



Client guidance: Overcoming hoarding and collecting behaviours

Contents

About this guide	1
Looking after your time	2
Take photographs of your home before you start	5
Identifying an area to work on	8
Keep a record of how much you have done	11
Stay with the feeling	14
Getting support	17
Putting things into practice	20
Be creative	23
Celebrate each win	26
Notes	29

About this guide

This guide gives some simple ideas that might be helpful for you.

You may also like to read Transform's policy on **Hoarding and collecting behaviours**, for more guidance.

This guide has been created using resources from the charity **Hoarding UK**. For more information, please visit hoardinguk.org.



Remember your safety always comes first.

Please ask a member of staff for protective gloves if you think there may be sharp objects that could hurt you when tidying.

If you injure yourself on a sharp object, please let a member of staff know immediately.



Looking after your time

Time is precious. We have demands on our time which might distract us from our needs. It is important to remember to make time for yourself. It is about respecting and honouring yourself.

It is not selfish to think about putting yourself first. We often put others first and do not consider our own personal needs and what is important for us. Remember, the time you give yourself does not have to be huge. You can start by allowing yourself half an hour each day to work on your issues. As you progress you will find that you may prefer to allow yourself more time. Making time for yourself will also help you to start managing your day better.

Tips



1. Write down all the things you do each day for a week.
2. Draw up a schedule for all your routine activities, e.g. work, sleep, shopping; leave the gaps clear.
3. Identify a period of time that you can commit to on a regular basis for dealing with your hoarding.
4. Keep to the schedule, in the same way we always keep to our schedule to go to work. Keeping to the schedule will ensure you will be consistent with doing your tasks.
5. Record each day you have done it, this helps reinforce and remind you that you have made the time to deal with your issues. It will also help you have the consistency in undertaking the work you have planned to do.

Remember your safety always comes first.

Please ask a member of staff for protective gloves if you think there may be sharp objects that could hurt you when tidying.

If you injure yourself on a sharp object, please let a member of staff know immediately.

Obstacles

Obstacles are common, look out for them as they can be traps and prevent us from doing what we need to do.

“I am too tired.” “I don’t have the time.”

“There is too much to do.”

When you face an obstacle ask yourself how is this helping me in dealing with my problem? Break the task into smaller segments to make it more manageable.

“I don’t have anyone to report to about what I have done” or

“It is not important”

Tell a friend you are going to do an important job. You don’t need to discuss the details and you will need to report back that you have completed the task. Being accountable to someone will motivate you to make the time.





Take photographs of your home before you start

It will be a record of what your environment looked like before you started. The photographs can be an important way to record the progress you make.

Tips



1. Take the photographs from the perspective that covers the biggest area.
2. Take the photographs from the same location each time to ensure consistency and prevent you from distorting your progress.
3. Take weekly photographs of the area you are working on to monitor changes and as a record of your progress.

Remember your safety always comes first.

Please ask a member of staff for protective gloves if you think there may be sharp objects that could hurt you when tidying.

If you injure yourself on a sharp object, please let a member of staff know immediately.

Obstacles

“I’m concerned about having the photographs developed and someone seeing them.”

Most cameras and smartphones take digital images that can be downloaded and stored on a computer or a disk. These images are yours and no one can forcefully ask to see them.

“Someone might see them.”

These photographs are yours and if you have them on your digital camera or smartphone you can control who has access to them.

“I don’t have a computer or the knowledge to use a computer.”

If you don’t have a computer or the knowledge to use a computer, then access to the photographs can appear limiting, but the photographs can be stored on your camera or phone. If you have a friend that you trust, you could ask your friend to help you move them to a computer. Most libraries have computers that can be accessed for use.

“I don’t want to look at them.”

It is understandable that initially you may not wish to look at the photographs, but do still take them – you don’t have to look at them. In time, you may find that you would like to see what your environment looked like and compare the past and the present.

