cause you the same distress that other people who hoard might feel around physical objects. And you may want to keep these files for similar reasons.

It might involve buying multiple hard drives and devices, or using cloud storage or other software to keep the files. The types of files can include:

- Photos and videos
- Documents, such as Word files or spreadsheets
- Emails
- Texts or chat messages

You might experience digital hoarding on its own, or along with hoarding physical objects. You might keep a digital record of things you hoard physically. For example, by typing up an index.

Digital hoarding might start out as a way to reduce physical hoarding. For example, you might start taking pictures of objects instead of buying them. But you might end up causing similar problems as physical hoarding.

“I had reasoned with myself that taking photos would not help because I would be creating five objects not just one, whether it be digital or physical, if not both.”

## Animal hoarding

Animal hoarding is when you keep too many animals to provide proper care for. You might have trouble noticing that this lack of care causes harm to the animals. This could include the animals not having:

- Food
- Shelter
- Enough space to exercise and stay healthy
- Vets or medical care
- Clean environments
- Safe breeding environments

To class your behaviour as animal hoarding, you don't need to have a set number of animals. It's more about how you get the animals and how you care for them.

You might experience animal hoarding on its own, or alongside other types of hoarding. Some of us might experience [delusions](#), such as beliefs that animal rescue centres harm animals or can't look after them.

The reasons behind hoarding animals are very complicated. Those of us who hoard animals can often:

- Believe very strongly that we are saving the animals or have a duty to look after them.
- Have a very strong emotional connection to all the animals.
- Find it difficult to see that we are harming them, which can be very hurtful when people tell us we are.

If a vet or animal welfare organisation believes the animals are at risk of harm, they might take the animals away. This can be very upsetting.

The courts can also be involved sometimes. If you need legal advice in these situations, you might be able to get help from the [Law Centres Network](#).

The RSPCA offers information on [how different animals should be cared for](#).

## Hoarding and other health problems

Hoarding can be a symptom of other physical and mental health problems. It's important to know if another health problem is behind hoarding, as this can affect the [treatment](#).

Some health problems that might lead to hoarding include:

- Brain injuries
- [Dementia](#)
- [Depression](#)
- [Obsessive-compulsive disorder \(OCD\)](#)
- [Schizophrenia](#)
- [Personality disorders](#), such as [obsessive-compulsive personality disorder](#)
- [Alcohol or drug addiction](#)
- [Prader-Willi syndrome](#) (a genetic condition)

In these cases, treating the physical or mental health problem may stop you hoarding.

Normally, you won't get a [diagnosis of hoarding disorder](#) if your hoarding is caused by another health problem. Because of this, not all of our information on hoarding might be helpful to you.

“After a divorce and house move, as a single mum working full-time suffering from depression on and off for years, I didn't have the energy to face throwing

things away, especially baby clothes and toys, and my small flat became increasingly full.”

## Is hoarding the same as OCD?

You can experience both [obsessive compulsive disorder \(OCD\)](#) and hoarding disorder at the same time. But experiencing hoarding disorder does not mean you have OCD. They are two different conditions.

In the past, doctors used to think that hoarding was a type of OCD. But since 2015, doctors consider hoarding disorder as its own, unique mental health problem.

Because of this past cross-over, some OCD organisations still offer information on hoarding disorder.

## Effects of hoarding

Hoarding could affect you in lots of different ways. For example, you might:

- **Struggle to find things you need.** This can sometimes lead to [money problems](#), for example if you can't keep on top of bills and letters.
- **Avoid letting people into your space or have difficulty answering the door.** This could mean you don't have visitors or get repairs done, which could lead to [housing problems](#).
- **Find it hard to keep yourself clean.** For example if you can't access your bathroom or washing machine.
- **Find it hard to cook and eat food.** This might be because you can't access your kitchen or there's no room inside your fridge.
- **Be unable to use parts of your space.** For example being unable to sleep in your bed or walk along hallways because they're very cluttered.
- **Be unable to quickly and safely leave in an emergency.** For example, because your things are blocking doorways or escape routes.
- **Distance yourself from others or have issues with people close to you.** This might be because you don't want them to know about your situation, or because they say or do things that don't feel helpful to you.
- **Feel ashamed or lonely.** This could make you feel very [isolated](#) or affect your [self-esteem](#).

