

Excessive Clutter and Hoarding

Independent Treatment Guide

Hoarding disorder can cause distress and inability to function in day-to-day living. According to the DSM-5, It is characterized by:

1. Excessive acquisition of stuff*
2. Difficulty discarding possessions
3. Living spaces that can't be used for their intended purposes because of clutter
4. Causing significant distress or impairment (Frost & Hartl, 1996)

**Not universal in all people who hoard*

If your health and safety, or the health and safety of someone you know is at risk, consider seeking immediate assistance before beginning the steps in the Independent Treatment Guide. Immediate help is available by calling 911 or 988.

Step 1: Prioritize finding a mental health clinician.

If hoarding is affecting your safety, relationships, daily activities, or ability to use your living space, working with a mental health professional can help. Hoarding disorder is often connected to other challenges such as anxiety, depression, ADHD, OCD, trauma, or grief. A therapist can help you understand what is contributing to the clutter, develop new skills, and work toward goals that are important to you.

Contact your insurance company or healthcare provider for help finding a therapist. If possible, look for someone who has experience treating hoarding disorder or related mental health conditions.

Pillars Community Health provides therapy, peer support, and community-based mental health services for children, adolescents, and adults. Our staff can help individuals explore the thoughts, emotions, and life experiences that contribute to hoarding behaviors, develop practical coping skills, and work toward creating safer and more functional living environments. We use a compassionate, person-centered approach that respects each individual's goals and readiness for change. Call us at 708-PILLARS or visit our website at www.pillarscommunityhealth.org for more information or to be connected to care. If you or a loved one is experiencing a mental health crisis, contact a crisis worker by calling 708-6-CRISIS. We are here to help.





The Living Room is a safe place where you can talk with a peer if you are experiencing life's emotional stresses. The trained peer recovery support specialists use their personal experience to help you find and maintain your recovery. Services are free of charge.

- 4731 Willow Springs Rd., La Grange, IL
- 7602 63rd Street, Summit, IL (services available in English or Spanish)

Step 2: Consider a Case Manager.

Case Managers can assist clients with tools and resources such as benefits and services, in home assistance, housing assistance, and other needed referrals. Case Managers can also advocate for clients and work with other professionals to assist the clients depending on their needs.

If you are age 60 or older, you can contact Aging Care Connections to be connected with a case manager.

Address: 111 W Harris Ave, La Grange, IL 60525
Phone: (708) 354-1323



Step 3: Gather close family members and friends to help declutter.

Ask your compassionate neighbors, family members, or friends to help with the cleaning, organizing, and clearing process.

To Family and Friends helping in this process:

- Encourage your loved one to seek medical help for their disorder.
- Ask for permission before touching or discarding belongings. This will help prevent the trigger of negative emotions.
- Remain calm when anger, anxiety, frustration, or grief presents itself in your loved one. Try to remind yourself that hoarding disorder, along with other mental health diagnoses, is a medical condition that they are trying to overcome.
- Treatment should never be forced. At the end of the day, your loved one will make the final decision about their lives.
- Do not shame someone for their clutter. This can be done by not using negative language such as "junk" or "trash" when referring to their belongings. Instead, remind them of their achievements thus far by referring to the pictures you will take during the decluttering process, and remind them of their goals.

Step 4: Prepare for decluttering

- Anticipate logistical concerns about the clean-out. Do you have access to clothes, medication, towels and other personal needs?
- Plan for specific criteria around decision making for what to keep, discard or donate.
- Learn and practice stress management techniques
- Consider using a binder with tabs.
 - Label each tab as:
 - **Schedule** - Create a schedule of when you would like to declutter during the week. Decluttering should not typically occur every day unless you are in a time-sensitive situation - allow yourself to rest some days. Starting slow and gradually increasing your workload will help keep you on the right track.
 - **Goals** - This section will allow you to be mindful of what your needs are and how they can be addressed. You can refer to the Uniform Inspection Checklist included at the end of this guide for guidance on prioritizing the most important safety goals.
 - **Pictures** - This section is important when feeling overwhelmed. By taking pictures of your clutter during the decluttering process, you can see the progress you've made.
 - **Resources** - Documents such as budgeting worksheet, what-to-keep worksheet, cleaning schedule, and mental check-in guide are provided at the end of this document.
- Research and select a location where you will donate items you no longer wish to keep. A list of locations that take recycling and donations is included in the Appendix.

Step 5: Decluttering

Possessions are often connected to memories, identity, safety, responsibility, or future plans. The goal is to make thoughtful decisions while maintaining emotional regulation and personal choice.

