



## Recognizing Hoarding Tendencies

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### Prevalence in the U.S.

- Begins in early childhood around age 13 and progresses with age.
- Equal opportunity: regardless of race, ethnicity, age, sex or socio-economic status.
- Gender: undetermined, contradictory findings.

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### Prevalence in the U.S.

- Genetics/heredity, seems to run in families.
- Global phenomena: occurs cross-culturally. Japan, UK, Australia, Germany, etc.

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## Comorbidities

Hoarding disorder is a co-occurring disorder 92% of the time.

- 57% Major depressive
- 30-40% OCD
- 31% Organic brain illness
- 29% Social phobias
- 28% Generalized anxiety

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## Hoarding Facts

- Clutter may be situational (e.g., after a move or during illness) and temporary, whereas hoarding tends to be chronic and worsening without intervention.
- MH disorder, not a deliberate decision or act.
- Not a moral issue.

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## Hoarding Facts

- Not caused by laziness, lack of standards or lack of responsibility.
- Hoarding Disorder often coexists with other mental health conditions, such as anxiety, depression, or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

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## Hoarding Facts

Not everyone with a cluttered home has hoarding tendencies, and not everyone with hoarding tendencies meets the criteria for Hoarding Disorder.

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## Hoarding Disorder Defined

(DSM-V) May 2013

Diagnosis must include the following 4 parts:

1. Persistent difficulty discarding or parting with personal possessions.
2. Accumulation of a large number of possessions that fill up and clutter the active living areas of the home, workplace, or other personal surroundings.

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## Hoarding Disorder Defined

(DSM-V) May 2013

3. Prevents normal use of the space.
4. Symptoms cause clinically significant distress or impairment.

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## Hoarding Disorder

- A diagnosable mental health condition characterized by persistent difficulty discarding or parting with possessions, regardless of their actual value.
- This results in significant clutter that disrupts normal functioning.

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## Hoarding Characteristics

- **Quantity:**  
Items accumulate to the point that they obstruct living spaces and daily activities.
- **Emotional Attachment:**  
Strong emotional attachment or perceived need for items, even if they are broken or have no practical use.
- **Distress:**  
Discarding possessions causes significant emotional distress or anxiety.

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## Hoarding Characteristics

### Impairment:

- Overwhelming clutter interferes with basic functions (e.g., sleeping in bed, cooking in the kitchen, using the bathroom).

### Health and Safety Risks:

- Increased risk of falls, fire hazards, and pest infestations.

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## Example

A resident who cannot access their bed due to piles of clothing and paper or refuses to discard spoiled food for fear of “wasting” it.

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## High Clutter Defined

Everyday accumulation of items that may temporarily reduce organization or cleanliness but does not impair the use of living spaces.

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## High Clutter Characters

- . Items are typically functional or sentimental but not excessive.
- . Individuals are generally aware of and bothered by the mess and will address it over time.
- . Living spaces remain usable (e.g., beds, tables, stoves can still be used for their intended purposes).

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## Example

A resident with a stack of unopened mail or laundry that needs folding but clears these within a reasonable timeframe.

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## Risk Factors and Triggers in Older Adults

Life Changes and Stressors:

- Bereavement, retirement, or loss of independence.

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## Risk Factors and Triggers in Older Adults

Health and Mental Health Considerations:

- Dementia or cognitive decline.
- Depression, anxiety, or past trauma.

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## Risk Factors and Triggers in Older Adults

Social and Cultural Influences:

- Experiences of poverty or scarcity.
- Generational attitudes toward possessions.

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## 5 Types of Hoarding

1. Animals
2. Food
3. Paper
4. Impulsive shopping
5. Trash

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## Beliefs about Possessions

- Responsible for the planet: doesn't want it to end in landfill, wants it to go to a good home.
- Saving to share information with others. (newspapers, books, magazines, etc.)
- Sentimental: represents my life, it's a part of me, family heirloom, etc.
- Fear of running out of stuff. (paper towels, toilet paper, soup cans, etc.)

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## Thoughts and Emotional Responses

- "I Could lose this information forever."  
Causes: anxiety, fear, sadness, guilt.
- "I need to save this information to share with the right person at the right time."  
Causes: excitement, joy, satisfaction (dopamine)
- "I'll just deal with my situation later when I have the time and energy."  
Causes: relief, and avoidance!

