

OVER WHELMED BY TOO MUCH STUFF?



MENTAL HEALTH
ASSOCIATION OF
SAN FRANCISCO

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**All addresses are located in San Francisco unless otherwise noted.*

OVERWHELMED BY TOO MUCH STUFF?

Most of us like to keep possessions that bring us comfort or appear to have value. But when one's daily activities and quality of life are compromised by an accumulation of these possessions, then a person might have a problem with compulsive hoarding.

COULD I HAVE A COMPULSIVE HOARDING AND CLUTTERING PROBLEM?

- ◆ Do I think I have too much stuff?
- ◆ Do friends and family think I have too much stuff?
- ◆ Do I have rooms I cannot use because of clutter?
- ◆ Do I have to move stuff off the furniture/bed in order to use it?
- ◆ Do I often lose things in my clutter?
- ◆ Am I reluctant to have people over because of the clutter?
- ◆ Do I have trouble getting to my windows, fire escape and doors?
- ◆ Have I fallen over my clutter?
- ◆ Do I get anxious when I think someone might take, rearrange or throw away my things?
- ◆ Do I bring things home even though my place is already cluttered?
- ◆ Am I afraid I will get in trouble with my landlord because of clutter or have I already gotten in trouble?

*If you have answered yes to any of these questions,
you may have a problem with compulsive hoarding.*

WHY DO I KEEP SO MANY THINGS?

- ♦ **I might get rid of something I will need later.** I would rather keep it in case I should ever need it in the future.
- ♦ **I don't want to waste things.** I do not want to be wasteful by discarding anything that could still be used. I feel responsible for items and want to make sure that they are used properly or given to those who may need them.
- ♦ **I have attachments to my things and do not want to get rid of them.** Each of my items means something to me. Some things I can use in the future, some things have an emotional meaning to me and some things are too valuable for me to get rid of.
- ♦ **I could forget an occasion/date/meaning.** Many of my items remind me of things and keep me up to date with the happenings around me (newspapers, magazines, etc.). If I get rid of them, I might forget things.
- ♦ **I am not able to clean up by myself.** It is difficult for me to clean up without outside help, so things pile up.
- ♦ **I live in such a tiny place.** If I lived in a bigger place, I wouldn't have to live this way.
- ♦ **I can't decide which things to get rid of.** I have a difficult time deciding which things to keep and which things to throw away.

Many people can find themselves overwhelmed by extensive clutter. Oftentimes, this problem is caused or aggravated by increasing age, physical disabilities and symptoms of several mental disabilities, including obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), attention deficit disorder (ADD), major depression and head trauma. Sometimes, major life changes like divorce, death of a loved one, unemployment, severe illness or the birth of a new child can affect one's ability to discard household items.

WHAT ARE SOME CONSEQUENCES OF HAVING TOO MUCH CLUTTER?

Safety Hazards — A cluttered house can limit mobility (causing falls) and can be hazardous to the elderly and disabled.

Health Hazards — Excessive clutter can lead to inadequate cleaning. Rotting food items can attract bugs and rodents, leading to health hazards. Reduced cleaning can also worsen existing allergies and breathing problems.

Fire Hazards — Clutter can block doorways and windows, making leaving a home very difficult. Boxes, paper, clothing and other items are extremely flammable and will add fuel to a fire.



All of these hazards can create other problems: falling and breaking bones, social isolation, problems with neighbors, family, friends and possibly eviction. If you are facing an eviction, turn immediately to the Legal Assistance Resources section (page 8) in this brochure.

LEGAL RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WHO COMPULSIVELY HOARD

In trouble because of clutter?

Your landlord may have given you a deadline or a written notice to clean up your unit, or even started formal eviction proceedings. If your clutter problem is caused or made worse by a disability, you have certain legal rights.

What is a disability?

Federal law, through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Fair Housing Amendments Act (FHAA), in addition to California law, defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more life activities, such as walking, seeing, hearing, working, learning or caring for oneself. These laws also consider a person to have a disability if he or she either has a history of or is regarded as having such an impairment. Here are some examples of how a disability might cause a clutter problem or make it worse:

Disability and Clutter: Some Examples

- ◆ Bill suffers from chronic depression that makes him unable to decide what to keep and what to throw away. Books and papers pile up in his apartment.
- ◆ Sandra's obsessive-compulsive disorder drives her to hoard appliances and clothes from garage sales in her apartment, which is already full.
- ◆ Michiko has possessions in boxes piled up to the ceiling of her apartment. After her stroke, she is physically unable to reach the boxes and sort through their contents.
- ◆ George's diabetes causes him to become legally blind, making it difficult for him to sort through stacks of printed material in his hotel room.
- ◆ Diana's brain injury from a car accident makes it hard for her to remember where things are in her apartment. Because of this, she keeps buying the same supplies over and over again.

Your Right to Reasonable Accommodation

If a disability is causing or making your clutter problem worse, you have a right to ask your landlord to adapt her or his rules, policies or practices, so that you are given an equal opportunity to use and enjoy your unit. Usually, in a hoarding/cluttering situation, the reasonable accommodation you request will be for the landlord to give you more time to get help to get rid of your clutter.

