



Practical Tips for Working with Hoarding Behavior

1. **Clarify the goal and get permission to help focus on it.** I hear goals like “clear, calm, open, functional”, or pain avoidance like losing a relationship and they’re behind on their bills due to clutter. The words they use allow us to support them, reflecting their desires when they get tired or stuck.
2. **Start small.** Clear a small area, where they spend the most time. Talk about the task, not the whole project.
3. **Try new ways to consider things.** Use questions that may help them think about objects differently. “How active is this?” What activity will you be doing when you use it? When will that be? Alternately, how often do you use this?
4. **Be prepared to work slowly.** This is like going to the gym with a trainer, gradually building up stamina.
5. **Help the client sit comfortably and let the helper do the holding.** When the client holds things it increases the thoughts, memories, stories and possibilities for each item.
6. **Protect your body.** Wear protective gear and use best practices for lifting. Don’t work bent over; use a table for sorting. Wear gloves and knee pads; get a good grip on things. Wear closed-toed shoes, long sleeves and long pants. If mold, or other biohazards are present, be prepared to use a respirator, eye protection and gloves. Drink lots of water!
7. **Sorting and downsizing: start with 4 mutually-exclusive categories.**
 - Action Items: Place in folder or bin, Work with calendar to prioritize and set due dates.
 - Utility Items: These items support activities of daily living, work and recreation.
 - Archive: Not active, store and mark with subject/activity and date stored.
 - Away: I put trash in large black bags, and donations or recycling in large clear bags.
8. **Work method 1- by category.** This is challenging in a densely packed environment. It’s good to begin with items that can be replaced more easily like clothes, and leave the most unique items like memorabilia for later in the process. Use the 4 mutually-exclusive categories.
9. **Work method 2 - like radar.** Look at the space like a clock and pick a spot, then work clockwise or counter-clockwise, sweeping the space, taking up one item at a time. Avoid a “popcorn” or random pattern of selecting items for evaluation. Make the most thorough

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decision possible about where each item goes before moving to a new one. Use the 4 mutually-exclusive categories.

10. **Make it easy to put things away.** Look at available storage space and ask: “In an ideal world, where would you keep your ____ (dishes, shoes, tools)?” Then dedicate that spot with a label “this space reserved for dishes”. That keeps non-dish items from creeping in. How do you want that storage space to function, with wiggle-room for daily use or dense storage that’s rarely used?
11. **A sense of enough.** Map out how much space to be set aside for each important category. Would that be enough for your needs? Bring all of each category together. Avoid over-duplication. This helps when shopping too, if you know how much you have.
12. **Try to discard broken things.** Repairs rarely get done in the most organized homes. Bring all fix-it’s together.
13. **Use stackable containers or boxes, not random sizes.** Go vertical within safe limits, and label containers by activity and date stored.
14. **Document the process.** Take photographs for the memories and to enjoy the before-and-after experience. Keep a map or index of where things are stored.
15. **Take breaks.** Drink water and get up and stretch!
16. **Step back and feel/see the results.** Ask for feedback. How does that space look and feel now? Use their language to inspire action the next small area. Don’t let them be hard on themselves for past decisions.
17. **Clean up time.** Be sure to take away anything you have been given permission to remove, even trash. This leaves the client with that clear, open and functional experience.

Call Janet Flint for a complimentary phone consultation.



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