

Getting a Handle on Hoarding

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Definition:

Acquisition of and failure to discard large number of possessions of useless or limited value

Living space cluttered to preclude activity for which space designed

Significant distress/impairment in functioning caused by hoarding

Frost & Steketee, 2007

Hoarder Profile

- **Hoarding Behavior begins in childhood (13)**
- **Trauma may precipitate behavior**
- **Increases with Increasing Age**
- **Female**
- **Unmarried, Lives Alone**

Hoarder Profile, cont.

- **Runs in Families**
- **Co-morbid Disorders: Anxiety, ADD, Depression, Impulse Control Disorder (ICD) and/or Personality Disorder**
- **Poor Insight; Deny Problem**

Personality Features

- Excessive high standards & perfectionism
- Excessive focus on details at the cost of the “big picture”
- Indecisiveness
- Difficulty regulating their emotions, e.g. easily upset, difficulty calming down
- Difficulty trusting others, or accepting another’s perspective

Hoarding Behaviors

- **Saving** - Sentimental, Instrumental, Intrinsic
- **Acquisition** – Compulsive buying; taking Free Things; Stealing/Kleptomania
- **Clutter/Disorganization** – Random piles, churning
- Note: **Extension of Self**

Conceptual Model of Compulsive Hoarding

- Core Beliefs & Vulnerabilities
- Information Processing Deficits
- The Meaning of Possessions
- Emotional Reactions
- Reinforcement Properties

Steketee & Frost, 2007

Core Beliefs & Vulnerabilities

- Self-worth
- Lovability
- Helplessness
- Vulnerability
- Family History
- Co-morbidity
- Parental Values & Behavior
- Traumatic Events
- Physical Constraints

Steketee & Frost, 2007

Information Processing Deficits

- Attention
- Categorize, Prioritize, Organize
- Lacks Confidence in Memory
- Perception
- Association
- Decision-making

Steketee & Frost, 2007

Meaning of Possessions (thoughts, beliefs, attachments)

- Beauty/aesthetics
- Memory
- Utility/opportunity
- Uniqueness
- Sentimental
- Comfort
- Safety
- Identity/potential
- Control
- Mistakes
- Responsibility/waste
- Completeness
- Validation of worth
- Socialization

Steketee & Frost, 2007

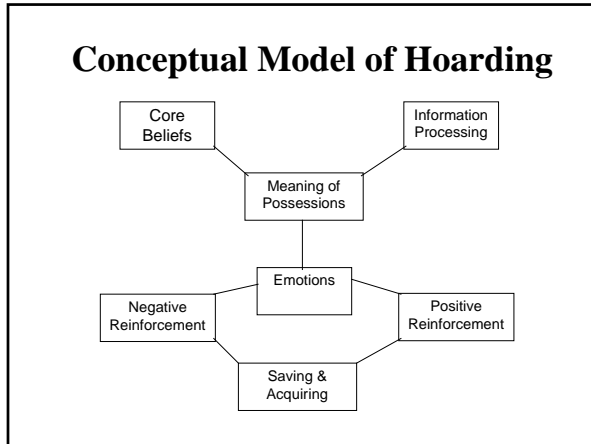
Emotions

- Positive Emotions
- Pleasure
- Excitement
- Pride
- Relief
- Joy
- Fondness
- Satisfaction
- Negative Emotions
- Grief/loss
- Anxiety
- Sadness
- Guilt
- Anger
- Frustration
- Confusion

Steketee & Frost, 2007

Reinforcement Properties

- **Positive Reinforcement** for saving and acquiring comes from positive emotions, e.g. being near possessions, handling them, shopping, collecting, etc.
- **Negative Reinforcement or Behavior Avoidance** is Rewarding (by not enduring negative emotions) e.g. Saving/acquiring avoids “feelings of loss”



Clutter & Hoarding

- Clutter is a product of a hoarding problem
- Physically reducing clutter does not address the hoarding problem
- Changing beliefs and the meaning of possessions eventually reduces clutter
- Improving organizing habits is a necessary component for change

Steketee & Frost, 2007

Interventions

Assessment & Intervention

- Apply Definition, Assess Hoarding Problem
e.g. using HOMES Risk Assessment
- Dev. Therapeutic Alliance
- Treat Co-morbid Disorders
- Assess Readiness for Change
(Tran theoretical Model of Change Process by Prochaska & DiClemente)
- Enhance Motivation

Identifying & Coping with Resistance

- Arguing
- Interrupting
- Negating (denying problem)
- Ignoring
- Unexpressed fears & shame

Examine Yourself

- Step back; ask what you are doing to elicit response
- Are you persuading the client that change is best?
- Are you assuming the *expert* role?
- Are you criticizing, shaming, or blaming?