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## Collectors

- Pride: feel proud about items collected.
- Organized: keep items organized and well maintained.
- Joy: find joy sharing and willingly display items and shares with others.
- Socialize: attend meetings or conferences with others who share their interest.
- Can Afford it: budget their time and money.

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## High Clutter

- No major difficulty with excessive acquisition.
- Manageable and localized.
- No major difficulty discarding items.
- Can carry on with normal activities in home.
- May pose a safety/tripping hazard.

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## Hoarders

- Embarrassed by chaos and loss of control.
- Scatter randomly w/o functional organization, loss of functional living space.
- Feel uncomfortable with others and refuses to let others see.
- Often in extreme debt.
- Feel ashamed, sad or depressed after acquiring additional items.

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## Hoarding and Insight

Hoarders have varying levels of insight about the extent of their problem and the ways that it impacts them and those around them.

- Low or no insight. (denial)
- Non-insightful. (low self-awareness)
- Insightful, but unmotivated.

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## Hoarding and Insight

- Insightful, motivated, but noncompliant.
- Acknowledges and works to fix it.
- Others are often more aware of or bothered by the clutter than the individual.

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## Family

- Family members can range in reactivity and beliefs (genetic)
- They can influence intervention efforts or hinder them
- They may have hoarding tendencies themselves
- Family relationships are likely strained because of the clutter

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## 10 Telltale Signs

1. Living areas are unusable.
  - There are often no sitting areas in the home. The hoarder creates “nests” if they need a place to sit or sleep.
2. Appliances and utilities are shut off.
  - Moldy refrigerators, overflowing toilets and infested ovens are often found in hoarding homes, making basic functions like cooking and bathing impossible.

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## 10 Telltale Signs

### 3. No organization to the clutter.

- Hoarders may be unable to control their impulse to buy things or take free items, but they do not organize or display their possessions.

### 4. Home is unsanitary.

- From structural damage to infestations to decaying piles of garbage, sanitation problems can quickly arise and spread to neighboring homes.

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## 10 Telltale Signs

### 5. Lack of maintenance requests.

- Hoarders may not request repairs or allow routine maintenance to help hide their hoarding behavior.

### 6. An extreme number of pets.

- Animal hoarders may intend to care for their pets, but the situation often leads to unintentional neglect, abuse, or death.

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## 10 Telltale Signs

### 7. Unwilling to dispose or give up items.

- Psychologically or sentimentally attached to their belongings.
- When another person touches, moves, or attempts to dispose of their things, it can cause overwhelming anxiety.

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## 10 Telltale Signs

8. Combative or defensive when confronted.

- Ultimatums do not usually work.
- Become angry or distance themselves if pushed to change their behavior.

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## 10 Telltale Signs of Hoarding

9. Socially isolated.

Hoarders may feel alienated by family and friends who do not understand their behavior, or they may hoard to comfort their loneliness resulting from isolation.

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## 10 Telltale Signs of Hoarding

10. Unwilling to allow people inside their home.

Guilt, shame and embarrassment may prevent hoarders from allowing people to enter their homes.

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### What We See

- Dirt. Mess, trash.
- Health hazard.
- Crazy behavior.
- Upset neighbors.
- A problem/something to be fixed.

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### What the Resident Sees

- Their whole world.
- What they needed to survive.
- No one else's business.
- Creative efforts.
- Sense of worth/wealth.

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### Recognizing Hoarding Tendencies

#### Early Warning Signs:

- Reluctance to let staff enter the unit
- Visible clutter in common or visible areas
- Resident complaints or concerns from neighbors

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## Recognizing Hoarding Tendencies

### Behavioral Indicators:

- Defensiveness about possessions
- Strong emotional attachment to items

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## Recognizing Hoarding Tendencies

### Environmental Clues:

- Piles of items blocking pathways or doors
- Difficulty using furniture for its intended purpose
- Utilities shut off

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## Psychological Impacts of Hoarding

- |                               |                                 |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ▫ Safety risks                | ▫ Legal consequences            |
| ▫ Health concerns             | ▫ Neighbor concerns             |
| ▫ Social isolation            | ▫ Family strain                 |
| ▫ Stigmatization and judgment | ▫ Decline in quality of life    |
| ▫ Financial burden            | ▫ MH depression, decompensation |

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## Challenges

1. Health and Safety Hazards
2. Property Damage and Maintenance Issues
3. Social Isolation and Stigma
4. Financial Strain

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## Challenges

5. Legal and Regulatory Challenges
6. Limited Access to Resources
7. Mental Health and Trauma
8. Community Well-being

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## Challenges

High clutter and hoarding present significant challenges within low-income and affordable housing communities, impacting residents, property management, and the broader community.

