



Digging Out: Helping with Hoarding & Clutter

Session #9

All in the Family and Other
Complications

Checking In: Digging Out Group Page

<https://www.southshorecrc.org/ssphc-diggingout-2026>

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Digging Out

Helping with Hoarding and Clutter ~ Online Discussion Group

Sponsored By: South Shore Public Health Collaborative

March 25 - June 10, 2026

Click below to view and download session-by-session materials:

Book: [Digging Out - Helping Your Loved One Manage Clutter, Hoarding & Compulsive Acquiring](#) (Tomkins & Hart, 2009)

Session #1 : Introduction & What is Compulsive Hoarding?

Handout

Slides

Session #2 : Harm Reduction

Handout

Slides

Session #3 : Setting the Stage for Harm Reduction

Handout

Slides

Session #4 : Helping Them Accept Help

Handout

Slides

Session #5 : Assessing Harm Potential

Handout

Slides

Session #6 : Creating a Harm Reduction Plan

Handout

Session #7 : Keeping the Harm Reduction Targets Clear

Handout

Resource List

Assessment Tools

- [HOMESB Multi-Disciplinary Hoarding Risk Assessment \(Ratbotis, 2009\)](#)
- [Home Assessment Tools for Professionals and Individuals](#)

Hoarding Resources

[Mass Housing Hoarding Resources](#)

Events

[Knights of Columbus - Get Rid of Your Stuff](#)



Checking In:

- Any parts of the chapter that you identified with through lived experience?
- What resonated with you?



Chapter Focus:

- Complexity of managing your person's hoarding problem if they are frail or live in assisted living.
- Strategies for creating a harm reduction plan when your person experiences dementia or difficulties with aging.

Chapter Focus Questions:

1. Which populations covered (multiple people who hoard living together, assisted-care residents, or older adults) do you expect to be the most difficult to support and why?
2. How might a harm-reduction mindset change your approach compared to a removal-focused approach?

People Who Hoard Living Together:

- Faster clutter accumulation and interpersonal conflicts.
- Include all contributors on the harm reduction plan.
- Explicit agreements on share responsibilities and consequences.
- Strategies to manage “turf wars”
 - Designated zones for possessions.
 - Equal-volume discard agreement (example: trade/sell exchange)

People Who Hoard Living Together Questions:

1. How would you include all contributors to hoarding on a harm-reduction team without increased conflict?
2. How could shared consequences (e.g., eviction risk) be framed to motivate cooperation rather than blame?

People Who Hoard in Assisted-Care Facilities:

- Facilities can often accommodate hoarding with tailored harm reduction strategies.
 - Provide pleasurable activities outside the room (reduce isolation).
 - Transfer hoarding of unsafe objects to safe substitutes (swap cart).
 - Make environmental changes to limit access to tempting items (lock supplies, alter food service).
 - Accommodate when possible (clear storage bins, rearrange furniture).
 - Decide when not to intervene (no risk >> monitor and maintain relationship).

People Who Hoard in Assisted-Care Facilities

Questions:

1. Which of the five harm reduction strategies seems most feasible to in your local assisted-care settings and why?
2. What safe-item swaps could be implemented on a daily “swap cart” at your facility?

When Older Adults Hoard

- Greater clutter from lifetime of accumulation; age-related cognitive and physical decline increases risks.
- Key concerns:
 - Self neglect and hygiene
 - Dementia
 - Frailty

When Older Adults Hoard Questions

1. How does lifetime accumulation change the goals and timeline for harm reduction for older adults?
2. Which stakeholders should be included in planning (family, medical, legal) and when should each be involved?

Impact of Self-Neglect on Harm Reduction

- Priority: Maintain hygiene to prevent infection.
- Examples: Dental care, regular changing of soiled clothing.

Impact of Self-Neglect on Harm Reduction Questions

- How can caregivers encourage hygiene without triggering resistance or shame?
- At what point does concern about hygiene or infection make a more intensive intervention necessary?

Impact of Dementia on Harm Reduction

- Effects on self-care, memory, and types of possessions saved.
- Issues:
 - Unsafe/rotten food and substances – remove or secure hazardous items.
 - Hiding behaviors – padlock/lock unused spaces; clear and monitor closets.
 - Accusations and mistrust – respond with compassion, view as symptom, not personal attack.

Impact of Dementia on Harm Reduction Questions

1. What monitoring or environmental controls are least intrusive yet effective for someone who hides items?
2. What practical steps reduce risks from rotten food, or hazardous substances?

Impact of Frailty on Harm Reduction

- Frailty multiplies fall risk when combined with clutter.
- Frailty can slow the harm-reduction process and increase injury risk during decluttering.
- Recommendations:
 - Keep pathways clear
 - Add railings and supports; consider walkers
 - Improve lighting by using night-lights ...

Impact of Frailty on Harm Reduction

- Recommendations (continued ...)
 - Replace slippery floors; secure rugs; add nonslip treads.
 - Use proper footwear (avoid loose slippers)
 - Limit sedatives when possible (risk of falls)
 - Encourage exercise to build strength

Impact of Frailty on Harm Reduction Questions

- Which frailty-related risks (falls, fractures, bedsores) are most urgent to address in your setting?
- What simple home modifications would you prioritize first to reduce hazards?
- How can medication (e.g., sedatives) be reviewed and adjusted collaboratively with prescribers to lower fall risk?

Wrapping Up

- Special populations require tailored harm-reduction approaches.
- Next chapter covers legal issues (eviction, protective services, clean-outs).
 - When to involve protective services, adult guardianship, or eviction prevention services.
 - What steps can families take now to prepare for potential legal challenges related to hoarding?



Questions or
comments?