You might also experience many of these effects if you [live with someone who hoards](#).

“I stopped asking people round as I was ashamed and it caused me a lot of guilt that I was not hosting family meals. My family wanted to 'help' by turning up with bin bags but this caused more upset.”

## Hoarding and your rights

Official organisations might get involved if the things in your home, and the way you've organised them, cause safety risks to you or your neighbours. This could involve:

- The local council, including the Environmental Health department
- Fire and rescue services
- Social services or safeguarding teams
- The courts
- Animal welfare teams, if you [hoard animals](#) or have animals that are at risk due to hoarding

These teams might suggest things that you aren't comfortable with. In some cases, they might remove you or your belongings from your home – even if you don't want them to.

But remember: you have rights in these situations.

For advice on your rights, contact our [legal line](#). For legal support, contact the [Law Centre Network](#).

## Hoarding and stigma

Many of us have heard of hoarding, but this doesn't mean that we all understand it. The word 'hoarding' is sometimes used in the wrong way, such as:

- The media referring to panic buying as hoarding. This can happen during natural disasters or events like the coronavirus pandemic.
- People calling themselves 'hoarders' because they collect items or have more clutter than usual.

The media might also show hoarding in a very extreme way, which is different to many experiences. This can make it difficult to [recognise that you're hoarding](#) or tell other people about your experiences.

People might also make hurtful assumptions about hoarding, such as thinking it means being unclean or lazy. Hoarding doesn't mean you need help tidying up – it's unhelpful if people try to do this for you. It can feel frustrating and upsetting if people don't understand this. but **it's important to remember that you are not alone.**

For more information, see our pages on [stigma and misconceptions](#).

## I'm a hoarder...

“It is a constant internal fight that I live with, that nobody sees.”

[Read Kate's story](#)

# Recognising hoarding

This page covers:

- [How do I know if I'm hoarding?](#)
- [What kind of things can I hoard?](#)
- [What if I don't know I'm hoarding?](#)
- [Can I get a diagnosis of hoarding disorder?](#)

## How do I know if I'm hoarding?

Some of us who hoard do not know we are hoarding or cannot see how it impacts our lives.

It can feel very stressful if other people tell you that you're hoarding. This might come from friends, family, your partner, or official bodies like the council.

While hoarding, you might:

- Only realise you are hoarding when other people are in your space.
- Not be able to tell you're hoarding – sometimes called 'clutter blindness'.
- Realise that it's affecting your life, but find it hard to stop or know how to change. For more information, see our pages on [helping yourself](#) and [treatments](#).

Hoarding normally starts in the place you live But you might expand or use other spaces such as a car, garage or storage unit. You may also keep things at other people's homes, if they allow you to.

“Realising that there was a problem was my first step, and doing something about it was the next. By talking about my journey to decluttering I hope to raise awareness for others that there is help and hope out there.”

## What kind of things can I hoard?

Everyone will have a different experience of hoarding. It's possible to hoard anything, physical or digital. These are some examples of things that people commonly hoard:

- Clothes or shoes



- Drawings or photographs
- Toys or childhood keepsakes
- Books, newspapers, magazines or leaflets
- Post (open or unopened), bills or other paperwork
- Boxes, bags or other storage containers
- Food, including rotten or out-of-date food
- [Digital files](#), such as emails or photos
- Broken items, which you might have kept and planned to repair
- [Animals](#), such as cats or dogs

You might save things other people see as worthless or of limited value. You might have important and unimportant things mixed up together – such as important bills mixed with old newspapers. This might cause you distress, or it might be how you prefer to arrange your belongings.

“I kept lots of clean packaging as school kept asking for stuff for junk modelling, and I liked to do crafts with my daughter. Slowly things built up and my dining table was completely covered, so we could not actually do the craft stuff.”

## What if I don't know I'm hoarding?

If you're unsure about whether you have a hoarding problem, you could do the following:

- Make an appointment to [speak to your GP](#).
- Contact the organisations in our [useful contacts](#).
- Use tools from The International OCD Foundation to [help identify a hoarding problem](#), such as image ratings and questionnaires. You may want to take these to a GP to discuss if you're unsure how to use them.

