

## **The Role of Hypnotherapy in Working With Cluttering and Hoarding**

**By  
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Clutter, which is often related to procrastination, is a leading cause of disorganization. There are many reasons why people clutter. Some reasons include things such as feeling overwhelmed, and your highest priorities at that time, are somewhere else. Perhaps you just don't know where to start in removing your clutter. How many times have you heard yourself say, "I better not throw this away? I might need it someday." Maybe you feel that you do not have enough space or enough time to take care of the problem. It could be that you just do not know where to go for help. If you know that you have a problem with keeping things, you may seek the assistance of a friend or even your spouse, if he or she is positive in helping you and not yelling at you for having it. There are also many organizations that help people get rid of clutter and organize your life.

Hoarding is a much more serious form of cluttering. It is the excessive collection of things, along with the person's inability to discard them. Hoarders often create such cramped living conditions that their homes may be filled to capacity with their things, leaving only narrow pathways that wind through the clutter. There is also a wide array of the items that people hoard. For example, some people hoard animals, others hoard books or anything that is digital. With animals, often the animals are ignored and dozens to hundreds of pets are living in unsanitary conditions, while others just collect things—newspapers, magazines, salt shakers, Beanie Babies, and so on. While collecting things that you find interesting is not a disorder, having so many of those things where they interfere with the functioning of your home, is hoarding.

Hoarding has also been referred to as compulsive hoarding or compulsive hoarding syndrome. It also can be a symptom of obsessive-compulsive disorder. Additionally, many people who hoard do not necessarily demonstrate any of the other symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder or OCD. Researchers are working very hard to try to understand hoarding as a separate and distinct mental disorder.

People who hoard, often do not see it as a problem. This, of course, makes treatment challenging for them. Intensive treatment can help people who hoard, better understand their compulsions to hoard, and teach them to live in a safer, more enjoyable environment. There is no clear definition of compulsive hoarding, as yet, in accepted diagnostic criteria used by psychology professionals, such as the DSM, considered the reference book of psychiatrists, psychologists, and other therapists.

Disposophobia (dis-POSE-uh-foe-be-uh) is a term created by professionals that refers to the relationship of people to their belongings. Interestingly, disposophobic behavior can range from a person's desire to have very little, or to having too much stuff for the space available. People who are severely disposophobic have even been known to go outside their homes and rent additional storage space for their things. Usually the real value of their things is often far less than what the perceived value is.

So, the characteristics of a hoarder can be things like the acquiring of and failure to get rid of a larger number of possessions that appear to be useless or of limited value,

living spaces sufficiently cluttered so as to preclude activities for which those spaces were designed, such as eating at the kitchen table, or sleeping in the bedroom, reluctance or inability to return borrowed items, and significant distress or impairment in functioning caused by the hoarding.

In its most dangerous forms, hoarding can cause fires, unclean conditions, such as rat and cockroach infestations, injuries from tripping on clutter and other health and safety hazards.

### **Treatment**

For individuals who are clutterers, hypnotherapy works quite well. Mostly, it is a bad habit that can be cleared up through hypnosis. Like any dysfunction, the client must want to get better or the hypnotherapy will not work. If the clutterer is in a marriage relationship and his/her spouse is not a clutterer, the disorganization and lack of cleanliness can become a source of aggravation. If the two people talk about the problem together and it is agreed that they will both work together to clean up the mess, to reinforce their actions through hypnotherapy is a great idea, and it is generally successful. In order to keep the problem from returning, listening to a hypnosis CD to help with this problem would be beneficial.

Hoarding is more difficult to treat because, according to available research, there are five levels of hoarding. These five levels of hoarding have been set by the National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization entitled the NGSCD Clutter Hoarding Scale.<sup>1</sup> This scale distinguishes five levels of hoarding, with level 1 being the least severe, and level 5 being the most severe. Further, within each level, there are four specific categories which define the severity of clutter and hoarding potential: Structure and zoning; Pets and rodents; Household functions; and Sanitation and cleanliness.

Levels 1 and 2 would probably do very well utilizing hypnotherapy as a treatment. With a level 1 hoarder, the household is considered standard. General clutter is found, such as stacks of things, boxes of things to be sorted through, extra books lying around, and so on. A person does not need any special knowledge in working with the chronically disorganized. With level 2, the household probably would require professional organizers to have additional knowledge and understanding of chronic disorganization. For example, arguing with the clutterer or putting them down in any way because of their mess would not be a productive way to work with that person. A level 2 could still be easily helped with hypnotherapy.

For levels 3-5 hoarders, the household may require services in addition to those a professional organizer and related professional can provide. Beginning with level 3, individuals are usually exhibiting symptoms that have to do with obsessive-compulsive disorder, OCD. According to one study, brain imaging studies (PET scans)<sup>2</sup> have shown that the cerebral glucose metabolism patterns seen in OCD hoarders were distinct from the patterns in non-hoarding OCD. The most notable difference was in the part of the brain that is responsible for focus, attention and decision making. A 2004 University of Iowa study found that damage to the frontal lobes of the brain can lead to poor judgment and emotional disturbances, while damage to the right medial prefrontal cortex of the brain tends to cause compulsive hoarding.<sup>3</sup>

Obsessive-compulsive disorders are treated with antidepressants, usually. The one that is used most often which is indicated for treatment of compulsive hoarding is paroxetine. In a 2006 study of the usage of this drug to treat compulsive hoarding was

conducted by the University of California, San Diego. Compulsive hoarding is also treated with psychotherapy which allows patients to deal with their emotions and behaviors. This was proven vital to the successful treatment of hoarding. On the other hand, most symptoms of OCD, such as contamination fears, checking and morbid/ritualistic thinking, are more effectively treated with “Exposure and Response Prevention” (ERP) and rarely treated with psychotherapy. ERP has two parts: Behavior Therapy and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. For more information on OCD, one could go to [www.ocfoundation.org](http://www.ocfoundation.org). This is the national OCD foundation. It is apparently changing its name to the International OCD Foundation.

For a CD that works with the disorganization of cluttering and hoarding, please visit Dr. Judy’s website at <http://www.cosmicangelhypnotherapy.com>.

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1. *Hoarding: Studies Characterize Phenotype, Demonstrate Efficacy, Psychiatric Times.*  
^[http://www.nsgcd.org/resources/clutterhoardingscale/nsgcd\\_clutterhoardingscale.pdf](http://www.nsgcd.org/resources/clutterhoardingscale/nsgcd_clutterhoardingscale.pdf)
  2. ^stands for: positron emission tomography. This information is used to detect the effectiveness of long term treatment.
  3. ^Univ. of Iowa on brain’s cortex and compulsive hoarding.  
(<http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg18024212.800-secret-of-compulsive-hoarding-revealed.html>)