

Talking Points  
“Clutterer Conference”  
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“The good thing about clutter is that it will wait for you. The bad thing about clutter is that it will wait for you.”

Definitions:

Hoarder: hunters/gatherers

Pack Rats: stockpile haphazardly, seldom use the things stored

Clutterers: out of control need to accumulate things

Collectors: Orderly and systematic organization of things—often displayed

Hoarding:

- Involves hiding, shame, loneliness, and negative emotions such as anger, sadness and fear (hiding within the clutter to relieve the inner pain of shame)
- Involves a desperate longing to fill the holes in the soul
- Starts in early life, though we see it more in elders
- We see an increase in hoarding in older persons with dementia
- Not known if gender plays a part
- Not socioeconomic specific....seen across all socioeconomic groups
- Generally mentally competent, but seen as “eccentric”
- Lack self care skills, but appear well groomed in public
- See themselves as socially isolated
- Often have diagnosis of Depression
- Most do not meet the diagnosis for OCD but may have features
- Has an inability to organize
- Easily distracted
- Often smokes or abuses substances

Hoarders exhibit 3 main types of problems:

- 1.) Compulsive acquisition
- 2.) Saving behaviors
- 3.) Disorganization in many areas of life, manifesting as clutter

Reasons for Hoarding:

- Perceive items as valuable
- Get a sense of security from their items
- Feel love they aren't getting from people
- Fear forgetting or losing their items
- Coping with stressful life events
- Physical limitations and frailty
- Extreme emotional attachment to their objects -- cannot discard them without significant stress and anxiety
- The physical clutter is a manifestation of the psychic clutter

#### Dynamics of the Hoarder:

- Dirt: can be identified with aggression and defiance, which can lead to guilt, shame, and fear - can react by defying authority
- Time: Dawdling and procrastinating – shows struggles with control or mastery
- Money: rather than love, money and status are the foundation of their emotional security.

#### Feelings of the Hoarder:

- Anxiety
- Boredom
- Resistance
- Distractedness
- Fatigue
- Grief
- Hopelessness
- Overwhelmed
- Shame/guilt
- Anger/rage/hostility
- Sorrow

#### Do's and Don'ts:

- Don't get into power struggles
- Don't force interventions – don't do surprise clean ups or take anything away without discussion
- Never refer to clutter as “stuff” or “junk”
- Don't criticize the environment
- Be non-judgmental
- Maintain respect
- Use a soft gentle approach- let them tell you their story
- Be kind and compassionate – don't belittle patronize, overwhelm, or threaten
- Build Trust -- “I am not interested in talking about your stuff, I am interested in you!”
- Name the problem and define the standards
- Help set goals
- Establish clear boundaries
- Work together
- Respect the meaning and attachment the person has to the possession – it may be as intense as a human attachment to them
- Praise efforts frequently and sincerely
- Emphasize the importance of professional help : counselors, therapists, grief counseling, 12 step programs

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Questions to ask Hoarders:

- What is your life like?
- What is going on for you right now?
- What would you like to do in the future?
- What do you like to do? Hobbies?
- What events lead you to this place?
- What motivates you to change how you do things?
- What is coming up for you? (Examine emotions during cleaning)
- What is the reason some places get continually re-cluttered?

Clutter Points:

- Support Group helps reaches out to people who tend to “isolate”.
- Scarlet O’Hare Effect “I’ll think about it tomorrow”
- Need to be realistic how long will take to accomplish tasks
- Home should be your sanctuary
- Should be able to enjoy home and life **NOW**
- Many people “accumulate” stuff during times of illness
- Learning to organize can become a learned habit with practice
- Utilize the “10 minute rule” to begin cleaning – use a timer
- Short time periods spent organizing so not to get overwhelmed
- Separate items into different piles:
  - Trash Pile
  - Donate pile
  - Other room pile (do not get distracted by taking items to another room).
  - Keep pile (put like items together and decrease amount of like items)

Clutter Support Group Format:

- Introduction (Leader helps facilitate the group and give feedback)
- Visualization of Rooms (10min) (Hoarders unable to visualize what room actually looks like/ difficult for them to visualize a clean, neat room)
- Topic each week (15min)
- Core of group: 30min discussion time- break into 2-4min. increments for each person speaking (No one else is talking- We need to Listen)