

Hoarding Guidance

Understanding hoarding

In England the Care Act 2014 recognises hoarding behaviours as one of the manifestations of self-neglect.

Hoarding disorder is a social, economic and public health concern and people who experience a hoarding disorder can experience a significant reduction in their quality of life. Hoarding disorder increases the risk of fatal fires, eviction, pest infestation and the presence of squalor (Haighton, Caiazza & Neave, 2023).

NHS England defines a hoarding disorder as where someone acquires an excessive number of items and stores them in a chaotic manner, usually resulting in unmanageable amounts of clutter. The items can be of little or no monetary value.

Commonly hoarded items include:

- **Inanimate objects** – these are the most commonly hoarded items and may be one type of object, or a collection of different items such as clothes, newspapers, magazines, food containers or even medical equipment.
- **Animal Hoarding** – This is where an individual keeps a large number of animals, but may fail to provide them with adequate levels of care.
- **Data hoarding** – a relatively recent phenomenon relating to people that hoard electronic data.

Hoarding is considered a significant problem if:

- The amount of clutter interferes with everyday living – for example if the person is unable to use their kitchen or bathroom and cannot access rooms.
- The clutter is causing significant distress or negatively affecting the quality of life of the person, their family and/or others.

Hoarding and mental health

Hoarding is considered a standalone mental health disorder and is included in the 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) 2013.

Hoarding can also be a symptom of other physical and mental health problems such as:

- Brain injury
- Dementia
- Depression
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder
- Schizophrenia
- Personality disorders
- Alcohol or drug dependency
- Prader-Willi syndrome

It is important to know if other health needs are behind the hoarding as this can impact on the treatment or support provided.

Hoarding disorders can be difficult to treat. Adults who hoard may not see the hoarding as a problem or have insight into how the hoarding is affecting both their lives and the lives of those around them.

Guidance for Practitioners

It is recognised that many people who hoard may not ask for support. Some people may realise that they have a problem, but may be reluctant to ask for support as they may be ashamed or embarrassed.

The majority of referrals will come from concerned family members, neighbours or via statutory services such as housing, fire and rescue services, ambulance services or the Police.

An ice-breaker form has been produced to empower people to have a conversation with their GP or a trusted professional if they wish to receive practical advice, treatment and support.

Hoarding Ice-breaker form <https://hoardingicebreakerform.org/>

Care and Support

As noted within the Self-neglect guidance, the Care Act 2014 places specific duties on Local Authorities in relation to abuse and neglect. Hoarding, as a form of self-neglect, would fall under these duties.

A Local Authority has a duty to complete an assessment where it appears that the adult may have needs for care and support.

The request for an assessment should be made to the Local Authority for the area in which the adult lives.

Staffordshire County Council –

To request an assessment:

Tel 0300 111 8010 (Monday – Friday 9am – 5pm)

E-mail: staffordshirecares@staffordshire.gov.uk

Stoke-on-Trent City Council

To request an assessment:

Tel: 0800 561 0015

E-mail: social.care@stoke.gov.uk

Mental Capacity and Hoarding

In cases of extreme hoarding, the very nature of the adults living environment may lead professionals to question whether that person has capacity to make a decision in relation to their hoarding and any proposed interventions. A capacity assessment should therefore be completed.

As noted within the self-neglect guidance, a practitioner completing an assessment of capacity in relation to hoarding will need to consider the specific decision that needs to be made. This may include decisions about where the adult lives, their tenancy agreement or the support/interventions proposed to support the adult.

A Court of Protection Ruling in 2022 highlighted the issues associated with hoarding, mental capacity and best interests. The ruling concerns 2 individuals: AC (aged 92) and her son, GC. The Court considered whether either party had capacity to make decisions about their belongings.

The judgement identified the following as relevant to the decision in respect of the persons items and belongings:

1) **Volume of belongings and impact on use of rooms:** the relative volume of belongings in relation to the degree to which they impair the usual function of the important rooms in the property for the individual concerns (and other residents in the property) (e.g. whether the bedroom is available for sleeping, the kitchen for the preparation of food etc). Rooms used for storage (box rooms would not be relevant, although may be relevant to issues of (3) and (4).

2) **Safe access and use:** the extent to which the individual concerned (and other residents in the property) are able or not to safely access and use the living areas.

3) **Creation of hazards:** the extent to which the accumulated belongings create actual or potential hazards in terms of the health and safety of those residents on the property. This would include the impact of the accumulated belongings on the functioning, maintenance and safety of utilities (heating, lighting, water, washing facilities for both residents and their clothing). In terms of direct hazards this would include key areas of hygiene (toilets, food storage and preparation), the potential for an actual vermin infestation and risk of fire to the extent that the accumulated possessions would provide fuel for an outbreak of fire, and that escape and rescue routes were inaccessible or hazardous through accumulated clutter.