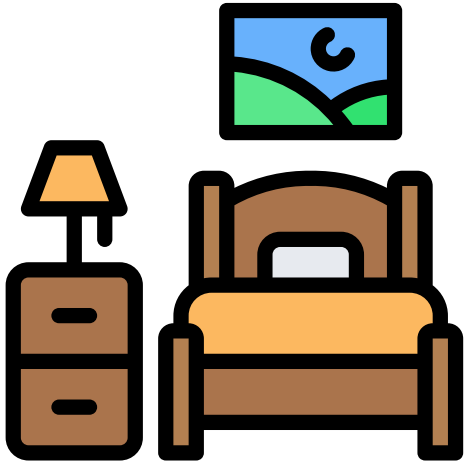




Identifying an area to work on

Before you begin you will need to identify an area that you are going to concentrate on. It is within our nature when clearing to move from one area to the next. As you are going to be dealing with the clutter, you need to identify an area where you are going to start.

Tips



1. Locate an area that is important to you to begin with, for example, your bedroom, as it is important for you to have a clear bed to sleep on, or your kitchen, as it is important to have somewhere to cook your meals.
2. Once you have located a significant area, select a section within that area that you are going to work in.
3. Work consistently in this section before moving on to another area.
4. By maintaining your focus on this area, you will find that as it clears, you will notice the difference and this will in turn motivate you to keep working on your hoarding issues.

Remember your safety always comes first.

Please ask a member of staff for protective gloves if you think there may be sharp objects that could hurt you when tidying.

If you injure yourself on a sharp object, please let a member of staff know immediately.

Obstacles

"I am finding that as I work on the identified area, I keep doing other things or move to another area instead."

There may be a number of reasons for this. It may appear to be too difficult, you may feel overwhelmed or like you can't cope, maybe other areas appear to be easier or more interesting.

To deal with this obstacle, keep your clearing session short and focused. Plan to do it before doing something pleasurable or fun, e.g. before going out, having dinner, etc. Step back and review what you have achieved so far to help remind yourself of what you have achieved.

"I am not doing enough, my room will never be clear of all the things I have in there."

Recognise that you are working in one area in a systematic way and you are gradually going to work on the whole area. Think of it as if you are doing a jigsaw puzzle and slowly but surely the puzzle will be complete.





Keep a record of how much you have done

It is always helpful to keep a record of what you have thrown out; the detail of what has been discarded is not important but the quantity can be, e.g. how many bags have you used, or how much space has been cleared. It is normal to have good and bad days; on bad days it is often easy to feel despondent. When we feel this way, we tend to forget what we have achieved so far. Keeping a record will remind you how much you have done and how far you have come.

Tips



1. Keep a record on a daily basis, preferably as you go.
2. Don't leave it until the next day, you will forget how much you have done and doubt yourself.

Remember your safety always comes first.

Please ask a member of staff for protective gloves if you think there may be sharp objects that could hurt you when tidying.

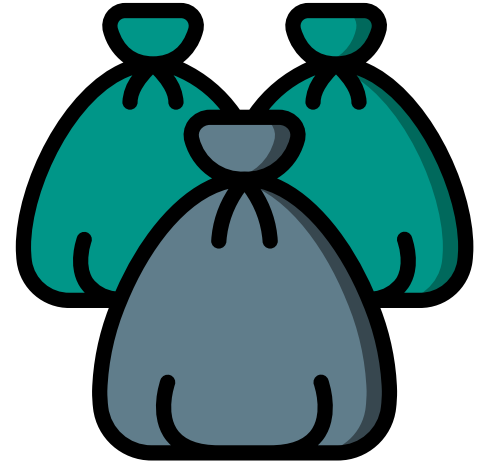
If you injure yourself on a sharp object, please let a member of staff know immediately.

Obstacles

"I can't be bothered to write it down."

Take photographs of the bags you are going to throw away. Keeping a record does not have to be a complex task. Marking the number of bags thrown out on your schedule or calendar for the specific date is an easy way to record what you have been able to do.

Be creative. You can use colour dots where each colour represents a specific number, for example, a black dot may represent one bag, or a red dot may represent five bags, that have been taken out of your environment.





Stay with the feeling

Doing things which are not part of your normal routine could cause you to feel uncomfortable and anxious. Learn to stay with the discomfort and move on and it will pass. The more we react or try to get rid of the uncomfortable feelings, the stronger they will get as you are making them more significant. By letting them be, they will pass and you will be able to recognise your ability to cope with uncomfortable feelings.

Tips



1. Recognise and accept the way you are feeling.
2. Accept it as it is normal to feel uncomfortable and anxious while you are doing things you would not normally do.
3. Try to be in the moment and engage in whatever you are doing.
4. Put on some music or the television in the background or have a friend be with you while you are sorting and clearing things out.