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## Impact on the Community

- Health & safety risks.
- Property values and neighborhood aesthetics.
- Social isolation and stigma.
- Community resources and services.

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## Impact on the Community

- Emergency response and crisis management.
- Legal and regulatory issues.
- Interpersonally dynamics.

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## Impact on the Community

### Environmental Impacts:

- Infestations spreading to neighboring apartment units.
- Listen to reports from other residents about odors, pests, or blocked shared spaces.
- Structure strain on buildings from excessive weight.

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## Multi-Faceted Approach

- Addressing the challenges posed by hoarding requires a multi-faceted approach that encompasses education, support, intervention, and collaboration among stakeholders.
- By recognizing the complex nature of hoarding behaviors and implementing targeted strategies, communities can create safer, healthier, and more inclusive environments for all residents.

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## Interagency Team Members

1. Resident
2. Property Manager
3. Service Coordinator
4. Maintenance Tech/Supervisor
5. 504 Coordinator

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## External Stakeholders

1. Adult Protective Services (APS)
2. Animal control
3. Building code enforcement
4. Environmental/Hazmat Services
5. Experienced clinical therapist, MHPs

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## External Stakeholders

- 6. Family members/trusted individuals
- 7. Fire Chief
- 8. Professional cleaner
- 9. Professional organizer
- 10. Public storage services

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## Balancing Autonomy with Intervention

- Older adults living in independent housing have the right to make personal decisions about their living spaces. (self-determination)
- Intervention should respect their autonomy unless their behavior endangers themselves or others.

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## Roll with the Resistance

- Expect it and do not fight it
- Consider the behavior to be the resident's best attempt to protect him or herself against uncomfortable/painful feelings
- Remember it is a mental health condition.
- Consider that the resident could be experiencing a traumatic response or declining health

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## Manage Initial Reactions to Cluttered Home

- Before going into resident's home, take a deep breath and leave all biases at the door.
- Facial expressions: your reaction will set the foundation for trust between you and the resident. (Vick's)
- Be aware of non-verbal cues

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## Manage Initial Reactions to Cluttered Home

- Use respectful nonjudgmental language
- Avoid judgments: "What a mess!"
- Avoid using "trash", "junk", "hoarding"
- Use resident's words: "your *things*", "your *collections*"

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## Communicating with Residents

- DO talk to the person face-to-face.
- Do use a gentle approach and let the person tell his/her story.
- DO respect the attachment to possessions by the person.

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## Communicating with Residents

- DO remain calm and factual, but caring and supportive.
- DO evaluate for safety.
- DO evaluate for human or animal neglect/cruelty.
- DO report your suspicions, findings.

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## Communicating with Residents

- DON'T make negative, teasing, or sarcastic comments.
- DON'T talk about the person to with other residents.
- DON'T Ignore the situation.  
Trust your gut. You must report.

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## Strategies & Interventions

- Build trust and rapport
- Education and psychoeducation
- Motivational interviewing
- Gradual exposure and desensitization
- Collaborative problem-solving

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## Building Trust

- Focus on immediate/urgent safety concerns
- Approach without judgment or stigma.
- Respect resident autonomy and privacy.
- Avoid discussing the “fate” of the residents possessions during initial visits, will be addressed later and may require input from other professionals

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## Build Trust

- Clarify safety and legal requirements (Section 8, Fire hazards)
- Place yourself and walk in your resident's shoes. (Empathy)
- How would you want others to help you manage your anger, frustration, resentment, and embarrassment?

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## Objects

Avoid touching Resident's objects

- Can evoke strong emotions from residents
- Violation; fear
- Use a notebook and pen to keep hands occupied; less temptation to touch objects

Avoid making suggestions about the belongings

- Suggestions though well-intended are generally poorly received.