You might feel someone close to you has a hoarding problem they aren't recognising. For more information, see our page on [helping someone who hoards](#).

“My mum sleeps on a small patch of her sofa. I don't know the last time she slept in a bed, but it has been several years.”

## Can I get a diagnosis of hoarding disorder?

If you experience certain symptoms, doctors or healthcare professionals may give you a diagnosis of hoarding disorder. They might also call it compulsive hoarding.

Your doctor might give you a diagnosis of hoarding disorder if you:

- Find it difficult to get rid of things you own, even if they aren't worth anything

- Feel emotionally distressed at the thought of getting rid of things – and that you need to save them
- Can't use parts of your home because they're so cluttered
- Keep bringing home things you've bought or got for free, even if you have no space or use for them
- Experience distress due to hoarding or find it's affecting other areas of your life, such as your relationships with [friends and family](#)
- Experience hoarding on its own, not because of [another health problem](#)

It's important to remember that hoarding disorder can be different for everyone. You might recognise some of these signs and symptoms, but you might have other experiences or difficulties.

Research has shown that many people who hoard show these signs in their teenage years. But doctors won't normally diagnose hoarding disorder unless you've got large amounts of clutter in the place you live.

This doesn't usually show until you are a bit older. It might not happen until you have your own space, or you've gathered items over a long period of time. Because of this, **it can be hard to recognise the signs of hoarding early.**

## Causes of hoarding

No one knows exactly what causes hoarding, but there are lots of theories. Different people will have different reasons for their own experiences. It's likely to be a combination of factors.

This page covers:

- [Difficult feelings](#)
- [Perfectionism and worrying](#)
- [Childhood experiences](#)
- [Trauma and loss](#)
- [Family history or habits](#)

### Difficult feelings

Hoarding can be related to difficult experiences and painful feelings. You may find these hard to express, face or resolve.

Some people say hoarding helps them cope with other mental health problems, or distracts them from feeling very anxious, upset or afraid.

There can sometimes be a link between hoarding and impulse control. This is when you find it almost impossible to resist certain actions, such as buying items.

## Perfectionism and worrying

If you hoard things, you might feel very worried about making mistakes – also known as perfectionism. You might also find it hard to make decisions, plan ahead or work out how to do tasks. These could be possible reasons why some of us are more vulnerable to hoarding.

For example, you might struggle to sort or group your things into types, or to decide what to keep or throw away. The idea of this might seem so difficult or upsetting that it feels easier not to try.

“Sometimes I get triggered because I have anxieties about society's expectations of what I should be doing or achieving.”

## Childhood experiences

Some researchers believe hoarding can relate to childhood experiences of losing things, not owning things, or people not caring for you. This might include experiences like:

- [Money worries](#) or living in poverty in childhood.
- Having your belongings taken or thrown away by someone.
- Hardship, emotional abuse or neglect. For example, if your basic needs weren't met, or people didn't treat you with warmth or support

These experiences might make you feel more connected to your belongings, or make it hard for you to organise them.

“My parents were full of stories of their parents' and grandparents' deprivations, it was part of my world view growing up, and I know that chronic disorganisation multiplies the impact of every extra item I have.”

## Trauma and loss

You might be able to link the start of your hoarding to a [traumatic](#) period in your life. This could include:

- Being [abused](#), bullied or harassed, including experiencing [racism](#)
- Breaking up with a partner
- Experiencing physical health problems
- [Losing someone](#) close to you
- Feeling extremely [lonely](#) or isolated

- Experiencing long periods of [stress](#), or feeling stressed a lot

For some of us, these experiences could make your hoarding worse if you started doing it before a traumatic period.

“It was like she built a wall of stuff to keep everyone out. Having experienced several traumatic events in her life: the loss of her baby (while her father was dying), a terrible divorce, her partner having a heart attack and finally the death of her mother. No-one could hurt her if she was protected by all of this stuff.”

## Family history or habits

It's common for those of us who hoard to have family members who share this behaviour, such as a parent or sibling. Some studies suggest that certain genes could make you more vulnerable to hoarding.

But family links are very complicated. If you grew up around hoarding, you might have learned some of these habits and behaviours. You could also hoard without any other family members who have problems with hoarding.