Remember your safety always comes first.

Please ask a member of staff for protective gloves if you think there may be sharp objects that could hurt you when tidying.

If you injure yourself on a sharp object, please let a member of staff know immediately.

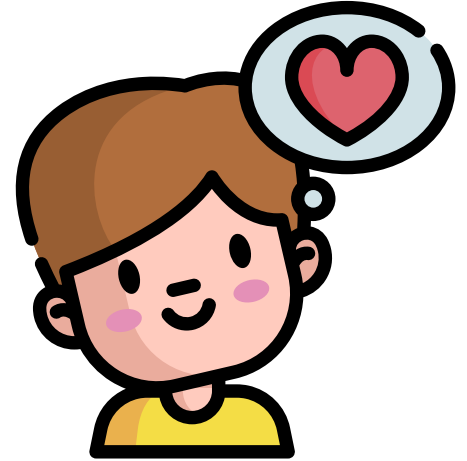
Obstacles

"It's too uncomfortable, I can't cope with it."

Accept the way you are feeling, don't fight it and it will pass. The more you try to get rid of it, the more significant it becomes. Recall and recognise the other times when you have felt like this and survived it.

"It will never go away."

The more you engage with the feeling, the longer it will last. By having a dialogue with the feeling, you are making it more significant and pronounced and this will lead to it becoming more uncomfortable. Think of the times when it has been hot and there was nothing you could do about it and how, over time, you tolerated the heat.





Getting support

It can be helpful to ask for support from someone you trust, like your keyworker. Sometimes just being aware that you have someone you can talk to may be adequate. Sometimes, having their physical presence when you are dealing with your clutter can be of great value. People you trust can provide support in many different ways, from providing emotional support to actually physically helping with getting rid of things.

Tips



1. Speak someone you trust and let them know what you would like from them. Let them know what support you need and how you would like them to provide it.
2. Be clear and set some ground rules that would make it easier for you, e.g. “I just need to you to be with me not doing any of the clearing”, “I need you to help me take these bags to the tip or to the charity shop”, etc.

Remember your safety always comes first.

Please ask a member of staff for protective gloves if you think there may be sharp objects that could hurt you when tidying.

If you injure yourself on a sharp object, please let a member of staff know immediately.

Obstacles

“They will judge me.”

This is a common fear that people experience, that others will judge them for the fact that their home is cluttered and untidy. Please know that our staff are trained to be helpful, caring and supportive.

“I feel shame.”

Shame is another common emotion. Remind yourself that you have not done anything wrong but are just trying to sort out your home and your life. People understand that sometimes others have problems. The fact you recognise that you have a problem and you are dealing with it is often seen as a commendable act and people will respect you for being honest and dealing with a difficult problem.

“They will get rid of my things without me.”

Explain to them what it is that you want them to do, e.g. to be around to provide emotional support, to help with the sorting out, etc. Usually people do respect what you ask of them.





Putting things into practice

As you introduce new ways of dealing with your hoarding issues, it will feel unfamiliar and threatening as some of the exercises will involve you doing things differently from how you are used to doing them.

Tips



1. Take the risk by trying to deal with things differently.
2. Taking risks is healthy and will help you to make changes that you feel are necessary.
3. We learn from our experiences.

Remember your safety always comes first.

Please ask a member of staff for protective gloves if you think there may be sharp objects that could hurt you when tidying.

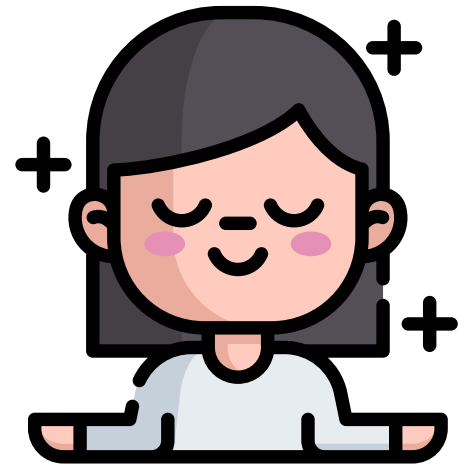
If you injure yourself on a sharp object, please let a member of staff know immediately.

Obstacles

"I don't feel like I can do it."

"It's not something I have done before."

