

# Strategies for Working with People Who Experience Hoarding

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Everything's Together®

# Objectives

- Today You Will Become Familiar With...

...strategies for interacting with people who experience hoarding

...a basic structure for working with people who experience hoarding

...focus strategies for managing “the overwhelm” for people who experience hoarding

...the concept of Backsliding and what it looks like

# Imagine

# Background

- Entered the organizing field in 1992
- Challenging clients begin to surface
- Needed to be more educated



# People and their stuff

- People who Collect



# People and their stuff

- People who Experience Clutter



# People and their stuff

- People who Experience Hoarding



# Hoarding Defined

The acquisition of, and failure to discard a large number of objects that appear useless or of limited value. Amount of possessions in the home renders living spaces unusable. Causes significant distress or impairment.

(Frost and Hartl, 1996)



- Excessive Acquisition
- Great Difficulty Discarding
- Possessions Are Cluttered
- Distress Caused by the Issue



What makes the person experiencing  
hoarding different?

# Understanding Hoarding

**2-6 % of the population**

**Tend to be single**

**Not seeing gender differences**

**Tend to be better educated**

**Roots of the behavior in childhood - chronic**

**Genetic Connection**



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# One-on-One Interaction

- Language is key - tone of voice
- Respect for possessions & nonjudgmental
- Just the facts Ma'am – direct and clear
- Establish specific and manageable goals
- They always retain the power of choice



## Hazardous Locations - Identify and mediate combustibles and other issues



# Safety First

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# Safety First



Blocked Exits  
Clearing walkways and  
doorways of clutter



# Safety First

## Pests

Removing food sources that attract rodents and insects.



# Easier to Discard Items

- Reading Material



- Excess Food



- Unused/Replaced Electronics



- Other





# Easier to Discard Items



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# Set a Staging Area - Consistent Place to Work



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# Categorize, Contain, Label



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# Categorize, Contain, Label



# Assess Items One by One



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# One-on-One Work – Close the Session

- Review the progress
- Move items as close as possible to area of use
- Eliminate trash/recycle
- Have a plan for removing hazardous items
- Confirm next visit and area of focus

# Manage “The Overwhelm” Focus Strategies

Tablecloth Cover-Up



Paper Tube Spyglass





# Other Tools That Can Help?

- Clutter Image Rating Scale - Google for downloads
- ICD Clutter Hoarding Scale –  
[www.challengingdisorganization.org](http://www.challengingdisorganization.org)

## 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

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# ICD: Clutter Hoarding Scale

