

Definition

Hoarding can be defined as a psychiatric disorder characterised by persistent difficulty discarding or parting with possessions, regardless of their actual value, resulting in significant clutter that obstructs the individual's living environment and produces considerable functional impairment. Hoarding is frequently associated with older people, but the definition is broader than this and is applied equally to younger adult age groups and those with children. 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.

Reflection

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

[Oldham Safeguarding Children Partnership](#) have developed advice in relation to hoarding and the impact on children. This supports good practice in managing the balance between the rights of family to have their private life respected and that of the child's needs remaining paramount.

Support and Intervention

When working with families where there are concerns about hoarding simply working to clear the hoarding is known not to have lasting impact and can cause and exacerbate the long-term situation by reinforcing mistrust. Children's services will need to consider the [Oldham Adult Safeguarding Boards \(OSAB\)](#) Multi-Agency Strategy and Guidance for Self-Neglect and Hoarding and how services can work together to support hoarding households where there are children. Agreed standard practice must be to work with the individual and to agree a strategy which reduces risk and works to minimise future problems. The risks and impacts of hoarding for safeguarding children must always remain paramount.

An impartial assessment of the scale of clutter and hoarding is vital in assessing the impact of hoarding on children and in determining if there is a safeguarding concern that warrants children's social care involvement or early help support. The following [Clutter-Image-Ratings](#) must be utilised to support any referral to CSC or early help for hoarding.

This ensures that there is a common understanding of the risk posed and can also be used to demonstrate improvements in hoarding behaviours.

There also needs to be consideration of the risk of fire and consideration of a referral to the fire service for a Home Fire Safety Assessment [HFSC \(safelincs.co.uk\)](#)

Characteristics of Hoarding behaviour

Hoarding behaviour typically manifested in 3 ways:

- 1. Acquisition** - Compulsive buying and/or the accumulation of items. The motivations for this can be complex and need time to understand. Often reasons for hoarding are deeply entrenched and connected to personal loss or trauma, often going back to childhood. It is important for professionals not to form judgements and to take time to try to identify why the person hoards.
- 2. Saving** - There are three common reasons for saving: 'sentimental' which can be motivated by grief and refers to the emotional attachment a person feels toward an object which can often stem from a history of having experienced deprivation, or of having had possessions forcibly taken from them in the past and so items are saved 'just in case I need them' or to guard against 'being without' again in the future; 'intrinsic' or 'aesthetic' where items are saved because they are seen as too beautiful to be discarded.
- 3. Disorganisation** - Items of value are mixed in with rubbish and items of no apparent value. People who hoard often have difficulty with information processing, categorisation, sequencing tasks and decision making. They may also believe that they have a poor memory which leads to items being stored where they are not visible instead of put away in cupboards i.e. 'if I put them away, I won't be able to see them and if I can't see them I won't remember I have them and they will be lost to me'.



Hoarding: The impacts on children

Impact hoarding can have on a child are:

- Social isolation: not being able to have friends over.
- Reduced living space: children may have to use one space for multiple uses and purposes, such as sleeping, eating, homework, TV and playing.
- Anxiety: this may develop due to their parent's behaviour towards objects. They may get anxious living with a household with many objects that they are unable to touch.
- Health: asthma, allergies, headaches etc. which can be due to dust, the cleanliness of the household and the things that are being hoarded.
- Fire Risk
- Bitten/infection by pests
- Developmental delay: not having the space to explore and develop significant milestones like crawling, cruising, walking etc.
- Risk of accidents/injury
- Lack of access to cleaning facilities
- Lack access to cooking facilities.

Implications for Safeguarding Children

Growing up in a hoarding property can put a child at risk by affecting their development and, in some cases, leading to neglect, which is a safeguarding issue. The needs of the child at risk must come first and any actions we take must reflect this. Where children live in the property, and the hygiene conditions within the home present a serious and immediate environmental/health risk to children or the physical accommodation places the child in danger, a referral to CSC should always be made, with consideration of contacting the police on 999 if the risk to the child/children is immediate.