

Bitesize Briefing: Hoarding

PODCAST

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1 What is Hoarding?

Hoarding is a **pattern of behaviour** in which someone keeps collecting things and finds it very difficult to throw them away, even if the items have little to no value. Hoarding results in a cluttered living environment, affecting the person's daily life. Without the right support at the right time, Hoarding may pose risks to the health and safety of both the adult and those around them.



2 Why Might Hoarding Occur?

It is rarely one single factor that causes hoarding behaviour. Hoarding is a recognised mental health condition, which usually develops from a mix of psychological, emotional and environmental factors. Understanding the **why** is crucial for effective support and proactive safeguarding.



LEARN MORE

Hoarding is not simply messiness, laziness, or lifestyle choice. The emotional attachment and distress are central to the condition, not just the level of clutter.

DID YOU KNOW?



Insight

Many people who hoard have limited insight into the severity of the problem, and may refuse support.

3 Indicators of Hoarding Behaviour

Difficulty discarding items due to executive dysfunction or distress

Excessive acquisition of items, sometimes in multiples

Strong emotional attachment to items, regardless of their value

Excessively cluttered home environment, resulting in fire hazards or access restrictions

Behaviours that demonstrate wider self-neglect

You can request a **free Home Fire Safety Check here.**

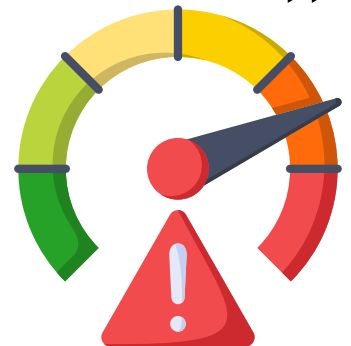


DID YOU KNOW?

4 Hoarding & Fire Risk

Fire risk is one of the main safeguarding concerns in hoarded environments. Hoarding-related fires:

- Spread quicker than other household fires.
- May produce more smoke and toxic fumes.
- Are more likely to result in serious injury or death due to blocked escape routes. Fire and Rescue Services may also struggle to enter the property or move around safely once inside.



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The likelihood and severity of fire is increased by...

Overloaded plug sockets and extension leads.

Damaged or buried electrical wiring.

Increased fuel loads (paper, clothes, packaging etc.)

Items stored on or near cookers, or distraction when cooking.

Proximity of portable heaters to potential fuel sources.

Missing, broken, covered or removed smoke detectors.

Faulty or poorly maintained appliances.

Smoking-related risks, such as smoking in bed.

Observe the environment and check escape routes. Ask yourself:

1. *Could someone escape quickly in an emergency?*
2. *Is there enough clutter to significantly increase how quickly a fire could start and spread?*
3. *Are there any obvious fire triggers (e.g. electrics, cookers, smoking)?*
4. *Would the person be alerted early enough if a fire started?*

5 Other Safeguarding Risks

Hoarding is often linked to **self-neglect**, including:

- Poor personal and environmental hygiene.
- Restricted access to washing/toilet facilities and safe food preparation areas.
- Deterioration in mental health.
- Malnutrition and/or dehydration.
- Physical health risks (such as infections) from environmental hazards (such as mould and damp, poor air quality, pests and infestations).

Hoarding may increase the risk of **financial abuse and exploitation, falls and physical injury**, and other **hidden harm** due to social isolation. Hoarded environments may also pose risks to others (neighbours, children living in the property, visiting practitioners etc.)



Safeguarding risks should always be assessed and addressed.

6 Talking About Risk

Start with relationship, not risk.

Show genuine interest in the person, not just their environment.

Be non-judgemental and respectful.

Avoid language like 'unsafe', 'dirty' or 'unacceptable' initially. Avoid criticism or shame.

Focus on safety rather than blame.

Frame the conversation around risk and wellbeing, not behaviour.

Be honest about risk.

Do not minimise serious risk, but use clear, factual language calmly. *E.g.: "Getting out in an emergency would be difficult because..."*



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