If you [live with someone who hoards](#), this can result in you having more clutter in your home overall. You might find it really difficult to make changes because you disagree with each other on what to keep or throw away.

“I call my mum a hoarder because she is, I just had no idea that I'd become one too. I thought of my childhood and the shame I felt that my house wasn't like my friends' houses.”

## Helping yourself with hoarding

Living with hoarding problems can be difficult. But there are things you can do to help yourself cope. This page has some suggestions for you to consider.

Not all of these suggestions might work for you – **it's OK if you need to try a few things before you find what works best.**

This page covers:

- [Starting to manage your hoarding](#)
- [Staying motivated](#)
- [Coping with difficult feelings](#)
- [Keeping yourself safe](#)
- [Helping others understand](#)

## Starting to manage your hoarding

It's not unusual to feel overwhelmed if you're trying to cope with a hoarding problem. You might feel like helping yourself will be too hard or take too long. And if you don't know where to start, taking small steps can help you make good progress. For example:

- **Set yourself small goals.** Try something like throwing away one thing per day.
- **Set a timer and try to tidy one area.** Or you could limit the time in other ways, like listening to a set number of songs.
- **Make a plan.** For example, you might schedule one hour a week for cleaning. Try to plan where your items will go, such as in the bin or as a donation. As soon as possible, try to make sure they go exactly where you planned.
- **Cancel things like magazine subscriptions or put up a 'no junk mail' sign.** This might help to stop new things coming into your home.
- **Come up with some rules.** Some people use the rule that if they haven't used an item in the last year, they'll get rid of it. Different rules work for different people, but these can help to make decisions easier.
- **Explore new activities that don't involve buying or saving things.** This could be going for a walk, watching a film or visiting a museum. You could also talk to people close to you about gift giving. Try to agree on ways of giving gifts that don't involve physical objects, like having a meal out.

“I started to try to declutter, and it really wasn't easy. I spent days crying, trying to find something that I could part with to get the ball rolling. Eventually I managed to make a start, and it felt great. The more floor I could see the better I felt.”

## Staying motivated

You might have been trying to manage your hoarding problem for a while, but sometimes feel like you're getting nowhere. Because of this, you may find it difficult to stay motivated.

Some of these tips might help you keep motivated and notice how far you've come:

- **Find ways to track your progress.** You could try taking before-and-after pictures of the space you've decided to clean. This can help you see how much progress you've made.
- **Make things easier for yourself.** This might include using a litter-picking tool to pick things up without touching them, or starting with an area you find easier to clear.
- **Find support for related issues.** If you're experiencing other issues alongside hoarding, it might help if you look into support for these. This could take some pressure off you. You might be able to find help in our pages on [money worries](#), [addiction](#) and [housing problems](#).

- **Celebrate your wins.** Try going out with friends or watching a TV show you like when you have achieved any goals – no matter how small they may seem.
- **Ask for help.** You may have someone close to you who could help you. Sometimes just having someone to talk to before or after you clear can feel useful.

If you feel you need more practical support, you might want to contact the organisations in our [useful contacts](#).

And if you experience difficulties with hoarding, **you may be entitled to a needs assessment by social services**. For more information, see our pages on [social care](#).

“In the last four years I have kept my snail's pace progress going by getting motivation from YouTube, listening to lectures on hoarding psychology and decluttering, and seeking help on self-help forums.”

## Coping with difficult feelings

Trying to manage your hoarding can make you feel emotionally drained. It might bring up lots of difficult feelings, which can make handling practical tasks harder. There are ways you can support yourself and get help for these feelings. For example:

- **Talk to someone.** You might find it hard to open up about hoarding, but it might help if you share how you're feeling. If you don't feel you can talk to people around you, contact some of the organisations in our [useful contacts](#).
- **Try peer support.** Connecting with people with similar or shared experiences can be really helpful. For information on where you can find this sort of support, see our pages on [useful contacts](#) and [peer support](#).
- **Keep a diary.** Try noting down your moods and feelings, as well as keeping a note of your hoarding. This could help you spot patterns in what triggers your hoarding behaviours, and the reasons behind difficult feelings.
- **Take time to relax.** Trying to manage your hoarding can be very hard work – emotionally as well as physically. It can help to find ways to relax that don't involve getting or saving things. For more ideas, see our pages on [stress](#), [relaxation](#) and [nature](#).
- **Try to take care of yourself.** Try to get enough [sleep](#) and do enough [physical activity](#) to look after your general [wellbeing](#).