	Structure and Zoning	Animals and Pests	Household Functions	Health and Safety	Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
LEVEL I	All doors, stairs and windows accessible; plumbing, electric and HVAC operational; fire and CO2 detectors installed and functional	Normal animal control (behavior/sanitation); approved number of animals; no evidence of rodents or insects	No excessive clutter; all rooms properly used; appliances functional; good housekeeping and maintenance	Safe, sanitary; no odors; medication control OK	OPTIONAL
LEVEL II	1 major exit blocked; 1 major appliance or HVAC device not working for longer than one season; some plumbing or electrical systems not fully functional; fire or CO2 detectors non-existent or non-functional	Evidence of inappropriate animal control; visible or odorous pet waste; visible pet fur/hair/feathers; light to medium evidence of common household pests/insects	Clutter beginning to obstruct living areas; slight congestion of exits, entrances, hallways and stairs; some household appliances not functional; inconsistent housekeeping and maintenance	Diminished appropriate sanitation; odors from dirty dishes, food prep, laundry, toilets; mildew present; medication control questionable	LIGHT PPE Medical or work gloves; caps (baseball or poly bouffant); first aid kit; insect repellent; hand sanitizer
LEVEL III	Outside clutter of items normally stored indoors; HVAC devices not working for longer than one season; fire or CO2 detectors non-existent or non-functional; one part of home has light structural damage (occurring within past six mos.)	Animal population exceeds local regulations; inappropriate animal control; inadequate sanitation; audible evidence of pests; medium level of spiders; light insect infestation such as bed bugs, lice, fleas, roaches, ants, silverfish, spiders, etc.	Clutter obstructing functions of key living areas; building up around exits, entrances, hallways and stairs; at least one room not being used for intended purpose; several appliances not functional; inappropriate usage of electric appliances and extension cords; substandard housekeeping and maintenance; hazardous substances in small quantities	Limited evidence of maintaining sanitation (heavily soiled food prep areas, dirty dishes, mildew); odors obvious and irritating; garbage cans not in use or overflowing; dirt, dust and debris; dirty laundry throughout house; Rx and OTC medications hazardous control (re children, pets, mentally impaired)	MEDIUM PPE Face masks or N95 respirator masks; eye protection; gloves; disposable coveralls; poly caps; work shoes/boots; first aid kit; hand sanitizer; insect repellent
LEVEL IV	Excessive outdoor clutter of items normally stored indoors; HVAC devices not working for longer than one year; CO2 detectors non-existent or non-functional; structural damage to home lasting longer than six months; water damaged floors, damaged walls and foundations, broken windows, doors or plumbing; odor or evidence of sewer backup	Animal population exceeds local ordinances; poor animal sanitation; destructive behavior; excessive spiders and webs; bats, squirrels, rodents in attic or basement (audible and visible); medium insect infestation	Diminished use and accessibility to key living areas; several rooms cluttered to extent they cannot be used for intended purposes; clutter inhibits access to doorways, hallways and stairs; inappropriate storage of hazardous/combustible materials; appliances used inappropriately; improper use of electric space heaters, fans or extension cords	Rotting food, organic contamination; expired, leaking cans or bottles; buckled sides and tops; dishes and utensils unusable; no linens on beds; sleeping on mattress; chair or floor; infestation of bedding and/or furniture; medications Rx and OTC medications easily accessible to anybody	FULL PPE Face masks or N95 respirator masks; safety goggles; medical or industrial grade latex or nitrile gloves; heavy duty work gloves; disposable coveralls; caps; work shoes/boots; first aid kit; hand sanitizer; insect repellent; headlamp or flashlight
LEVEL V	Extreme indoor/outdoor clutter; foliage overgrowth; abandoned machinery; ventilation inadequate or nonexistent; HVAC systems not working; water damaged floors, walls and foundation; broken windows, doors or plumbing; unreliable electrical, water and/or septic systems; odor or sewer backup; irreparable damage to exterior and interior structure	Animals at risk and dangerous to people due to behavior; health and numbers; pervasive spiders, cockroaches, mice, rats, squirrels, raccoons, bats, snakes, etc.; heavy infestation of insects such as bed bugs, lice, fleas, cockroaches, ants, silverfish, etc.	Key living spaces not usable; all rooms not used for intended purposes; entrances, hallways and stairs blocked; toilets, sinks and tubs not functioning; hazardous conditions obscured by clutter; appliances unusable; hazardous and primitive use of kerosene, lanterns, candles, fireplace/woodstove as primary source of heat and/or light	Human urine and excrement present; rotting food; organic contamination; cans or jars expired, leaking or buckled; dishes and utensils buried or nonexistent; beds inaccessible or unusable due to clutter or infestation; pervasive mold and/or mildew; moisture or standing water; Rx and OTC medications easily accessible to anybody; presence of expired Rx	FULL PPE REQUIRED N95 respirator mask or mask with organic filter(s); safety goggles; medical or industrial grade latex, or nitrile gloves; heavy duty work gloves; disposable coveralls; poly caps; work shoes/boots; first aid kit hand sanitizer; insect repellent; headlamp or flashlight

# Challenges Will Appear

- \* Staying in same location over time
- \* Co-morbid conditions add a twist
- \* Client impatient with progress
- \* Family impatient with progress
- \* Halt when “crisis” is averted
- \* May need to change out the person assisting



# What is Backsliding???

Backsliding occurs when a client stops making forward progress and/or reverts back to old habits



It is an expected outcome of the decluttering and organizing process unfolding over time

# What does backsliding look like?

- Many appointments cancelled or late to begin appointments that are kept. Stalling of meetings.
- Paper piles have migrated into previously cleared areas
- Systems and processes set up are not being used
- New experiments have been tried over existing ideas

# What does backsliding look like?

- New bags or boxes are stocked with items cleared in a hurry
- New purchase bags are evident in open spaces
- Productivity has slowed immensely or halted
- New equipment and tools are in evidence while old items still remain in the space
- Agreed to action is not accomplished
- Environment may look the same as on the initial meeting

# What happened???

- Health Issues -  
Mental or  
Physical
- Finances
- Household  
Malfunctions
- Pet Care
- Key Family  
Event
- Grief (new or  
revisited loss)
- Life Transition
- Lack of Time
- Relationship  
Issues
- Overwhelm

