

Buried in Treasures Clutter Reduction & Accountability Group

Week 5: How Did This Happen?

Slides Posted Online: <https://www.southshorecrc.org/sspch-bit-2026>

“Clutter is not just the stuff on your floor – it’s anything that stands between you and the life you want to be living.”
(P. Walsh)

2026 Meeting Dates & Times: Wednesdays 4:00PM-5:30PM

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|-------------|-------------|
| 1. April 7 | 7. May 19 |
| 2. April 14 | 8. May 26 |
| 3. April 21 | 9. June 2 |
| 4. April 28 | 10. June 9 |
| 5. May 5 | 11. June 16 |
| 6. May 12th | 12. June 23 |

Group Comfort Agreement:

- We try not to ask other group members personal questions.
- What’s said here, stays here.
- Please make “I” statements, only referring to your personal experiences.
- Participation is voluntary.
- The group will begin at 4:00 PM and end at 5:30 PM.
- Cell phones should be set to silent and important calls will be taken outside of the room.
- Please be on time. Contact Suzanne (so@SuzanneOtte.com) or leave a message at (508) 645-6883 for absences or late arrivals.
- Group cancellation calls will be made by noon on the day of the group.

Syllabus:

Week 1:

Introduction & Getting to Know the Group

Week 2:

Assessing Clutter and Hoarding Challenges

Week 3:

Meet the Bad Guys

Week 4:

Meet the Good Guys

Week 5:

How Did This Happen?

Week 6:

Enhancing Motivation

Week 7:

Help with Reducing Acquiring

Week 8:

Sorting & Discarding Preparation

Week 9:

Sorting & Discarding – Let’s Go!

Week 10:

Bad Guys: Motivation and Working Time

Week 11:

Bad Guys: Taking on Your Brain

Week 12:

Planning Next Steps & Celebrating Success

Session to Session:

- Handouts will be distributed at each session.
- Bring book to each session. Keep handouts and notes in one place.
- Write in your book
- Set goals!
- Practice sorting, decision making, and discarding.

Sources: (1) Shuer, L. & Frost, R.O. (2014). *Buried in Treasures Workshop Facilitator’s Guide (Version 5.0)*; (2) Tolin, D., Frost, R.O., & Steketee, G. (2014; 2nd ed.) *Buried in Treasures: Help for Compulsive Acquiring, Saving, and Hoarding*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1

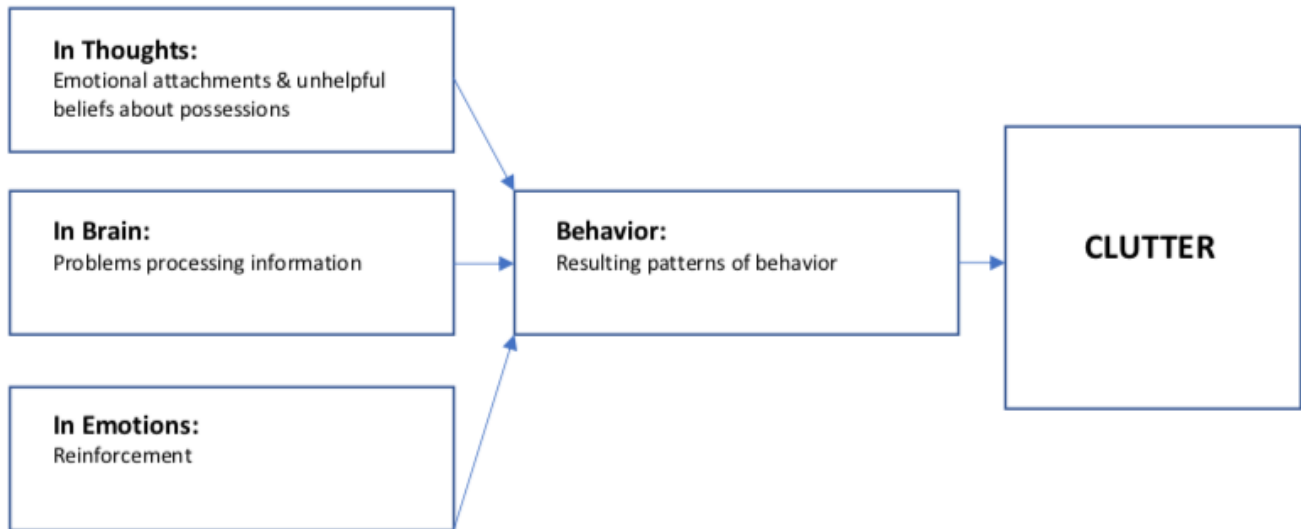
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Check-In:

- Mood rating (0-10) + share one sentence to describe a success related to your decluttering efforts.
- What have been the best things about this group so far?