4) **Safety of building:** the extent to which accumulated clutter and inaccessibility could compromise the structural integrity and therefore safety of the building.

5) **Removal/disposal of hazardous levels of belongings:** that safe and effective removal and/or disposal of hazardous levels of accumulated possessions is possible and desirable on the basis of a “normal” evaluation of utility.

For more information relating to the judgement please refer to the following link:

<https://www.39essex.com/information-hub/case/ac-and-gc-capacity-hoarding-best-interests#:~:text=The%20court%20determined%20that%20it,to%20take%20place%20at%20home.>

Assessment Tools

The following Clutter Image Ratings may assist with the assessment of adults where there are concerns relating to hoarding.

Clutter Image Rating – Bedroom

Clutter Image Rating – Lounge

Clutter Image Rating – Kitchen

These are originally from a study by Frost, R.O., Steketee, G., Tolin, D.F. & Renaud, S (2008). Development and Validation of the Clutter Image Rating. Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioural assessment, 31, 401-417.

The West Midlands Self-Neglect Guidance provides information on actions to consider dependent on the Clutter Image Rating. Please refer to Appendix 1 for both the Clutter Image Ratings and Suggested Responses.

Interventions to support adults who hoard.

"Anyone who is trying to help a hoarder should be aware that what, on the surface appears to be a pile of rubbish, is often the hoarders most prized possessions".

(Dr Lynne Drummond, 2013. A Guide to Hoarding Disorder. South West London & St-Georges Mental Health NHS Trust.

Mental Health Services

As noted above hoarding is recognised as a mental disorder. As such, mental health services have a key role in supporting adults where there are concerns about hoarding.

There are two main approaches to treatment, cognitive behavioural therapy and medication.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) –

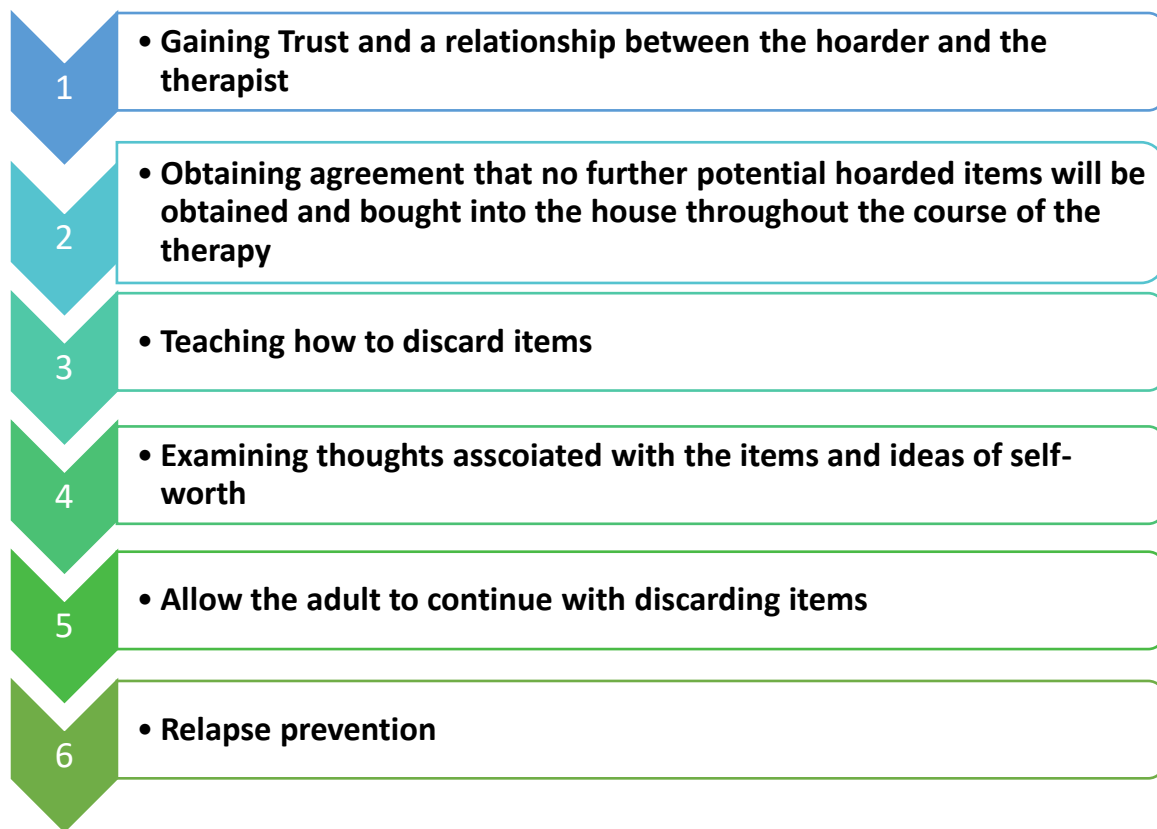
CBT is a type of talking therapy that focuses on how a person's thoughts beliefs and attitudes affect their actions. This is the most effective psychological treatment for hoarding disorder as it helps the adult to change the thoughts and feelings that drive them to hoard.

