



Tips for Family Members of People with Hoarding Behaviors

Professional Recommendations

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Understand That...

1. **Hoarding is an illness that resembles an addiction.** It can be managed, but not “cured.”
2. **It is the person, not the stuff that is important.** This can be hard to separate.
3. **It is ok to be upset with the behavior.** Try not to be upset with the individual.
4. **Cleaning and organizing is better left to professionals.** They are trained and experienced. The process can get adversarial and may not be resolvable.
5. **You are the healthy one.** Building a positive relationship takes time.
6. **People that hoard may also have a problem with decision making.**
7. **Threatening does not work** and is not an effective motivator for long-term change. The person already feels frightened, embarrassed, depressed and ashamed.
8. **Change takes time.** And in this situation, it must be maintained on an ongoing basis.

Helpful Tips and Tools...

1. **Educate yourself.** Read books, research the history, attend seminars and talk to others.
2. **Avoid conflict and maintain a positive relationship** by not accusing and blaming. This strains your relationship and makes it harder to address the clutter. Remove yourself from the “situation” and enlist a trained professional.
3. **Express your feelings concretely, including your unconditional love.** State your desire to spend time together, your concern for safety and good health, but do not nag.
4. **Share that help is out there.** Ask if you can provide a phone number to call. (Offer numbers of local mental health professionals and professional organizers specializing in hoarding.)
5. **Only accept items if they are for a specific occasion such as a birthday or holiday.** Do not reinforce the hoarding behavior by accepting items unless they meet this requirement. Be consistent. Emphasize activities and spending time together instead of physical items.
6. **Remove items from your family member's home only when requested or *sincerely* invited to do so.** The possible ramifications could make an already difficult situation much worse.
7. **Suggest photos** of items be put in an album that can last forever and will not be forgotten.
8. **Visit regularly** in person, by phone, and take advantage of social and community settings. Supplement with technology when possible, (email, Skype, Twitter etc.)
9. **Coach and encourage** but do not try to convince or push to discard items. Your family member needs to make their own argument for change.

Take Care of Yourself...

1. **Seek support** from those with time to listen. Remember, it is okay to feel frustrated.
2. **Try to be patient.** Take a lot of deep breathes. This takes time and tolerance.
3. **Don't take the behavior personally.** Attach your concerns and priorities to the person not the behavior or the stuff.
4. **Remind yourself that it is your desire for less stuff, not necessarily your family member's.** The desire for change must come from them, not you, for it to happen.
5. **Use a diary to record your feelings.** There is no benefit to repeatedly expressing them to your family member.
6. **Accept your family member.** It takes a long period of time to effect change.
7. **List the losses you have experienced as a result of the hoarding behavior.** This could include limited interactions, visits, and conversations. Acknowledge that these *may* be a reaction to the behavior.

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