Model for Understanding Your Reasons for Clutter



- **Hoarding is not just a house problem ...**
 - o Unless the **person** makes fundamental, sustainable changes in how he or she thinks, feels, and acts (alters the way they relate to possessions, the problem is still there).
 - o When **someone takes over the discarding process**, the person with the hoarding problem usually continues to acquire and save items until the house fills up again – sometimes more than before the clean-out.
- **Hoarding in Your Thoughts: Emotional Attachments and Unhelpful Beliefs About Possessions** (Box 1)
 - o **Thoughts and beliefs** become so entrenched that they create inflexibility and get in the way of making wise choices.
 - o **Common beliefs:**
 - **Usefulness, Waste, and Responsibility:** I can think of some ways to reuse this item. Therefore, I am responsible for doing so and if I fail to do so, I'm being wasteful. I will be a lousy person. But right now, I'm tired and stressed and I don't have enough time, so I can't follow through with the plan. To avoid being a lousy person, I'll hold onto the item until I can deal with it. (That time almost never comes.)
 - **Overly Creating Thinking:** A person's creativity exceeds his or her physical capacity to carry out the plan. People who clutter/hoard are highly creative and intelligent and come up with idea after idea, saving things for all sorts of reasons but never following through with plans.
 - **Perfectionism:** The prospect of making decisions – the “wrong” decisions is overwhelming.

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- **Hoarding in Your Brain: Problems with Processing Information** (Box 2)
 - **Brain scans (fMRI):** Frontal lobe activity too low (judging the relevance or importance of things) and too high (making decisions about keeping or discarding personal possessions.) Messaging is received differently.
 - **Attention:** External demands (to attention) take person off task during sorting & discarding. When acquiring, tied to becoming “locked on” to an item.
 - **Categorization:** When sorting own possessions, difficult to sort into large categories; many small categories are created instead.
 - **Decision-Making:** Indecisiveness can be linked to beliefs (perfectionism) and/or difficulty processing the information required to make a decision.
 - **Memory:** Difficulty remembering things and use of physical objects as reminders.
 - **Questions for YOU to consider:**
 - Do you have difficulty keeping attention focused on decluttering and organizing?
 - Do you have challenges with categorization?
 - Do you have problems with decision making?
 - Is memory an issue relative to sorting, discarding, and decision making?

- **Hoarding in Your Emotions: Acquiring & Saving to Find Relief From (or Gain) Unpleasant (or Pleasant) Feelings** (Box 3)
 - **Feeling Rotten:** Emotional discomfort typical in people who experience hoarding (feelings may persist or come and go):
 - Sadness, grief, loneliness, or longing
 - Anxiety, fear, tension, or worry
 - Guilt, regret
 - Anger, frustration, irritability, or annoyance
 - **Acquiring and saving behaviors** (oftentimes) is an attempt to get relief from unpleasant feelings.
 - **Sentimental attachment** (including anthropomorphism)
 - **Feelings of identity**
 - **Feelings of safety, security, and control** (physical & emotional)
 - **Positive feelings** (excitement, joy, wonderment, pleasure when acquiring or finding a lost item) can interfere with rational thinking about the costs of acquiring and hoarding.
 - **Questions for YOU to consider:**
 - Do sentimental attachments make it hard to let go?
 - Do identity beliefs support your reasons to collect?
 - Do your items relate to safety, security, and control?

- **Hoarding in Your Behavior: Resulting behavioral patterns (acquiring too much and not parting with enough)** (Box 4)
 - Possessions evoke **moods**.
 - Moods become powerful **motivators**.
 - Discarding a possession may evoke anxiety, fear, or other **unpleasant feelings**.
 - Frustration and anger may arise from feeling **pressure to discard**.
 - Behaviorally, a person may avoid the feelings of discomfort by **not working on discarding but acquiring** instead. Avoidance or acquiring is a way to gain relief from feeling bad.
 - **Questions for YOU to consider:**

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- Do you identify with reinforcements for “treasure hunting”?
- Do you have feelings you might be avoiding by keeping something you don’t need or acquiring a new item?
- What sorts of behavior patterns do your attachments, processing difficulties, and reinforcements lead to? Acquiring? Difficulty letting go?

Practice: An Experiment (completed for homework)

- After reading the reasons why you may save something, have difficulty processing it, and identifying what feelings reinforce your decisions, complete the exercises in *Buried in Treasures* on pgs. 78-83.
- Complete your model, using the blank form below and follow pgs. 83-85 in *Buried in Treasures* for guidance.

Model: *Reasons for Hoarding & Clutter*



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Goal Setting: At the close of each group, we will ask each person to set a short-term clutter-related goal for the upcoming week.

- Identify the problem or area you'd like to work on. Be specific.
- Define what you want to achieve.
- Create your plan. Write your goal.
- Set a timeline. Scheduling your work may help.
- Learn by doing. If needed, adjust your goals along the way.
- Be realistic. Clutter likely didn't accumulate in a short period of time. Be thoughtful about taking on a goal that is too ambitious.
- Share your progress during group time.

Preparing for Next Session:

- Read chapter 7 "Enhancing Motivation" in the Buried in Treasures (BIT) book before our next session.
- Complete Homework Form for Session 6 and bring to next group.
- Questions? Please e-mail Suzanne at so@SuzanneOtte.com

Check-out:

- Mood rating (0-10), your decluttering goal for the upcoming week + 1 encouraging word

NOTE: All slides and handouts are posted here:

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