If the adult is willing to get help then they may choose to contact a therapist themselves. The adult can refer themselves directly to an NHS talking therapies service without a referral from a GP.

[Find an NHS talking therapies services - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

The NHS guidance on hoarding disorder highlights that regular sessions of CBT over a sustained period of time will usually be necessary and that there will also need to be some home-based sessions to work directly on steps to address the clutter.

The following diagram indicates the different stages of treatment:



Based on information the South West London and St-Georges NHS Mental Health Trust, A Guide to Hoarding Disorder (2013)

For more information please refer to the NHS website:

[Hoarding disorder - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

Medication – There are not currently any medications specifically to treat hoarding disorder. However, a group of drugs known as serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SRI's) or selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI's) that are used to treat other conditions such as anxiety and depression can be helpful.

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Services

It is recognised that people who present with hoarding behaviours are at high risk of injury or death as a result of fire. Indeed, a number of fatal fires in Staffordshire have related to adults who hoard.

The risk of a fire starting is increased due to combustible materials being stored in contact with or in close proximity to heat sources such as light fittings, heaters or smoking materials.

Risks are increased further when the level of clutter reaches significant levels resulting in utilities such as gas and electricity being disconnected. The adult may then use camping stoves or candles.

Entry and exit routes may be restricted.

There also needs to be consideration of the fire risks to any adjoining properties.

For Safe and Well advice and guidance from Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service, call the Contact Centre on Tel: **0800 0241 999**

Partner agencies wanting to request a Home Fire Safety Visit should complete the following document [partner referral form](#).

Olive branch training aims to raise awareness of fire safety in the home for those staff that visit vulnerable members of the community. This can include social workers, community nurses, Police and home care providers.

To access Olive Branch training [visit the Olive Branch Learn Live portal](#).

Housing Providers

Housing providers may be amongst the first to become aware of concerns or complaints relating to hoarding within a property. Without support and interventions from other agencies, housing providers may need to initiate proceedings under housing or anti-social behaviour legislation.

However, it should be noted that where there are concerns relating to hoarding, a thorough assessment of the adults needs should be completed before any formal action is considered.

Please refer to the section on legal interventions for more detail.

Environmental Health Powers

Please refer to the Section on legal interventions for more detail.

Deep cleans

Whilst there may be a need to complete a deep clean to in response to environmental health or fire safety concerns, it should be recognised this is unlikely to be a long-term solution. The deep clean will not address the cause of the hoarding disorder and if completed without the adult's consent is likely to cause significant distress.

Pest Control Services

Practitioners may encounter situations where in addition to the hoarding, there are concerns relating to pest infestation.

Staffordshire County Council – In Staffordshire pest control is overseen by the local borough or district council.

Contact the relevant local council to enquire about their pest control services. <https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Environment/Pest-Control/Home.aspx>

Stoke-on-Trent – Contact Pest Control on 01782 232065

Refer to the following document for more information
https://www.stoke.gov.uk/info/20006/housing_and_neighbourhoods/131/pest_control

Useful resources

Clouds End <https://www.cloudsend.org.uk/>

Hoarding UK hoardinguk.org

Hoarding Disorders UK hoardingdisordersuk.org

Hoarding Support [Hoarding Support](#)

Help for Hoarders helpforhoarders.co.uk

Hoarding Ice-breaker form <https://hoardingicebreakerform.org/>

MIND [What is hoarding? - Mind](#)

NHS [Hoarding disorder - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

Reaching North Staffs info@reaching.org.uk

Useful videos:

What is compassion? – A short video produced by Clouds End explaining the importance of compassion in understanding hoarding disorder

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-DouVFlkks>

Staffordshire County Council (only)








The Quick Fix Fund – this aims to provide a resource to speed up solutions which are beyond our statutory duties but where a small amount of money could make a big difference to the adult's situation and the care they receive.

Requesting access to quick fix funds – E-mail quickfix@staffordshire.gov.uk attaching the completed referral from available on SCC Staffspace or the SWLA. Refer to associated guidance available on these sites.

Appendix 1 - Clutter Image Rating Scales and Suggested Responses

Clutter Image Rating Scale – Bedroom

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

		
1	2	3
		
4	5	6
		
7	8	9



Clutter Image Rating Scale – Kitchen

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

		
1	2	3
		
4	5	6
		
7	8	9

Clutter Image Rating Scale – Lounge/Living Room

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

		
1	2	3
		
4	5	6
		
7	8	9

Level One Actions (Clutter Image Rating 1-3)

Household environment is considered standard. No specialised assistance is needed. If the resident would like some assistance with general housework or feels they are declining towards a higher clutter scale, appropriate referrals can be made based on the adults needs and circumstances.

