

# Understanding hoarding

and where to find help





## Causes of hoarding

Your reasons for collecting items are unique and personal but they might be due to:

- A history of hoarding in your family
- Your mental health condition, for example PTSD or anxiety
- Bereavement or loss
- A physical disability you may have
- A learning disability you may have.

Sometimes, you might feel a sense of shame about hoarding which can lead to you feeling increasingly isolated. As a result, you may find it hard to ask for help. You may not realise the impact that the problem has on the people around you and the detrimental effect it can have on their lives, including their physical health and safety.

## What is hoarding?

The NHS describes a hoarding disorder as; 'Where someone acquires an excessive number of items that can be stored in a chaotic manner, usually resulting in unmanageable amounts of clutter. The items can be of little or no monetary value.'

Many people collect items throughout their lives. This can be an engaging and stimulating hobby. However, sometimes you can take this to extremes. Items can come from a variety of sources, such as: shops (including charity shops), online purchases, skips, friends and acquaintances, or can arise as a result of grief. Typical items include newspapers, books, clothes, animals, DVDs, food, toilet paper, bags or sentimental items.

The compulsion to keep these items can have a significant impact on your home:

- Living space can be significantly reduced
- Furniture and utilities can become hard or impossible to use.



## Hoarding can become a problem when you or someone in your family:

- Struggles to use a room in the way in which it was designed
- Starts storing things in places that you're not supposed to (e.g. putting cans of food in the bath)
- Finds it hard to escape their home in an emergency (like a fire)
- Is prone to slips, trips and falls



### And also, when:

- Tradespeople are unable to carry out essential repairs
- Cleaning becomes difficult
- Rodents become a problem
- Relationships are affected
- Children in the household are at risk of being injured, or hoarding impacts on a child's emotional wellbeing
- The stress of hoarding increases the risk of neglect or domestic abuse within your household
- It begins to impact on your quality of life.

## How to get help

Treatment requires courage to change what is often a very complicated behaviour. There is a lot of support available for you or other people who hoard but it can be hard to ask for help. Professionals will work hard to ensure that help happens at the right pace for you.

## Organisations that help you

There are lots of local and national resources with information on how to help you.

### Helpful websites:

Mind BLMK Hoarding Support Programme [www.mind-blmk.org.uk](http://www.mind-blmk.org.uk)

Help for Hoarders [www.helpforhoarders.co.uk](http://www.helpforhoarders.co.uk)

Hoarding UK [www.hoardinguk.org](http://www.hoardinguk.org)

OCD UK [www.ocduk.org/hoarding](http://www.ocduk.org/hoarding)

Children of Hoarders [www.childrenofhoarders.com](http://www.childrenofhoarders.com)

## Local professionals and teams

- GP – can assess physical and mental health or activate a referral to specialists for help. Can also prescribe medication.
- NHS Mental Health Service – can advise on how to look after your mental health, including talking therapy like Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.
- RSPCA – can help look after any household pets and offer advice about how to care better for animals.
- Housing – can help with organising and sorting household items.
- Fire service – can offer Safe and Well visits to reduce the risk of fire and give advice about clear escape routes and a bedtime routine. If required, smoke alarms will be provided.
- Social care (adults) – can assess your care and support needs, carers might be entitled to support too. Another option may be a carer's assessment to organise a deep clean of your property and provide support with any safeguarding referrals.
- Hospital – may be able to provide support before you are discharged to go home, ensuring a safe return.
- Support for children – there are lots of ways local services can support children in your household.



## Next steps

If you, or someone you know, has an issue with hoarding,  
please make contact with:

### Your GP

The local fire service

Tel: 0800 043 5042

[homefiresafetyvisit@bedsfire.gov.uk](mailto:homefiresafetyvisit@bedsfire.gov.uk)

Your relevant local authority:

Bedford Borough Council

Tel: 01234 267422

Central Bedfordshire Council

Tel: 0300 300 8301

Luton Borough Council

Tel: 01582 546000