It's a big step to recognise that you might have a hoarding problem and need some help. Even if you're finding it hard, knowing you're working towards change is something to be proud of.

“Sometimes I'll just write on an online forum to vent how angry I am at myself... Yes anger and depression are closely enmeshed in my clutter, and squalor. I can

be furious at myself for being in such an awful mess, and can end up telling myself that I don't even deserve to have a decent home.”

## Keeping yourself safe

Hoarding can sometimes make the place you live less safe. You might have a higher risk of fire spreading, or it may be hard for you to leave in an emergency.

You might not feel ready to start dealing with other parts of your hoarding problem. But it can be beneficial to make sure the place you live in is safe. For example:

- You can ask your local fire service to do a safety check. Many fire services understand hoarding. They might ask you to describe your situation using the [Clutter Image Rating](#).
- The London Fire Brigade has tips on its website about how to [reduce the risk of fire from hoarding](#).
- The [Age UK website](#) also has more information on [safety at home](#), which might help older people in particular.

## Helping others understand

You might disagree with people around you when it comes to hoarding. This could be friends, family, your partner, or official bodies like the council. It might be because they:

- Say you have a hoarding problem, but you don't think you do
- Insist on helping you clean, but you don't want them to
- Cannot see that you have made progress
- Do not believe you can keep up the progress in the long term

It can feel very upsetting to hear these things from people close to you. To help them understand your situation a bit better, try showing them our pages for [friends and family](#) and [talking about a mental health problem](#).

Official bodies like the council or a housing officer might say things you disagree with. Find out about your rights by speaking to our [legal line](#) or reading our information on [discrimination](#).

## Treatment for hoarding disorder

If you feel distressed by hoarding, you might want to consider seeking treatment. A growing number of mental health professionals are aware of hoarding disorder.

They should know that they need to help you take things at your own pace. And they should not pressure you to make changes faster than you want to.

This page covers:

- [Talking to your GP](#)
- [Talking therapies for hoarding disorder](#)
- [Medication for hoarding disorder](#)

## Talking to your GP

The first step when seeking help is usually to visit your GP. If they think you're experiencing hoarding disorder, they might refer you to a psychiatrist or other mental health professional. They will assess you and might look into whether there are any [other health problems](#) related to your hoarding.

The [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence \(NICE\)](#) – the organisation that produces guidelines on best practice in healthcare – hasn't issued treatment guidelines for hoarding disorder. But the guidelines for treating OCD mention hoarding because [OCD and hoarding used to be grouped together](#).

These guidelines advise that:

- You should be offered evidence-based treatments, such as [cognitive behavioural therapy \(CBT\)](#).
- Healthcare professionals should consider offering you treatment in the place you live, which some people find helpful.
- If you can't attend appointments or have visitors, your doctor should also consider treatment over the phone.

For more information about talking to your GP, see our pages on [seeking help for a mental health problem](#).

## Tools to help you talk to your GP

There are also some tools to help you start a conversation about hoarding disorder with your doctor:

- **Hoarding ice breaker tools.** Filling in a hoarding ice breaker form could help you to talk to your GP. You can download a copy from websites like [Hoarding Disorders UK](#) or [Rainbow Red](#). It can help you explain how hoarding affects you.
- **Clutter Image Rating tool.** Using this tool involves looking at pictures and choosing which ones most closely match your situation. You can download a copy from [Hoarding Disorders UK](#). You may also be able to find a free app by searching your app store for 'Clutter Image Rating'.

Not everyone finds the Clutter Image Rating tool useful. It might not properly reflect the size or type of place you live in, for example if you live in a caravan. You might also have some other [symptoms of hoarding disorder](#) but not yet have a home that is very cluttered.



**It's OK if the Clutter Image Rating does not work for you.**

## Talking therapies for hoarding disorder

The main talking therapy used to treat hoarding disorder is cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). This focuses on how your thoughts, beliefs and attitudes affect your feelings and behaviour.