How to Ask for a Reasonable Accommodation

- ◆ Let the landlord know that you have a documented disability and how the disability affects your clutter problem.
- ◆ Be prepared to give the landlord a doctor's letter verifying your disability. The landlord has a legal right to ask for such a letter. (Resources for mental health practitioners who can provide such a letter are in the Mental Health Resources section on page 9.)
- ◆ Ask for an accommodation that will take care of the problem (usually, more time to get help). The amount of time you ask for should be realistic but not too long.
- ◆ Plan how you will get help from relatives or friends, from a paid cleaner or organizer or from a government program such as In-Home Supportive Services. (See Compulsive Hoarding Resources, starting with Legal Assistance Resources section on page 8.)



WHERE CAN I GET HELP?

Legal Assistance

If the landlord won't give you more time, thinks you are asking for too much time, or goes ahead with an eviction, it is important to reach out to one of several legal organizations that help people with eviction matters. Remember, evictions move quickly, so you need to get legal help as soon as possible. (See Legal Assistance Resources section on page 8.)

Mental Health Support

It will be important for you to start cleaning and getting rid of some things, but this may be a difficult, exhausting process. Many people have trouble deciding what to part with and have emotional attachments to their things. It is helpful to find emotional support during this time. You can find help through support groups, individual therapy or other mental health treatment options. (See Mental Health Resources section on page 9.)

Clean-Up Help

There are organizations and services that may be useful to you as you clear out your home. Some local agencies will pick up your donated items and distribute them to people who are in need. Other organizations offer a helper if you need physical help getting rid of items. (See Clean-Up Help Resources section on page 10.)



◆ LEGAL ASSISTANCE RESOURCES ◆

AIDS Legal Referral Panel

(415) 701-1100 ◆ 1663 Mission Street, Suite 500

Provides legal services for people with HIV/AIDS in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Bar Association of San Francisco — Lawyer Referral Service

(415) 982-1600 ◆ 301 Battery Street, 3rd Floor

Provides access to low-fee or free attorneys in eviction defense cases. If you receive an eviction notice (30-day or 3-day) call for placement with an attorney. If you receive a summons and complaint (5-day notice) go immediately to the Eviction Defense Collaborative (see below).

Bay Area Legal Aid

(415) 982-1300, Legal Assistance Line: (415) 982-4243 ◆ 50 Fell Street, 1st Floor

Provides attorneys for individuals being evicted out of Section 8 and public housing.

Eviction Defense Collaborative

(415) 947-0797 ◆ 995 Market Street, Suite 1200

Assists in filing appropriate papers upon receipt of a summons and complaint (5-day notice) and an unlawful detainer. Client must come in within 5 days (including weekends) of receipt of paperwork. Walk-in hours daily.

Homeless Advocacy Project

(415) 974-6541 ◆ 995 Market Street, Suite 915

Provides free legal services and supporting social services to individuals and families who are homeless or at serious risk of homelessness in San Francisco.

Housing Rights Committee of San Francisco

(415) 703-8644 ◆ 427 South Van Ness Avenue

Offers free phone and drop-in counseling and advocacy programs for tenants to secure their rights to habitable and affordable housing in San Francisco.

Independent Living Resource Center

(415) 543-6222 ◆ 649 Mission Street, 3rd Floor

Provides housing counseling to help individuals request reasonable accommodations for clutter problems. Does not provide legal representation.

Legal Assistance to the Elderly, Inc.

(415) 538-3333 ◆ 995 Market Street, Suite 1400

Provides legal assistance to San Francisco residents of all ages, including adults over 60 years of age and younger adults with disabilities.

Protection & Advocacy, Inc. (PAI) ("Disability Rights California")

(510) 267-1200 or (800) 776-5746 ◆ 1330 Broadway, Oakland, CA 94612

Provides free legal information and advice to people with disabilities on a wide range of disability-related issues, including housing discrimination.

◆ MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES ◆

24 Hour Mental Health Access Line

(888) 246-3333 or (415) 255-3737

Provides mental health evaluations and diagnoses needed to prove disability. Call for initial screening and to set up an appointment for evaluation and treatment.

Bay Area Helplink

Marin, Napa, Solano or San Mateo Counties call (800) 273-6222 or (415) 808-HELP or San Francisco residents dial 211

Provides referrals to community counseling agencies and self-help groups throughout the Bay Area.

Clutterers Anonymous

(310) 281-6064 ◆ P.O. Box 91413, Los Angeles, CA 90009

A self-help 12-step organization with chapters throughout the United States. Members can receive a newsletter and several brochures on the topic of clutter.

Friendship Line

(415) 752-3778

24-hour counseling hotline for elderly suicide prevention and grief counseling.

Independent Living Resource Center

(415) 543-6222 ◆ 649 Mission Street, 3rd Floor

Provides support, referrals, advocacy and housing counseling for people with disabilities.

Mental Health Association of San Francisco (MHA-SF)

(415) 421-2926 ◆ 870 Market Street, Suite 928

Provides information and referrals on mental health including information on cluttering issues as well as referrals to independent clutter organizers. Sponsors weekly hoarding and cluttering support group. Call for updated information on meetings and new programs.