Follow the Plan

Review the goals and priorities established during treatment planning. Focus on the specific area, category of items, or safety concern identified for that session. Avoid shifting to unrelated areas or creating new piles that can become overwhelming.

Helpful reminders:

- Work on one designated area at a time.
- Follow previously established sorting categories (e.g., Keep, Donate, Recycle, Trash, Unsure).
- Prioritize safety hazards such as blocked exits, fire risks, spoiled food, or fall hazards.
- Make decisions based on current goals rather than momentary emotions.
- Take photographs of progress to document accomplishments and maintain motivation.

When difficult decisions arise, return to the agreed-upon treatment goals and ask, "How does keeping or removing this item support the life I want to live?"

Emotional Check-In

Decluttering can trigger a wide range of emotions, including anxiety, grief, guilt, sadness, anger, fear, or relief. Regular emotional check-ins help prevent distress from becoming overwhelming and support healthier decision-making.

Throughout the session:

- Pause periodically to assess your emotional state.
- Notice physical signs of stress such as muscle tension, rapid heartbeat, sweating, or difficulty concentrating.
- Identify the thoughts that accompany strong emotions.
- Use coping skills before distress becomes unmanageable.

Step 6: Maintaining Progress and Preventing Relapse

After decluttering, develop a plan for maintaining your living space. This may include:

- Scheduling regular decluttering or organizing sessions.
- Completing a weekly walk-through of key living areas.
- Addressing incoming items before they accumulate.
- Continuing to use decision-making strategies learned during treatment.
- Identifying early warning signs that clutter may be increasing again.

Remember that setbacks can happen. A small increase in clutter does not erase the progress you have made. The goal is to recognize challenges early and take action before they become overwhelming.

Stay Connected to Support

Recovery is often more successful when it is not done alone. Ongoing support can provide encouragement, accountability, practical strategies, and understanding from others who have had similar experiences.

Clutterers Anonymous

- Clutterers Anonymous (CLA) is a peer-led fellowship based on the Twelve Steps that supports individuals seeking freedom from clutter and hoarding behaviors. Meetings provide a safe, nonjudgmental environment to share experiences and learn from others in recovery.
- If a local meeting is not available, consider starting your own support group. Many communities have individuals who would benefit from a structured opportunity to connect, share challenges, and celebrate successes together. A starter kit can be purchased and downloaded here: <https://clutterersanonymous.org/meetings/start-a-meeting/>.

Celebrate Recovery 12 Step Program

- Celebrate Recovery is an international biblical and balanced 12 step program to help people overcome their hurts, hang-ups, and issues. Only 1 in 3 persons who attend Celebrate Recovery are dealing with chemical addictions (such as alcohol and drugs). Sexual addiction, food and body issues, love and relationship addiction, hoarding, trauma, anxiety, co-dependency, and physical/emotional/sexual abuse are other common struggles/issues that people are working on.
- All adults 18 or over are welcome to attend any meeting. There is no prior registration or cost. Leaders are volunteers and peers in recovery with recovery experience. We are not licensed counselors.
- Other supports available are: sponsors, accountability partners, step studies (on another night of the week), monthly dinners, group outings, and opportunities to serve others.
- There is a Celebrate Recovery app which can be downloaded for free. The app contains a group locator, teaching podcasts, and more resources.

Address: Hope Church - 5707 Wolf Road La Grange Highlands, IL 60525

Time: Mondays: 7:00 P.M. – 8:30 P.M. (coffee/snacks 6:30)

Contacts: Bruce 708-717-9190 (men) Sandy 708-717-9195 (women)

Appendix

- Activities of Daily Living Scale in Hoarding Disorder
- Clutter Image Rating Scales
- Uniform Inspection Checklist
- Donation Locations

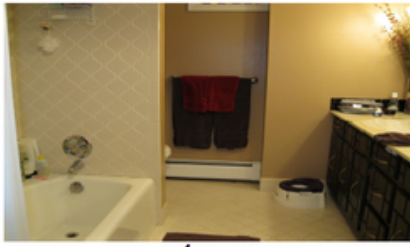
Activities of Daily Living Scale in Hoarding Disorder

Published in final edited form as: *J Obsessive Compuls Relat Disord*. 2013 April 1; 2(2): 85–90.
doi:10.1016/j.jocrd.2012.12.004.

