



Digging Out: Helping with Hoarding & Clutter

Session #8

Managing Bumps in the Road

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](#)

Event:

High Tide, Low Tide Me, **My Stuff**, and I

Is Clutter or Hoarding Behavior ...
Taking over your home or workspace?
Creating safety problems in your home?
Affecting your life and relationships?

Join us for a lively discussion with **Lee Shuer**, a hoarding disorder expert with lived experience who travels globally to speak about the stigmatized issue of hoarding - affecting an estimated 2-6% of the population. Lee understands the challenges of reducing clutter and offers practical, supportive approaches to help.

"For years, my clutter rose and fell like the ocean. Even at 'low tide,' when my home looked 'done' pockets of clutter remained — like tidal pools hidden in the shadows. Why? The clues were in those pools. I'll share insights I gained and strategies I used to make sustained progress so that you can help yourself or others live above the high watermark."



Saturday, May 30th
10 a.m. - 12 p.m.
Hingham Public Library
66 Leavitt Street, Hingham MA

RSVP by May 25th at www.SouthShoreCRC.org

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Checking In:

- Takeaways from Chapter 8, “Managing Bumps in the Road”?
- Of the “Six Common Reasons for Contract Failures” was there one or two that resonated with you based upon past work with a friend or family member? (pg. 135-142)

Main Focus & Causes of “Bumps”:

- Normalizing setbacks during clutter/hoarding recovery and giving practical strategies for handling relapses, resistance, emotional triggers, and family conflict.
- Causes: (1) grief over loss of possessions, (2) anxiety about change, (3) decision-making fatigue, (4) unresolved trauma, (5) enabling or critical family dynamics, and (6) external stressors (illness, moves, bereavement).

Emotional Work

- Validate feelings
- Separate the person's identity from their possessions
- Expect shame, guilt, anger, and ambivalence
- Use empathetic listening and avoid lecturing

Practical Relapse Strategies

- Plan for setbacks with a written relapse-prevention plan.
- Set small, specific, manageable goals rather than large targets.
- Use short, scheduled sessions (e.g., 15-30 minutes) to reduce fatigue.
- Revisit earlier successes and before/after evidence to rebuild momentum.
- Implement immediate environmental fixes (clear a path, secure essentials).

Communication Techniques for Caregivers

- Use nonjudgmental, motivational interviewing-style language.
- Focus on concrete behaviors and safety (pathways, fire hazards) rather than moralizing.
- Offer choices and collaborate on solutions.
- Avoid power struggles; set clear, consistent boundaries and consequences.

Problem-Solving Steps When Progress Stalls

- Pause and assess what triggered the setback.
- Reassess goals and break them into smaller steps.
- Reallocate tasks (bring in friends, volunteers, professionals) if overwhelmed.
- Address immediate safety risks first.
- Reinforce routines and schedules.

When to Engage Outside Help:

- Persistent safety hazards
- Severe psychiatric symptoms (depression, suicidality)
- Legal risks
- When progress is minimal despite consistent efforts (recommend professional organizers, therapists experienced with treating hoarding, and/or social services)

Maintenance and Prevention:

- Build routines for daily sorting, mail handling, and trash removal.
- Create accountability: regular check-ins, maintenance sessions, and tracking progress.
- Plan for life stressors (holidays, moves) with advance preparation and extra support.

Self-Care for Supporters:

- Set limits, seek peer or professional support, protect personal belongings, and maintain separate time and space.



Overall:

- Setbacks are expected; with planning, empathy, small steps, and appropriate help, long-term progress is achievable.

Setback Examples:

- **Emotional attachment / sentimental value:** “I can’t get rid of Grandma’s things — they’re all I have left of her.”
- **Fear of need or future scarcity:** “What if I need this later? I won’t be able to find another one.”
- **Decision fatigue / overwhelmed by choices:** “I don’t know what to do with all of this; deciding just makes my head spin.”
- **Distrust of the supporter or loss of control:** “If you throw this away I’ll never forgive you — I need to decide what happens to my stuff.”
- **Anxiety or distress during sorting:** “Every time I try to sort, I feel sick and panicked; I can’t keep going.”
- **Practical barriers (mobility, money, logistics):** “I can’t carry heavy bags to the dumpster and I don’t have money to hire help.”

Example Responses to Setbacks:

- **Emotional attachment / sentimental value:** Response: “I understand how important these are. Let’s slow down — can we pick one item to put in a safe ‘maybe’ box with a note about why it matters, and revisit it in 30 days?”
- **Fear of need or future scarcity:** Response: “I hear your worry. How about we keep one as a backup and store it where it won’t take up daily space? We can check in later and decide together if it’s still needed.”
- **Decision fatigue / overwhelmed by choices:** Response: “This is tiring — let’s make it easier. We’ll set a 15-minute timer and only work on one small area. I’ll help with every choice so you don’t have to decide alone.”
- **Distrust of the supporter or loss of control:** Response: “You’re the one in control here. I won’t remove anything without your say. Can we agree on a trial where you choose three items to review and I’ll follow your lead?”
- **Anxiety or distress during sorting:** Response: “If this is making you feel sick, we’ll stop and use a calming break. Would deep breaths, a short walk, or a 5-minute distraction help before we try one tiny task?”
- **Practical barriers (mobility, money, logistics):** Response: “That’s realistic — let’s solve the logistics together. I can arrange help to lift heavy bags or schedule a pickup, and we’ll pick small, low-cost steps you can manage.”



Questions or
comments?