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## Role of the Property Manager

- . Provide safe and affordable housing.
- . Housing policy compliance
- . Lease enforcement
- . Unit inspections

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## Documentation and Record-Keeping

### Detailed Records:

- . Document all observations, conversations, and interventions regarding hoarding tendencies. Include dates, actions taken, and outcomes.

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## Legal and Ethical Considerations

### Fair Housing Laws:

- . Addressing hoarding without discrimination
- . Reasonable accommodations

### Confidentiality and Consent:

- . Balancing resident privacy with safety concerns

### Mandatory Reporting Obligations:

- . When hoarding poses a danger to self or others

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## Legal Protections

- Ensure understanding of fair housing laws, reasonable accommodations, and eviction prevention strategies.
- Ensure that documentation protects both the resident's rights and the housing provider's compliance with legal obligations.

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## Lease and Housing Policy Compliance

### Lease Agreements:

- Hoarding behaviors that violate lease terms (e.g., creating hazards or impacting neighbors) must be addressed.
- Accommodations may be needed before considering eviction.

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## Lease and Housing Policy Compliance

### Safety Inspections:

- Routine inspections with sensitivity: Schedule regular but respectful unit inspections to identify risks early.
- Set small, manageable goals rather than overwhelming cleanouts.

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## Lease and Housing Policy Compliance

### Safety Inspections:

- Policies should clearly outline expectations for maintaining safe and habitable conditions in units, with transparent communication of potential consequences for non-compliance.

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## Notification and Accountability

- Schedules and coordinates unit inspection.
- Allow structured clean-up plans: If violations are found, give residents timelines and options for gradual cleanup with support.
- Property manager determines which notice to issue: 10-day or 30-day housekeeping notice

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## Notification and Accountability

- If resident does not pass the inspection (expected), 30 Day notice should be issued with a re-inspection date established. (Housekeeping Notice)
- Take photos, provides a baseline and documents progress and improvements.
- Make a referral to service coordinator.

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## Uniform Inspection Checklist

As a tool the UIC covers the minimum safety and sanitation standards required by multiple inspection sources such as:

- Housing authorities
- Property management companies
- Code enforcement
- Public health
- Fire

The UIC ensures all involved parties, including the resident, have clear and consistent expectations and guidelines for rectifying and maintaining a safe and sanitary home environment.

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## Role of the Service Coordinator

- . Works with property management to ensure interventions are in line with community policies and fair housing regulations.
- . Advocate for continued occupancy.
- . Offer information and referrals for community resources.

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## Role of the Service Coordinator

- . Partner with mental health agencies, clutter support groups (e.g., Clutterers Anonymous), or specialized hoarding intervention programs.
- . Participate in inspection.
- . Develop and implement a resident-centered Eviction Diversion Plan (EDP)

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## Monitoring and Follow Up

- Service coordinator schedules regular check ins according to those agreed upon in the EDP.
- Identifies hoarding community resources that will allow the resident to pass their inspection and determined safe according to their lease.

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## Documentation and Record-Keeping

### Detailed Records:

Document all observations, conversations, and interventions regarding hoarding tendencies. Include dates, actions taken, and outcomes.

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## Notification and Accountability

- Service coordinator makes contact, develops working relationship, creates Eviction Diversion Plan and notifies management if resident is responsive/cooperative.
- Reinspection date is set, focusing on the goals established in the Eviction Diversion Plan EDP.

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## Eviction Diversion Plan

- Holistic combination of services that divert a landlord-tenant dispute away from a court judgment.
- Aims to have landlords and tenants create a mutually acceptable agreement that stops the court case from proceeding and that ultimately promotes housing stability.

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## EDP General Guidelines

- Everything in the unit is able to function as it was built to be used. e.g.. the oven/stove contains no clutter so that a meal could be cooked, or a person could bathe in the tub/shower
- Provide full access to all plumbing
- Clear walkways, paths throughout unit

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## EDP General Guidelines

### Maintenance/Damages

Shall keep the premises and such other areas as may be assigned to Tenant for Tenant's exclusive use in a clean, orderly, safe condition, including but not limited to, cleaning drapes, windows, floors, cabinets, refrigerators, ranges and ovens.

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### EDP General Guidelines

- No accumulation of combustible materials, such as newspapers, clothing and rubbish, this poses a severe fire hazard
- PM should look for sagging floors or ceilings from weight of the items.

