

# Hoarding from the Inside Out

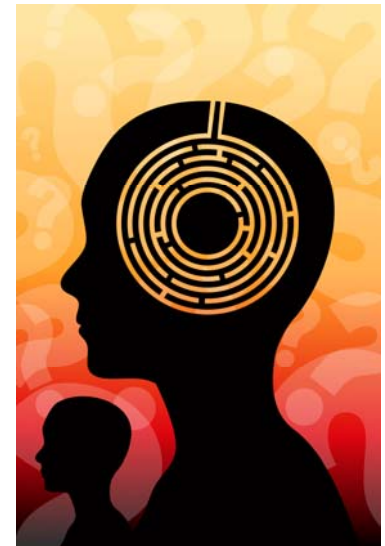
**Behind Closed Doors:  
Getting a Handle on  
Hoarding**

# How hoarders think

This module discusses the thought processes associated with hoarding behavior. These thought processes work together, reinforcing one another:

- Extreme emotional attachment to items
- Procrastination
- Difficulty with decision-making
- Difficulty with organizing and categorizing objects
- Fear of forgetting
- Perfectionism
- Responsibility

You will learn how hoarders view their belongings and through familiar objects, begin to understand how hoarders think.



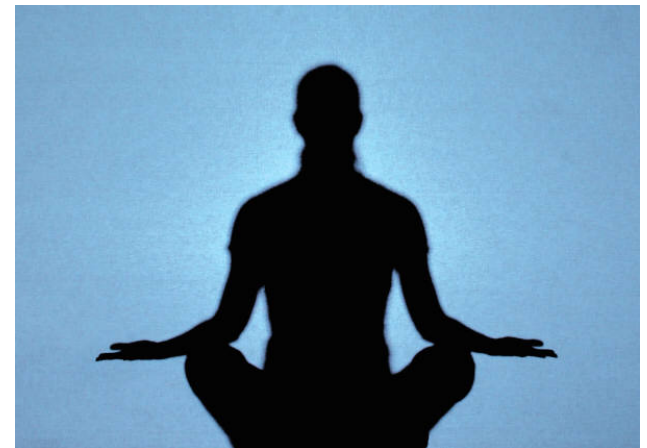
# Extreme emotional attachment

## Extreme emotional attachment to items

Many hoarders view their belongings as extensions of themselves, not as independent objects. Consequently, letting go of items feels like letting go of part of themselves. A hoarder who taught Yoga two decades earlier says of her sixty unopened Yoga video cassettes:

*“If I discard the Yoga tapes,  
I will lose that part of who I was.”*

Other individuals may keep a few tapes as a memento; the hoarder keeps all of them.



# Difficulty with decision-making

## Difficulty with decision-making

Hoarders tend to have extreme difficulty in making decisions. By keeping everything, hoarders avoid the anxiety associated with decision-making, and thus the hoarding behavior becomes self-reinforcing.

*“What if I need this one day...  
if I throw it away, I may be  
making the wrong choice.”*

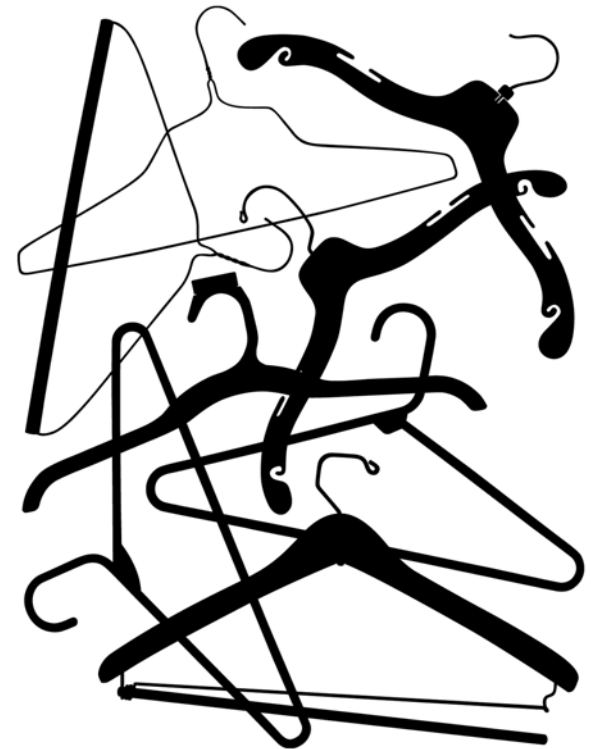


# Difficulty with organizing

## Difficulty with organizing

Hoarders have difficulty in organizing or categorizing objects. A non-hoarder sees the similarities in the items shown here --- a pile of black hangers --- and can group them together. A hoarder sees only the differences --- a wooden hanger, a wire hanger, a metal hanger, a skirt hanger, a pants hanger, a plastic hanger, a hanger with cardboard.