Evidence suggests that both individual and group CBT can help. It also suggests they're more likely to help if you follow a programme designed for hoarding disorder – rather than OCD, for example. Hoarding-specific treatments are improving as researchers learn more about what can help.

Together with your therapist, you might:

- Examine your beliefs about needing to keep things
- Try to understand why it's hard for you to get rid of things
- Learn skills to help you cope with difficult feelings

Other types of talking therapy may also help you, but experts need more research to find out what could work best.

For more information, see our pages on [talking therapies](#) and [cognitive behavioural therapy \(CBT\)](#).

“There are a variety of therapies that have together helped to support me and more importantly, allow me to understand why and how I became a hoarder, so I am able to change my responses.”

### Therapy in the place you live

Research suggests that it can help if your therapist visits you in the place you live. This way they can understand more about your situation and help you work out how to make changes.

Some people also find it helps to have treatment in a familiar environment.

“As part of the course, we were also each given a 'declutter buddy'. Initially, the idea of someone coming into my home filled me with terror and dread, but as soon as my buddy, Ebi, arrived I felt calm and safe. Ebi helped me on a practical level as well as an emotional level.”

### Long-term therapy

You might need a long-term CBT approach to help manage your hoarding disorder. It can take a long time to feel comfortable and take steps to address your hoarding. But unfortunately, in most regions the NHS only offers short-term or medium-term therapy.

You may need to be very persistent to get the right help from the NHS, or consider other ways to access treatment. An advocate may be able to help you. For more information, see our pages on [advocacy](#) and [making yourself heard](#).

If you can afford it, you can also seek private therapy outside the NHS. You can search for therapists who specialise in hoarding disorder through the:

- [UK Council for Psychotherapy \(UKCP\)](#)
- [British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy \(BACP\)](#)

For more information, see our page on [private therapy](#).

## Medication for hoarding disorder

There aren't any specific medications for hoarding disorder. But some people find medication helps with other problems they experience alongside hoarding. Your doctor might offer medication if your hoarding is a symptom of [another health problem](#).

Medication really helps some people but isn't right for others. Before deciding to take any medication, it's important to have all the facts you need to make an informed choice.

For more information, see our pages on [things to consider before taking medication](#) and your [right to refuse medication](#).

For guidance on how to come off medication safely, see our pages on [coming off medication](#).

“To be honest my recovery probably would not have started without medication. The anxiety and depression needed to be sorted out a bit before the house could even start to be sorted.”

## Helping someone who hoards

This section is for friends, partners or family members who want to support someone who is hoarding.

You may feel very worried if you think someone you care about is hoarding. It might feel difficult to know how to talk to them about it, especially if they don't agree that they are hoarding.

You might have already tried to offer support, but the person you're worried about is maybe unwilling or unable to accept help. This can feel really difficult, worrying or frustrating.

But there are lots of helpful things you can try. We offer suggestions for ways you can support them while also looking after your own wellbeing.

## Do not consider forced clear-ups

If you're supporting someone who is hoarding, it's understandable that you want to help them clear up. And you might believe you're doing them a favour if you clean and tidy things for them.

But **this is very unlikely to help in the long term – and it could make things worse**. Clearing out their clutter does not deal with the reasons why the clutter is there.

You might believe that you're helping by turning up without advance warning or permission, or paying someone to tidy without the person knowing.

However, **professionals who understand hoarding should never agree to make surprise visits**. They should know that it's unhelpful to tidy up against someone's wishes.

This page covers:

- [Offering general support](#)
- [Helping to clean or clear](#)
- [Supporting people who don't think they hoard](#)
- [Tips for your own wellbeing](#)
- [Living with someone who is hoarding](#)

## Offering general support

If you are supporting someone who is hoarding, whether they agree or not, you should try to keep these important points in mind:

- **Use respectful language.** Don't refer to their possessions as 'junk' or 'rubbish'. This shows that you don't understand their connection to the objects or why they want to keep them. They will be less likely to open up to you if you talk about their things this way.
- **Don't focus on a total clean-up.** While some people who hoard might be able to completely clear their space, this isn't the case for everyone. The important focus should be the safety and wellbeing of your loved one, which can be achieved without completely clearing everything. This is sometimes called a 'harm reduction strategy'. You can find out more on the [International OCD Foundation website](#).
- **Listen to what they want.** Ask the person close to you what they think will be helpful. This will give them more control over the situation and show you care

about what they want. For example, they might want you to sit with them while they clean or for you to help take things to charity shops.