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### EDP General Guidelines

- Items on countertops stacked no higher than 2 feet
- Items stacked on floor no higher than five feet, unless against a wall
- No storage of hazardous materials

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### EDP General Guidelines

- REAC policies applicable e.g. There should be clear, easy exit/egress and there should be no obstructions
- There should be at least a 10-inch clearance by all heaters and vents
- There should be at least a 10-inch clearance in front of all windows

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### EDP General Guidelines

- No Egress concerns
- No overloading circuits and hazardous use of extension cords not permissible
- No garbage or clutter that attracts rodents or insects, or that produces foul odors is not allowed

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### EDP General Guidelines

- No signs of insect or rodent infestation, including gnawing/teeth marks on boxes, holes in items from chewing, nests
- Bedbugs/fleas
- No evidence insect exoskeleton (a brown or black husk), these can be seen on floors

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### EDP General Guidelines

- No excessive dust build up is not allowed
- No storage of hazardous materials
- No evidence of mold/mildew anywhere in unit

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## EDP General Guidelines

- All doors should operate as intended, able to swing all the way and closets able to roll back and forth, open/close
- Drains must be clear and no soap scum build-up

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## EDP General Guidelines

- As long as the resident makes progress, they can continue to get 30 days notices. (patience)
- If the resident does not continue to comply with the EDP, proceed with termination

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## Cross-Functional Collaboration

### Regular interdisciplinary meetings:

- Hold monthly check-ins between property managers, RSCs, and maintenance staff to review complex resident cases.
- Joint home visits: When appropriate, conduct team visits (e.g., RSC + maintenance) to assess and engage residents with hoarding in a coordinated way.

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## Cross-Functional Collaboration

Shared documentation system:

Use a centralized, confidential system to track resident interactions, maintenance issues, and support plans.

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## Hoarding is a Housing Problem When

- It violates applicable housing health and safety
- Standards, including those for animals
- It endangers vulnerable people as defined by state law
  - Children
  - Elders/vulnerable adults
  - Persons with Disabilities
  - Mandated reporters

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## Safety

- Fire hazard
- Blocked exits
- Risk of falls and death due to items falling (avalanche)

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## Safety

- Lack of routine home maintenance
- Structural damage to building from increased weight and volume of clutter
- Risk of eviction, homelessness and even death.

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## Hoarding is a Housing Problem When

- When it violates or progresses toward violating the Lease.
- Impairment of Neighborhood- Shall refrain from illegal or other activity which impairs the physical or social environment of the project or neighborhood

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## Hoarding is a Housing Problem When

It violates or progresses toward violating:

- HUD Standards including REAC and HQS
- Local or state health and safety codes
- Animal cruelty standards

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## HUD Sec. 5.703

- HUD housing must be descent, safe, sanitary and in good repair.
- (HUD - REAC Inspections)
- (HUD-Section 8 HQIs)
- Tax credit audits

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## Supporting Staff

- It's important to develop clear policies and procedures.
- Provides staff members the confidence to act when they see signs of hoarding and will embed it as an issue to look for in the course of their work with residents.

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## Supporting Staff

All staff should be trained to identify the signs of hoarding and to raise alerts and make appropriate internal referrals as part of their normal interaction with residents and work within properties. (KUDOS)

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## Intervention Strategies

- When approaching individuals struggling with high clutter and hoarding tendencies, sensitivity and effectiveness are paramount.
- Here are some practical strategies and intervention techniques:

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## Intervention Strategies

- Collaborative problem-solving
- Education and Awareness (Staff & Residents)
- Training All Team Members.
- Referrals to support services (MHPs, counseling, therapy, or support groups)

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## Intervention Strategies

- Safety assessments and interventions
- Community assessments
- Outreach and engagement
- Individualized eviction diversion (EDP) and safety plans.

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## Intervention Strategies

- Collaboration with social support networks
- Gradual decluttering process
- Emotional support and validation
- Frequent follow up and monitoring
- Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

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## Ineffective Intervention Strategies

- Making decisions about a plan of action on behalf of the resident. (EDP plan)
- Rationalizing, arguing or trying to convince or persuade. (Eviction)
- Pressuring the resident to discard.

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## Ineffective Intervention Strategies

- Telling the resident how they should feel.
- Giving verbal and non-verbal cues that are judgmental or negative in nature.
- Threatening to evict.