Organisation	Actions (always seek consent before making any referrals)
Referring Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss concerns with the adult.• Refer to Adult Social care for a Section 9 care needs assessment• Request a Home Fire Safety Visit partner referral form• Refer to GP if appropriate
Environmental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No action
Social Landlords	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Refer to Adult Social Care for a Section 9 care needs assessment is appropriate.• Refer to GP if appropriate.• Provide details on debt advice if appropriate to circumstances• Provide details of support streams open to adult via charities and self-help groups• Ensure the adult is maintaining their tenancy conditions.
Health and Social care professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make appropriate referrals for support to other agencies• Refer to social landlord if the adult is their tenant or leaseholder.
Emergency Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service – Will carry out a Home Fire safety Visit and work with partner agencies for high risk clients.• Ambulance Service – Ensure information is shared with statutory agencies (request consent) and feedback to referring agency on completion of any home visits.
Animal Welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No action unless specific advice requested
Safeguarding of Adults and Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If there are any adults of children in need of care and support, refer via the appropriate social care pathway.

Level Two Actions (Clutter Image Rating 4-6)

Household environment requires professionals assistance to resolve the clutter and the maintenance issues in the property.

Organisation	Actions (always seek consent before making any referrals) In addition to the actions listed below, these adults will need to be monitored and reviewed regularly due to the risk of escalation and reoccurrence.
Referring Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss concerns with the adult.• Refer to Adult Social care for a Section 9 care needs assessment• Request a Home Fire Safety Visit partner referral form• Refer to GP if appropriate• Refer to the landlord if the adult is a tenant.• Refer to Environmental health if the adult is a freeholder• Referral for debt advice if appropriate
Environmental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Carry out an inspection of the property – following assessment, Environmental Health Officer to determine the appropriate course of action.• Consider legal interventions under the Environmental protection Act 1990, Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 or Housing Act 2004
Social Landlords	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visit adult to inspect the property and assess support needs from a housing perspective.• Refer to Adult Social Care for a Section 9 care needs assessment is appropriate.• Refer to GP if appropriate.• Refer internally to assist in the restoration of services to the property where appropriate.• Provide details on debt advice if appropriate to circumstances• Provide details of support streams open to adult via charities and self-help groups• Ensure the adult is maintaining their tenancy conditions.• Enforce tenancy conditions relating to the resident's responsibilities
Health and Social care professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make appropriate referrals for support to other agencies• Refer to social landlord if the adult is their tenant or leaseholder.• Ensure information sharing with involved agencies to ensure a collaborative approach to the adult's support.

Emergency Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service – Will carry out a Home Fire safety Visit and work with partner agencies for high risk clients. • Ambulance Service – Ensure information is shared with statutory agencies (request consent) and feedback to referring agency on completion of any home visits.
Animal Welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit property to undertake a well-being check on any animals at the address. • Educate the adult regarding animal welfare if appropriate.
Safeguarding of Adults and Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If there are any adults or children in need of care and support, refer via the appropriate social care pathway.

Level Three Actions (Clutter Image Rating 7-9)

Household environment will require intervention with a collaborative multi-agency approach with the involvement from a wide range of professionals. This level of hoarding constitutes a Safeguarding concern due to the significant risk to health of the householders, surrounding properties and residents. The adult may be unaware of the implication of their hoarding actions and oblivious to the risk it poses.

Organisation	Actions
Referring Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss concerns with the adult.• Report as a safeguarding concern – DO NOT DELAY• Request a Home Fire Safety Visit partner referral form• Refer to Environmental health
Environmental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Carry out an inspection of the property – following assessment, Environmental Health Officer to determine the appropriate course of action.• Consider legal interventions under the Environmental protection Act 1990, Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 or Housing Act 2004
Social Landlords	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visit adult to inspect the property and assess support needs from a housing perspective.• Enforce tenancy conditions relating to the resident's responsibilities• Attend any multi-agency meetings.
Health and Social care professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete all required assessments• Co-ordinate a Multi-Agency Planning Meeting• Ensure information sharing with involved agencies to ensure a collaborative approach to the adult's support.• Consideration of a safeguarding plan to manage ongoing risks
Emergency Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service – Will carry out a Home Fire safety Visit and work with partner agencies for high risk clients.• Ambulance Service – Ensure information is shared with statutory agencies (request consent) and feedback to referring agency on completion of any home visits.
Animal Welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visit property to undertake a well-being check on any animals at the address.• Educate the adult regarding animal welfare if appropriate.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remove animals to a safe environment if required.
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Responses are adapted from the West Midlands Adult Self-Neglect Best Practice Guidance