- **Think carefully about gifts.** It may be unhelpful to give them new items. If you want to give a gift, try thinking of alternatives like going for a meal or day out. Try to be understanding if they get rid of something you've given them. Even if this feels hurtful to you, it might be part of their progress.
- **Don't pressure them to let you into their space.** They might feel really anxious about visitors, so it's important not to take it personally if they don't invite you in. If you'd like to spend time together, it might help to consider other places you could meet instead.
- **Let them know you are there.** One of the most important things you can do is let the person you're worried about know that you care. Make sure they know that you can help them find support when they're ready.
- **Include your loved one in calls to authorities.** You might feel that authorities such as social services, the RSPCA, or the council need to be involved. If so, you should discuss this with your loved one first. This will make them feel more included in the decision and more likely to accept help. You should only call the authorities without their permission if there is a serious risk to safety.

## Helping to clean or clear

During their process of starting to clean or clear, you can help by thinking about the following:

- **Respect their decisions.** Most people have some attachment to things they own. You might not understand why they keep particular things. But try to remember that the items they hoard feel important to them – even if they don't seem valuable to you.
- **Don't take over their space.** It's understandable to want to help them improve things. But if you try to take charge, they might not want to accept any help at all. For example, don't touch or move things without their permission.
- **Try to be patient.** Once someone seeks help with hoarding, it can still take a long time before they're ready to make changes.
- **Help them celebrate successes.** Try celebrating after they clear a small area. They might feel very anxious about what's left to do, so it could help if you encourage them to notice achievements. You could also remind them to take things one step at a time.

“Discarding is never a simple yes-no process, and most items will be pondered over through several sort-throughs, over a period of months and years.”

## Supporting people who don't think they hoard

Not everyone is ready to admit that they have problems with hoarding. If someone close to you is in this position, try to:

- **Be gentle – you can't force someone to change their behaviour.** Don't try to persuade, trick or force someone into clearing up or throwing things away. This is unlikely to help them change in the long-term and could make them withdraw from you.
- **Help them to seek treatment and support.** For example, you could encourage them to use the [Clutter Image Rating](#) or [hoarding ice breaker tools](#) to help them talk to their doctor. For more information, see our pages on [helping someone else to seek help](#). We also have advice on [what to do if someone doesn't want help](#).
- **Help them stay safe.** Focus on things such as fire safety and emergency access. This can at least make the hoarding situation a safer environment. The London Fire Brigade has tips on its website about how to [reduce the risk of fire from hoarding](#).
- **Avoid making threats.** Threatening to cut off contact or call authorities like the council is unlikely to help the situation. It can make your loved one feel more alone and less likely to talk to you about what they're going through.

“I feel that my mum is at risk in the event of a fire or if she has a medical emergency. The simple daily tasks that we all take for granted (getting into bed, cooking a meal, going up the stairs) are all made more difficult (and dangerous) by the amount of stuff in her home, and her attachment to it.”

## Tips for your own wellbeing

Supporting someone with a mental health problem can feel draining. It's important to look after yourself as well:

- **Set limits for yourself.** It can be really difficult if you're supporting someone who doesn't think they're hoarding, or doesn't want to seek help. It's important to consider what help you feel able to offer and set yourself limits.
- **Try peer support.** Some people find it really helpful to connect with others who are also supporting someone with hoarding. To find peer support, you could contact [Mind's Infoline](#) or your [local Mind](#) to find support in your area. You can also explore our [useful contacts](#) or try online peer support, such as [Side by Side](#).
- **Look after yourself.** Supporting someone else can sometimes be difficult and stressful. It's important to remember that your mental health is important too. For more information, see our pages on [coping when supporting someone else](#), [managing stress](#) and [maintaining your wellbeing](#).

## Living with someone who is hoarding

You might find it very difficult living with someone who is hoarding, or has [hoarding disorder](#). You might have lived with them for a long time without mentioning their hoarding, or you might have recently realised it.