Roll with Resistance

- Don't argue, or increase resistance
- Avoid an impasse; take 5
- Reflect it back in empathic way & acknowledge client's feelings
- Re-evaluate where client is, and back up

Developing Alliance

- Empathic, respectful, trusting, collaborative relationship is essential.
- Quiet & eliciting style to explore & resolve ambivalence.
- Direct attempts at persuasion should be avoided.

Do's

- Imagine yourself in client's shoes
- Match the client's language
- Use encouraging language
- Highlight strengths
- Focus initially on safety & organization and later work on discarding

Do's

- Meet as a team with client
- Help client stay focused on task
- Provide emotional support
- Help client make decisions but do not make decision for them
- Be a cheerleader
- Help with hauling

Don'ts

- Use judgmental language
- Devalue or negatively judge possessions
- Let your non-verbal expression say what you are thinking
- Make suggestions about discarding belongings

Don'ts

- Don't argue
- Don't take over decision-making
- Don't touch or move anything without permission
- Don't tell the client how they should feel
- Don't work beyond your tolerance level

Steketee & Frost, 2007

Helpful Questions for the Client

- Do I need it? (“need” vs. “want”)
- How many do I already have?
- Do I have a specific plan to use this?
- Will I use it within a reasonable time?
- Is this item in good condition?

Examine Emotional Attachments

- Will I honor someone's memory by saving this? Is that what the person would want?
- Is this object a cherished friend, or is it clutter that is taking up space?
- If I let go of this object, how bad would I feel? Would I feel that way forever?

Modify False Beliefs of Control

- If I save this, am I really in control? Or am I giving up control to my possessions?
- Does the clutter make me feel less in control of my life?
- Does keeping this really make me feel safer?
- Does the clutter make me less safe?

Putting It All Together

- ✓ Assess Hoarding Problem and Behavior
- ✓ Utilize Tools & Conceptual Model
- ✓ Develop Alliance & MI Language
- ✓ Examine Attachments, Modify Beliefs
- ✓ Select Target Areas/Agree on goals
- ✓ Assist Organizing/Decision making
- ✓ Practice Discarding
- ✓ Practice Not Acquiring
- ✓ Plan Appropriate Use of Living Space
- ✓ Re-check, plan relapse prevention

Interventions

Develop Hoarding Task Force

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Veterinarians/
Animal Control | Fire Department |
| Public
Health/Boards of
Health | Elder
Agencies/Home
Care/VNA |
| Mental Health | Maintenance |
| Child Welfare | Management |
| Adult Protective
Services | Legal |

Task Force Goals

- Develop relationships/network
- Develop protocols/action plans
- Assess, Plan, Do, Check
- Crisis Intervention/Monitor
- Educate Community

Barriers to Interventions

- Client competency; disabilities & illness; motivation; ambivalence; fears
- Lack of team cohesiveness, communication
- Lack of resources
- ?

Clutter Tips

- o “Only Handle It Once” (OHIO)
- o Simplify Decision Making
- o Buy & Keep “Just Enough”

Recommended Readings:

Steketee, G. and Frost, RO. Compulsive hoarding and acquiring. (2007) New York: Oxford Press (Therapist guide and Client workbook)

Tolin, D., Frost, RO., Steketee, G. (2007) Buried in treasures: Help for compulsive hoarding. New York: Oxford Press

Recommended Readings:

Frost, RO and Steketee, G. (2010) Stuff: Compulsive hoarding and the meaning of things. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

Tompkins, MA and Hartl, TL. (2009) Digging Out. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

Recommended Resources

Obsessive Compulsive Foundation
www.ocfoundation.org

Children of Hoarders
www.childrenofhoarders.com

New England Hoarding Consortium
www.instituteofliving.com

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Packrat is a documentary about hoarding,
distributed by Fanlight Productions:

www.packratthemovie.com

Nat'l Study Group on Chronic Disorganization
www.nsgcd.org

New England Professional Organizers:
www.napo-NewEngland.com

Resources

- www.masshousing.com/hoarding
- www.hoarders.org – San Francisco Guide
- www.clutterless.org – Recovery Groups
- www.messies.com – Online support
- www.AnimalHoarding.com
- www.clutterersanonymous.net – 12 Step Recovery Program