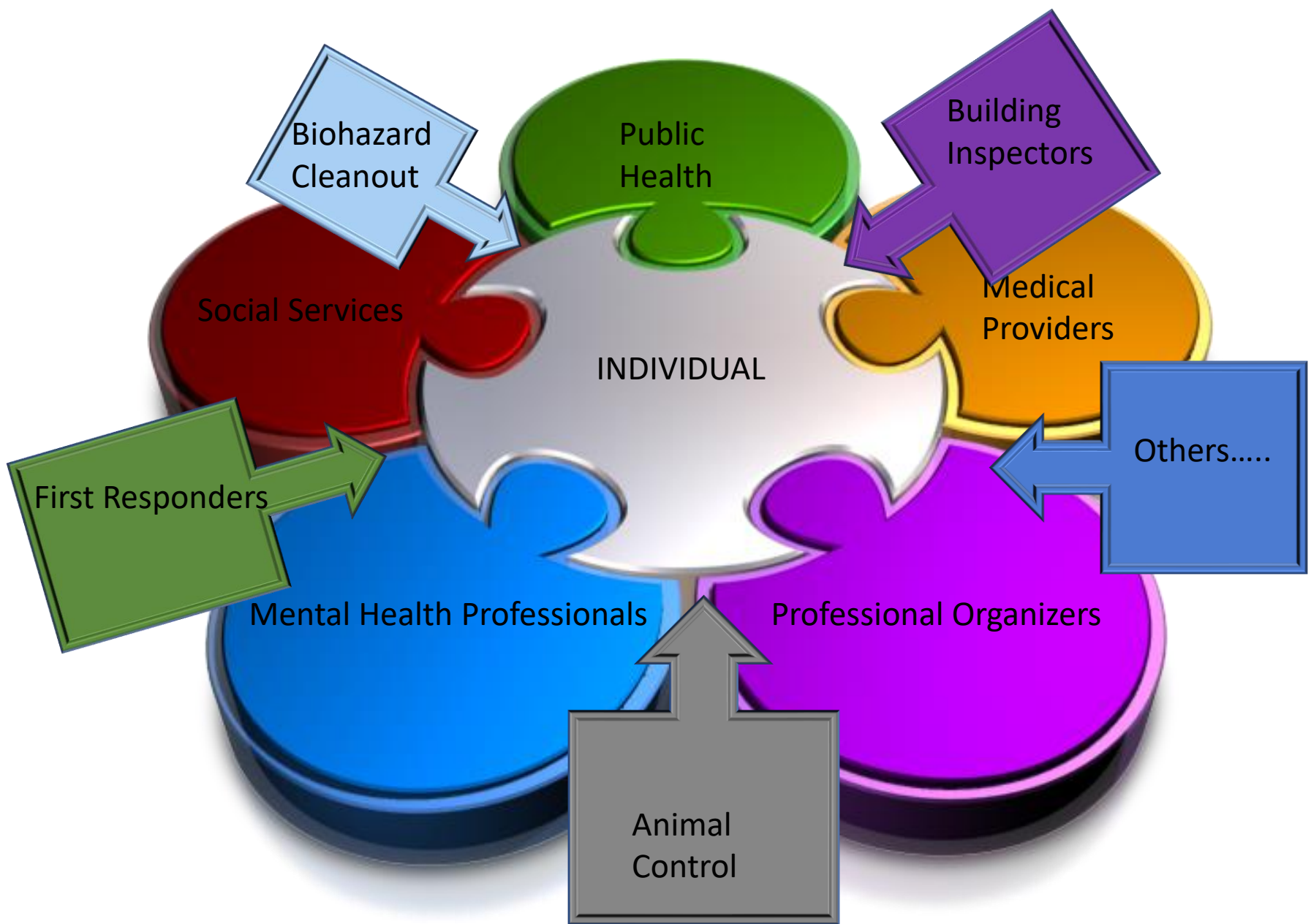


# What Can You Do?

- Most importantly, normalize backsliding behavior .
  - Help them explore in a non-judgmental way why it is happening
  - Help them see their process is more of a zig-zag than progress in a straight line
  - Reinforce original goals, check in on any differences

# Collaboration

How can we create  
better outcomes  
for dealing with this complex  
disorder that ultimately will  
benefit our communities?



# Challenge

How can you  
**collaborate** within  
your entity to  
bring better  
**connected resources**  
to the populations  
you serve?



# Helpful Resources

## Hoarding Support Groups

[\*\*https://hoarding.iocdf.org/supportgroups/\*\*](https://hoarding.iocdf.org/supportgroups/)

# Helpful Resources

- ICD Clutter Hoarding Scale: [www.challengingdisorganization.org](http://www.challengingdisorganization.org)
- Clutter Image Rating Scale: Google the name for free options
- Support Groups: <https://hoarding.iocdf.org/supportgroups/>
- **Buried in Treasures: Help for Compulsive Acquiring, Saving, and Hoarding**  
by David Tolin, Randy O. Frost and Gail Stekedee
- **Stuff: Compulsive Hoarding and the Meaning of Things**  
by Randy O. Frost and Gail Stekedee
- **Compulsive Hoarding and Acquiring: Therapist's Guide**  
by Gail Stekedee and Randy O. Frost

# Helpful Resources

- **Dirty Secret: A Daughter Comes Clean About Her Mother's Compulsive Hoarding** by Jessie Sholl
- **Don't Toss My Memories in the Trash** by Vickie Dellaquila
- **Overcoming Compulsive Hoarding: Why You Save & How You Can Stop**  
by Fugen Neziroglu, Jerome Bubrick and Jose Yaryura-Tobias
- **The Hoarding Handbook: A Guide for Human Service Professionals**  
by [Christiana Bratiotis](#), [Cristina Sorrentino-Schmalisch](#) and [Gail Steketee](#)
- **Digging Out: Helping Your Loved One Manage Clutter, Hoarding and Compulsive Acquiring** by Michael A. Tompkins and Tamara L. Hartl

# Questions and Comments

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