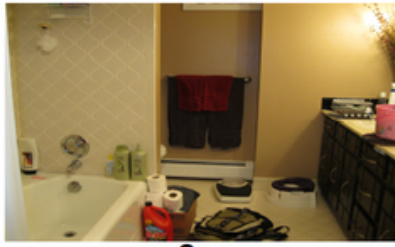
Activities affected by clutter or hoarding problem	Can do it easily	Can do it with a little difficulty	Can do it with moderate difficulty	Can do it with great difficulty	Unable to do	N/A
1. Prepare food	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Use refrigerator	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Use stove	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Use kitchen sink	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Eat at table	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Move around inside the house	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Exit home quickly	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Use toilet	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Use bath/shower	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Use bathroom sink	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. Answer door quickly	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. Sit in sofa/chair	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. Sleep in bed	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. Do laundry	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. Find important things (such as bills, tax forms, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6

Clutter Image Rating Scale: Bathroom

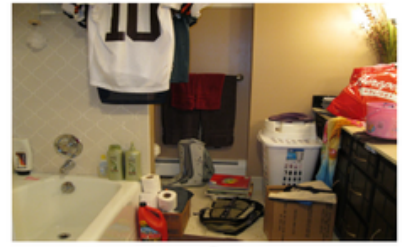
Please select the photo below that most accurately reflects the amount of clutter in your room



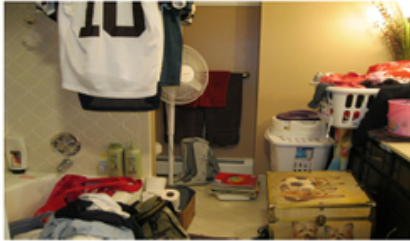
1



2



3



4



5



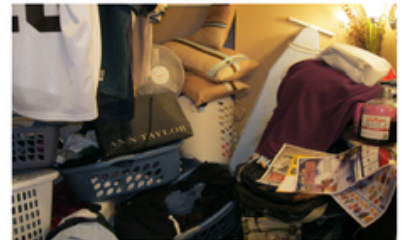
6



7



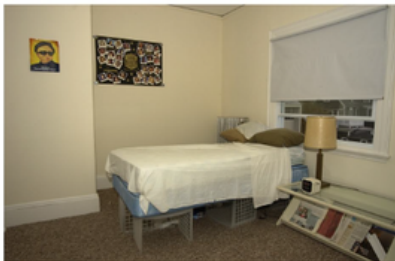
8



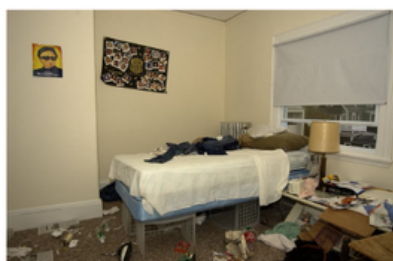
9

Clutter Image Rating: Bedroom

Please select the photo that most accurately reflects the amount of clutter in your room.



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9

Clutter Image Rating Scale: Kitchen

Please select the photo below that most accurately reflects the amount of clutter in your room.



1



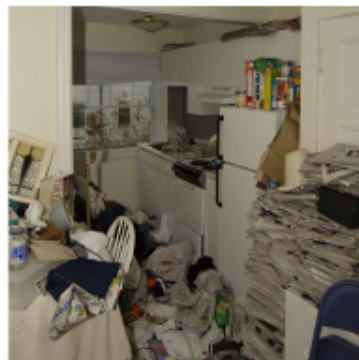
2



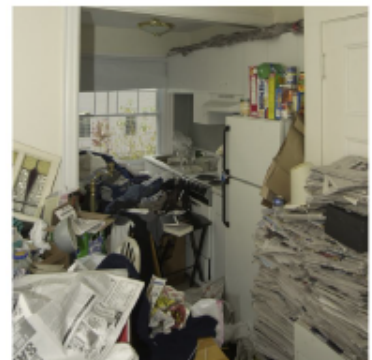
3



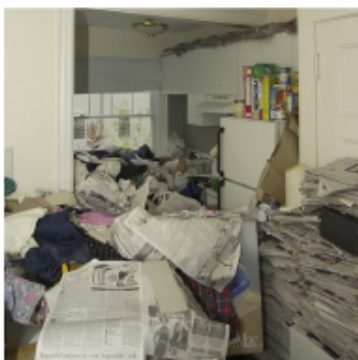
4



5



6



7



8



9

Clutter Image Rating: Living Room

Please select the photo below that most accurately reflects the amount of clutter in your room.



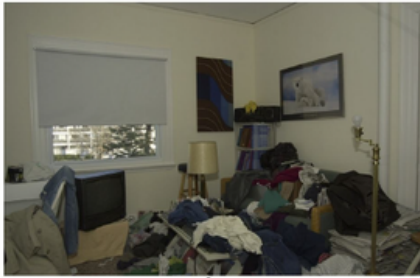
1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9

Uniform Inspection Checklist - Hoarding/Excessive Clutter - Quick Reference

For Additional Information and Support visit the following page : <http://www.centerforhoardingandcluttering.com/uniform-inspection-checklist-2>

Date Completed:

Person Completing
This Form:

Address:

Town:

RESIDENT

The purpose of inspection is to ensure housing is decent, safe, sanitary, & in good repair. Inspector must be able to view, reach, and test all items on inspection checklist.