What steps you take might also depend on what kind of relationship you have, and how their behaviour makes you feel. The other tips on this page can still help you, but you could also consider these ideas:

- **Respect each other's boundaries.** Work together to keep these boundaries where you need them. For example, this could involve agreeing that certain spaces need to be clutter-free for safety reasons. Or having a space in the home that's just for you.
- **Address the hoarding problem together.** Work out what common goals you have for your shared space and discuss how you can achieve these together.
- **Give them space.** It might help to give them time alone to sort things out. Some people find it easier to do this without someone else there. For example, you could go see a movie while they clean.
- **Know your limits.** It's OK if you feel you can no longer live in a space where someone is hoarding. It's not always possible to find somewhere else to stay, so it might help to try things like making sure you spend time outside the house regularly. This could include going for walks, visiting friends or going on a day out.
- **Talking therapy.** You can go to some types of [talking therapies](#) with the person who is hoarding. This can help you both express how you are feeling. The charity Relate has more information on [relationship and family therapy](#).

## Useful contacts

### Mind's services

- [Mind's helplines](#) provide information and support by phone and email.
- [Local Minds](#) offer face-to-face services across England and Wales. These services include talking therapies, peer support and advocacy.
- [Side by Side](#) is Mind's support online community for anyone experiencing a mental health problem.

## Other organisations

## **Age Cymru (Wales)**

[0300 303 44 98](tel:03003034498)

[ageuk.org.uk/cymru](http://ageuk.org.uk/cymru)

Information and support for older people in Wales.

## **Age UK (England)**

[0800 678 1602](tel:08006781602)

[ageuk.org.uk](http://ageuk.org.uk)

Information and support for older people.

## **British Psychological Society (BPS)**

[bps.org.uk](http://bps.org.uk)

Information about psychology, including a list of chartered psychologists.

## **Help for Hoarders**

[helpforhoarders.co.uk](http://helpforhoarders.co.uk)

Help for people experiencing hoarding and their families, including support groups and an online forum.

## **Hoarding Disorders UK**

[0330 133 2310](tel:03301332310)

[hoardingdisordersuk.org](http://hoardingdisordersuk.org)

Support for people affected by hoarding, including support groups.

## **Hoarding UK**

[020 3239 1600](tel:02032391600)

[hoardinguk.org](http://hoardinguk.org)

Support for people affected by hoarding, including support groups.

## **Law Centres Network**

[lawcentres.org.uk](http://lawcentres.org.uk)

Information about Law Centres, which defend the legal rights of people who can't afford a lawyer. Includes a searchable directory.

## **National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)**

[nice.org.uk](https://www.nice.org.uk)

Produces guidelines on best practice in healthcare.

## NHS UK

[nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk)

Information about health problems and treatments, including details of local NHS services in England.

## OCD Action

[0300 636 5478](https://www.ocdaction.org.uk)

[ocdaction.org.uk](https://www.ocdaction.org.uk)

Information and support for people affected by OCD and hoarding, including online forums and local support groups.

## Rainbow Red

[07931 303310](https://www.rainbowred.co.uk)

[rainbowred.co.uk](https://www.rainbowred.co.uk)

Provides an ice breaker form for people wanting to seek help with hoarding.

## Relate

[relate.org.uk](https://www.relate.org.uk)

Provides help and support with relationships, including counselling and telephone support.

## Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA)

[rspca.org.uk](https://www.rspca.org.uk)

Animal charity working to prevent cruelty and promote kindness to animals in England and Wales.

## Samaritans

[116 123](https://www.samaritans.org) (freephone)

[jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

Freepost SAMARITANS LETTERS

[samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org)

Samaritans are open 24/7 for anyone who needs to talk. You can [visit some Samaritans branches in person](#). Samaritans also have a Welsh Language Line on [0808 164 0123](https://www.samaritans.org) (7pm–11pm every day).



## The Silver Line

[0800 4 70 80 90](tel:08004708090)

[thesilverline.org.uk](https://thesilverline.org.uk)

Provides support, information, friendship and advice for older people (over 55) who may feel lonely or isolated.

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References are available on request.