*“I don’t know how to categorize these, so I’ll place them in plain sight so I’ll know where they are.”*



# Procrastination

## Procrastination

Hoarders often plan to deal with things “later.”

*“See this chair with a broken leg?  
That is a good chair.  
I’m going to fix that one day.”*

Many people procrastinate or postpone activities, but eventually tackle the issue at hand. Hoarders tend to procrastinate continually.



# Perfectionism

## Perfectionism

Many hoarders fear that letting go of items means they will no longer be in control.

*“If I throw this away, it will be in the hands of someone else. How can I control what they decide to do with it?”*

Hoarders often rationalize keeping things “just in case.”  
A hoarder points to a bowl of used wine bottle corks:

*“I keep these because I may need one some day.”*

Many people keep a few extra corks “just in case.”  
The hoarder keeps hundreds.



# Responsibility

## Responsibility

Hoarders often disdain wastefulness and disapprove of how society disposes of items that could be used. Items like soda can tabs may be saved so they can be recycled or given away.



Many people save soda can tabs to recycle. The hoarder saves hundreds or thousands.



# How hoarders think

Hoarders often see usefulness or value in the most mundane of items. Pictured below are items that most people would consider to be trash:

- Used, blank Polaroid film
- Twist tabs from loaves of bread
- A used Styrofoam cup
- An empty pill bottle



# How hoarders think

A hoarder looks at the blank Polaroid film and sees a coaster for drinks, an under-liner for plants, scratch paper for making notes, weather-proof signs to mark seedlings in the garden, shims for a bookcase, a bookmark, or a reminder to search for a camera.



The twist tabs could be used for an art project, made into jewelry, placed in a glass bowl as colorful decoration, a tool to teach a toddler about colors, glued to shoeboxes to indicate which shoes are in the box, hung as decoration on plants or a Christmas tree, or to keep bread fresh.



# How hoarders think

The Styrofoam cup could be used to store things like pens or keys, made into a flowerpot for seedlings, turned upside-down and made into Christmas tree ornaments, used as a watering can for plants or as a measuring device for food, used as a tracing tool to draw a circle, or as a container for a beverage.



The empty pill bottle could be used to hold things such as paper clips or rubber bands, as a container for spices, pesto containers that could be frozen and defrosted for individual servings, as cookie cutters (with the top removed), or to hold pills.



# How hoarders think

Think back to the four items from the previous slides, which you initially viewed as trash. If you saw all those potential uses, would you be able to discard them? Hoarders see all the uses.



# In the eyes of the beholder

The vast majority of hoarders are mentally competent and are proud of their collections. They see no problem with how they live and don't understand why other people insist on being involved in what is their personal business. Many hoarders are very candid about the impact hoarding has had on their lives.



## Meet Joan

*I need help moving. I have a lot of things. In the hallway there are 70 cartons of stuff from my former job. I'll look through it and get rid of some, but most of my things will go with me to my new home. Last year I rented a storage compartment and put my sofa and chairs in it to make room in my living room for my things. That's why there is no where to sit in my apartment.*

*I need to rent more storage space for my stuff since my new apartment is smaller than this one. What else can I do? It's the only way I can keep my stuff.*



# In the eyes of the beholder

Some hoarders, on the other hand, are ashamed or embarrassed by their lifestyle. They know that something isn't "right," but are overwhelmed and don't know how or where to begin. Easily distracted and unable to initiate change on their own, they often feel out of control. They live behind closed doors and are often fearful of being discovered.



# Meet Louise

*You've probably never seen an apartment as bad as mine. I don't know how this happened. I used to run an office. I was organized. How did my home get to look like this? I try to keep it all in the second bedroom --- you can't really get the door open to that room with all the stuff...*

*The condo president asked to come visit me. I told him I was busy. I don't want him coming into my apartment. I'm afraid he'll see the way I live and I'll get evicted.*



# In the eyes of the beholder

Sometimes hoarding is the result of a gradual decline in physical abilities ---a spouse becomes overwhelmed with caregiving responsibilities and is unable to keep up with household cleaning and organization. The worse the situation becomes, the more paralyzed and stuck the individual feels.

These accidental hoarders may be receptive to outside help; however, the majority of hoarders do not fall into this category.



Congratulations!

You have completed the **Hoarding From the Inside Out** module.