INSTRUCTIONS

For STATUS, use P to indicate Pass if item **MEETS STANDARD** or F to indicate Fail if the item **DOES NOT MEET STANDARD**. Use UNK to indicate Unknown if item unobserved or N/A to indicate if item Not Applicable. Use column on right for specific

STEP 1

STATUS

The following items must be **UNOBSTRUCTED**
~ completely clear of any items ~

SPECIFIC AREA NEEDING TO BE ADDRESSED
(EX: BACK DOOR, BEDROOM WINDOW, PATH FROM BEDROOM TO KITCHEN, ETC.)

HARM REDUCTION TARGETS

Egresses - means of exit - must be unobstructed, egress doors must open full 90 degrees or from door frame to door stop, whichever is wider

Pathways - Minimum of 36"/91cm wide unobstructed and continuous pathways throughout residence

Staircases - must be unobstructed (if applicable)

Smoke detectors, CO detectors, sprinkler heads - (all that apply) must be unobstructed with front & surrounding clearance of 18"/91cm

Internal Doors - must be unobstructed - (Applies primarily to residences requiring inspection for tenancy) closet, cabinet, pantry, etc. Inspector must be able to open & close doors fully & freely, & be able to latch if

Windows - 1 window per room must be unobstructed, includes every room with a window measuring over 20"/51cm width x 24"/61cm height

Heat & Electrical Sources - stoves, ovens, refrigerators, washing machine/dryer, a/c units, heat thermostats (all that apply) must be unobstructed

Heat & Electrical Sources - clearance requirements - open flame heat sources, fireplaces, furnaces, oil tanks, water units, electrical panels must be unobstructed with front and surrounding clearance of 36"/91cm

Emergency Pull Cords - (if applicable) must be unobstructed, end of cord must be no more than 18"/46cm distance from the floor

STEP 2

STATUS

The following items must be **ACCESSIBLE**
~ easily able to be reached by inspector ~

PRIMARY TARGET INSPECTION

Windows - must be accessible (any window not included above)

Electrical outlets - must be accessible

Plumbing fixtures & pipes - must be accessible, including under sinks

Toilets, sinks, bathtubs, & showers - must be accessible

STEP 3

STATUS

The following items provide a guide for addressing
GENERAL HEALTH AND SAFETY.

GENERAL HEALTH AND SAFETY TARGETS

Sinks must function and show routine use & care

Kitchen must have clear & sanitary space sufficient for food preparation counter, portable kitchen island, or table will satisfy

Refrigerator/freezer must be sanitary, no expired/decaying food, not overfilled - door & drawers easily close, light & temp controls

No expired or decaying food in residence

All gas pilot lights must be lit (if applicable)

Stove, range w/ oven - interior, exterior, & top must be sanitary & free of debris, **NO** flammable items inside, on, or within 6"/15cm of stove

No evidence of infestation

Garbage & debris must be removed from residence on a routine basis

No trip hazards, fall hazards, or avalanche risk

No extension cords under carpets, across floors, or across rooms

No long-term storage of newspapers, magazines, papers, or flammable/ignitable liquids to cause or accelerate fires

No exposed or frayed electrical wiring

No inoperable or unregistered vehicles in yard (if applicable)

No excessive pet odor, pet hair, pet waste

Donation Locations

Company / Agency	Phone Number	Website	Notes
Goodwill Industries		https://www.goodwill.org/ways-to-give/donate-goods/#map	
Salvation Army	(800) 728-7825	satruck.org	
St. Vincent DePaul Orland Park	(708) 263-0834	https://stvincentdepaulchicago.org/thrift-stores/thrift-stores/	
Juvenile Diabetes Donation Site	(708) 388-8888	jdjf.org	
Jubilee Resale	(630) 613-8795	jubileeresale.org	Accepts Furniture
Neat Repeats	(708) 361-6860	https://crisisctr.org/neat-repeats/	Funds services for victims of domestic violence
The Hope Chest	(708) 482-0359	thehopechest.net	Funds services for victims of domestic violence
The Potter's Hand Thrift Store	(708) 663-3501	thepotterschurch.com	Church-based
Home 2 Home	(708) 255-5063	https://www.theh2hproject.org/	Provides items to families in need when transitioning into a new home
Scarce	(630) 545-9710	https://www.scarce.org/	Donations and Recycling