



Don't Touch That!

Clutter—we all deal with it in some way or another. But for some people, clutter is something that can't be controlled. These are the people who can be considered hoarders.

Hoarding is a poorly understood mental disorder. For most of us, it's easy to just say "Well, throw all that stuff away and be done with it!" To the hoarder, however, all their stuff is important. It may be sentimental—"My mother gave me all those clothes." It could be that the person has gotten a great bargain—I have one friend whose mother had boxes and boxes of unopened dishes she had bought on sale. For many more, they are unable to categorize all their stuff. You and I can look at a pile of mail and determine that there are bills to be paid, bank statements to file and catalogs and junk mail to recycle. The hoarder, on the other hand, looks at the pile and is unable to determine what to do, so they do nothing, and the pile grows. This inability to categorize can create terrible anxiety to the point that doing nothing is better than doing anything.

Hoarding has a strong association with obsessive compulsive disorder, but recent research is showing a strong association with depression and dementia. This makes a lot of sense to me, because someone with depression or dementia is going to have trouble making these kinds of decisions, or, in the case of a depressed person, even being able to take the initiative to go through things.

Intervention with a hoarder is often a long and difficult process. The first impulse of many people is to just go in and throw everything out, but this is the worst thing to do. What you have to remember is that all that stuff is someone's treasure, even if it is clearly trash to everyone else. One of the more effective methods of dealing with a hoarder is to adopt a good cop/bad cop style.

The good cop can be anyone in the hoarder's support system: family members, social workers, friends, neighbors.

March 2010
Volume 3, Issue 3

Did You Know?

- The severity of hoarding seems to increase with age.
- Hoarding is found in 18-33% of adults.
- Extreme levels of hoarding often occur around age 35.

Compulsive Hoarding: Current Status of the Research,
Steketee & Frost

K & B Happenings

Steve and Monica will be presenting at the Alzheimer's Association Spring Symposium. The Spring Symposium is March 25, 2010, and is free for caregivers.

Steve will be talking about **Legal Tools for Advanced Planning**, and Monica is presenting on **Understanding Medicaid Benefits for Nursing Facilities** and **Understanding Veteran's Benefits**.

For more information call 817-336-4949.



Don't Touch That! continued from page 1

Possible bad cops are code enforcement workers, adult protective service workers, the court system, as well as family and friends.

The bad cop can provide the incentive—citations for violation of city codes, the threat of guardianship, etc. Then the good cops can work with the hoarder to start the long process of cleaning up. It is best to give the hoarder small, more easily attainable goals. You don't want to go in and tell them to clean out the front bedroom—that's just setting the person up for failure. But if you tell the person to clear off the bedside table, this is a much more easily attainable goal.

The one thing to keep in mind is that in some instances the amount and type of clutter involved can create hazardous conditions. Not only is there the obvious hazard of falling due to the clutter, but hazard when there are open containers of chemicals like pesticides, paints, or even gasoline. There are also health risks when animals are involved, whether animals themselves are hoarded, or when the home is infested with insects and rodents. Be aware of these hazards, and take precautions to keep yourself and the hoarder as safe as possible.

If you don't have time to devote to a project like this a professional organizer* might be a good resource.

Molly's Musings

Hi, Everyone—

I don't know what I got myself into when I asked if I could have my own column, now they expect me to actually have something to say every once in a while.

I just went to the vet to get my yearly vaccinations, so please be sure to get your regular flu and H1N1 vaccines, well as your pneumonia vaccines. I know it's a pain, but it's better than being sick.

Mom (Monica) read an article not long ago that said napping is good for you, especially if you are a caregiver and can't get enough sleep at night. Of course, I knew that napping is a good thing, and a habit I practice regularly.

Sweet Dreams!

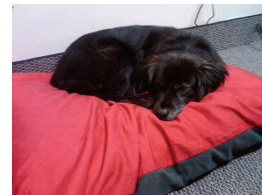


March is Social Work Month



Don't forget what the social workers in your life do for you.

*To find a professional organizer, go to www.napo.net.



as