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## Key Strategies

By implementing the following key strategies in affordable senior living communities, it is possible to address the challenges posed by high clutter and hoarding in a sensitive and effective manner, ultimately improving the quality of life for residents.

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## Clear Policies and Protocols

Create internal guidelines:

- Develop written protocols for identifying, documenting, and responding to hoarding in a consistent manner.

Define health and safety thresholds:

- Clarify what constitutes a lease violation vs. what is manageable with support.

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## Clear Policies and Protocols

Reasonable accommodation processes:

- Include steps for offering support services before considering lease enforcement.

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## Routine Interactions

- Use routine check-ins or casual conversations to observe changes in behavior or living conditions.
- Pay attention to cues like frequent complaints about pests, odors, or needing more space.

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## Unit Inspections

Conduct regular inspections as per community policies, looking for signs of hoarding while respecting residents' privacy and dignity.

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## Regular Monitoring and Follow-up

Ensures that residents are receiving the necessary support and that the interventions are effective in managing hoarding behavior over time.

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## Environmental Modifications

- Storage solutions, decluttering strategies and regular inspections

### Community engagement

- Social activities helps to reduce social isolation

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## Proactive Community Programming

### Clutter reduction workshops:

- Host optional resident events on decluttering, home organization, or wellness.

### Celebrate successes:

- Recognize and reward residents making progress, even if small, to build positive momentum.

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## Proactive Community Programming

### Build trust over time:

Long-term relationships often yield better outcomes in hoarding cases than short-term interventions.

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## Emotional and Operational Support for Staff

- Training should cover how to talk to people who hoard and how to behave in respect of their collection of material.
- This will help to gain/retain the willingness of residents to work to identify and then address their hoarding behavior.

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## Emotional and Operational Support for Staff

Debriefing and supervision:

- Provide staff with regular spaces to process difficult cases and avoid burnout.

Peer support groups:

- Create peer networks or mentorship models to reduce isolation among staff managing hoarding situations

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## Emotional and Operational Support for Staff

Safety protocols:

- Ensure clear safety protocols are in place for entering cluttered or hazardous units.
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

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## Adult Protective Services (APS)

Contact information varies by state; visit [napsa-now.org](https://napsa-now.org) for details.

### Services:

- Investigates cases of self-neglect or unsafe living conditions.
- Connects seniors with support services to improve safety and well-being.

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## National Alliance on Mental Illness

[www.nami.org](https://www.nami.org)

### Services:

- Education about mental health conditions, including hoarding disorder.
- Local affiliates that offer support groups and resources for individuals and families.
- Helpline for connecting to mental health professionals and community resources.

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## National Resource Center on Supportive Housing and Home Modification

[www.homemods.org](https://www.homemods.org)

### Services:

- Resources on making homes safer and more livable for older adults.
- Information on programs to assist with decluttering and home modifications.

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## The International OCD Foundation (IOCDF)

[www.iocdf.org/hoarding](http://www.iocdf.org/hoarding)

### Services:

- Specialized resources for hoarding disorder, including research, tools, and guides.
- Professional help directory to locate therapists and support groups.
- Annual Hoarding Awareness Week and related campaigns.

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## Cleaning for a Reason

[www.cleaningforareason.org](http://www.cleaningforareason.org)

### Services:

- Nonprofit offering free cleaning services for individuals in need, particularly those with health conditions.

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## Clutterers Anonymous (CLA)

[www.clutterersanonymous.org](http://www.clutterersanonymous.org)

### Services:

- Support groups and recovery programs for individuals dealing with chronic clutter or hoarding tendencies.
- Online and in-person meetings.

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## The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

### Services:

- Information on aging, mental health, and environmental hazards associated with hoarding.

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## Local Area Agencies on Aging (AAA)

[www.n4a.org](http://www.n4a.org)

### Services:

- Local services for seniors, including mental health support and housing assistance.

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## Hoarding Task Forces (State or Local)

Many states or counties have dedicated hoarding task forces.

### Services:

- Multidisciplinary teams that include housing providers, mental health professionals, and code enforcement officers.
- Assistance with intervention plans and resource coordination.

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## National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)

[www.nfpa.org](http://www.nfpa.org)

### Services:

- Safety guidelines for reducing fire risks in cluttered homes.
- Training resources for staff and community members on fire prevention.

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