Don't allow feelings to rule on what you can or can't do. Instead, go through the experience of trying it as it will enable you to make an informed decision about whether you can or can't do it. Ask yourself about some of the things that you do now, have they come from experiences? Look at how your experience of trying something new can help you to learn and deal with your issues.



"It feels too threatening."

Ask yourself what is threatening, and how is it threatening? Is it just the idea of trying something new or different? Ask yourself, what is the worst that could happen?



Be creative

Sometimes things do not work out as planned. When that is the case, be creative and substitute with something else that is similar. Be flexible, nothing is written in stone as to how it should be done. Each exercise is a guide, if you find you can't do it as discussed then be flexible and improvise to do something similar.

Tips



1. There are many ways to do each task.
2. There is no right or wrong way.
3. Each of us has preferences and we like doing things in a certain way.
4. Be bold, be creative and try doing it differently, in a way that is not familiar.

Remember your safety always comes first.

Please ask a member of staff for protective gloves if you think there may be sharp objects that could hurt you when tidying.

If you injure yourself on a sharp object, please let a member of staff know immediately.

Obstacles

"I usually put my things in a black bag before I take it out. I have run out of black bags."

Use carrier bags instead, it makes no difference. Bags are just to contain the items. The colour or type of bag makes little difference.

"I can only work on my clothes."

Don't be fixated on only one type of item. Expand outwards by looking at what else is similar to clothes. Try instead to work on your towels or sheets instead of your clothes.

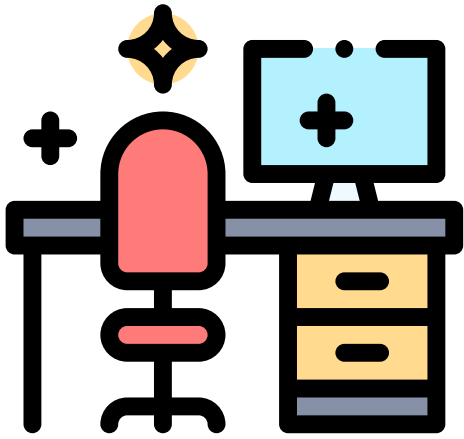




Celebrate each win

Recognise and celebrate each inch of your home that you regain and each activity you engage in. It's not easy but start by seeing the colour in your home. The clutter has blocked out the light, the floor, walls and furnishings leaving your home dark and dull.

Tips



1. With each area that you complete, look at it, stand in it, feel it and celebrate what you have regained.
2. It may be uncomfortable at first as it may feel empty but recognise what you have got back. Invite people you trust in and show them what you have achieved.
3. Mark the area with something colourful to remind you what you have got back. Look at the photographs that you took before and compare to how it is now. Print them if you can and notice the differences.

Remember your safety always comes first.

Please ask a member of staff for protective gloves if you think there may be sharp objects that could hurt you when tidying.

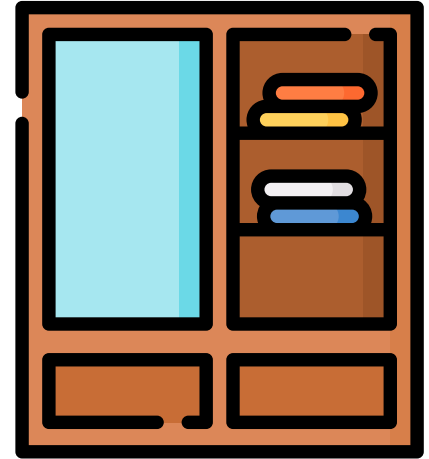
If you injure yourself on a sharp object, please let a member of staff know immediately.

Obstacles

"I've not done enough, it's too slow."

Remind yourself that it has taken some time for your home to become like this and it will take time to get it to where you want it to be. Taking small steps is the beginning. As you get more confident, you will find yourself more able to deal with larger spaces and work through them. An inch is better than nothing.

These basics are important as they will help you work in a systematic way to deal with your hoarding issues. Having the basic structure will help you to deal with some of the obstacles that you will experience on the route to reclaiming your space and your life.





www.transformhousing.org.uk ■ info@transformhousing.org.uk ■ 01372 387100

Registered office: Bradmere House, Brook Way, Leatherhead, Surrey, KT22 7NA

Registered provider of social housing: H2452

Registered charity: 264133

Company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales: 01057984

Published August 2022

Images from Flaticon, Pixabay and Unsplash

Design by Georgina Margetts