National Attention Deficit Disorder Association

(847) 432-2332, American Coaching Association: (610) 825-4505 ◆ 1788 Second Street, Suite 200, Highland Park, IL 60035

Information and referrals are available to ADD coaches through the American Coaching Association. ADD coaches can assist individuals to become better organized and to establish organizational systems.

OC Foundation

(203) 315-2190 ◆ P.O. Box 9573, New Haven, CT 06535

A self-help organization dedicated to the expansion of understanding, research and treatment of obsessive-compulsive disorder. Provides a monthly newsletter to its members and can refer individuals to professionals knowledgeable in the evaluation and treatment of OCD.

◆ CLEAN-UP HELP RESOURCES ◆

Cleanerific

(415) 820-7230

Provides janitorial services for your home or office. Call for free estimate.

In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS)

(415) 557-5251

If you are low income and either elderly or disabled, IHSS provides government funding for you to hire a worker chosen by you - either someone you know or through a referral from the IHSS Public Authority (see below) - or receive homecare services through the IHSS Consortium (see below). Free to individuals receiving or eligible for SSI, otherwise you pay a "share of cost."

IHSS Consortium

(415) 255-2079 ◆ 1453 Mission Street, Suite 520

Employs, trains and supervises home care workers who provide services in your home. The agency also assists you in obtaining other services to help you to continue living independently at home.

IHSS Public Authority

(415) 243-4477 ◆ 832 Folsom Street, 9th Floor

Refers in-home care workers to disabled, blind or elderly clients. Refers IHSS-funded workers or workers to be paid directly by you. Sliding scale fees.

La Raza Day Labor Women's Collective

(415) 252-5375 ◆ 474 Valencia Street, Suite 295

Provides workers to be paid directly by you for cleaning services. Hourly rates \$10-\$17. Call at least one day in advance.

Mental Health Association of San Francisco

(415) 421-2926 ◆ 870 Market Street, Suite 928

Provides referrals to clean-up agencies and independent organizers.

National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO)

(512) 454-8626 ◆ P.O. Box 140647, Austin, TX 78714

San Francisco Bay Area Chapter of NAPO

(415) 281-5681 ◆ P.O. Box 895, Millbrae, CA 94030

Provides information, products and assistance to help others organize their homes or businesses.

National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization (NSGCD)

(404) 231-6172

A non-profit organization serving professional organizers and related professions who are interested in the study and methods of serving chronically disorganized people.

San Francisco Department of Public Health - Environmental Health Services Code Enforcement: Complaints Program

(415) 252-3805

Responds to and resolves citizens' complaints regarding unsanitary conditions, public health hazards, nuisances, pests and mold in Apartments, Private Homes and Public Housing Authority properties.

SRO Hotel/Shelter Program

(415) 252-3857

Conducts routine inspections and responds to tenants' complaints in SRO Hotels and Shelters, provides training/educational materials to tenants and landlords, assists tenants and landlords in effectively eradicating bedbugs, rodents, mold, etc. Connects tenants to other support services.

St. Anthony's Foundation

(415) 241-2600 ♦ 121 Golden Gate Avenue

Low-fee cleaning services.



◆ PICK-UP SERVICE/DONATION PLACE RESOURCES ◆

Building Resources

(415) 285-7814 ◆ 701 Amador Street

Accepts building materials such as lumber, tile, windows, doors and plumbing parts. Will pick up large amounts of materials.

Community Thrift Store

(415) 861-4910 ◆ 623 Valencia Street (near 17th Street)

Accepts a variety of donations in saleable condition. Will pick up large quantities including furniture. You can donate to benefit a nonprofit of your choice in the Bay Area, including the Mental Health Association of San Francisco (Donor #206).

Goodwill Industries

(415) 575-2101 ◆ 1500 Mission Street

Accepts many donations, including large items. Accepts only new computers, no large appliances, no sofa beds or items in disrepair. Will pick up large items/quantities only.

Scroungers' Center for Reusable Art Parts (SCRAP)

(415) 647-1746 ◆ 801 Toland Street (Entrance is on Newcomb Avenue between Toland and Selby)

Accepts many different types of donations. Will pick up large quantities. Call for details.

SF Advertiser

(415) 863-3151 ◆ 130 Tenth Street

Will place one free weekly listing in their paper for items given away for free or sold for less than \$500; autos and auto parts are not included.

St. Anthony's Foundation

(415) 241-2600 ◆ 121 Golden Gate Avenue

Accepts donations such as clothing, dishes and flatware — no large appliances or items in disrepair. Call for pick-up request.

St. Vincent De Paul Society

(415) 597-7960, call (510) 638-7600 in Oakland ◆ 525 5th Street (at Bryant)

Accepts donations in good condition; no office supplies, sporting goods or tools. Will pick up donations, call one week in advance for an appointment.

www.Craigslist.org

Allows you to place free ads for items to sell or give away.

◆ BOOK & PAMPHLET RESOURCES ◆

Brain Lock: Free Yourself from Obsessive-Compulsive Behavior, Jeffrey M. Schwartz (1997)

Buried in Treasures: Help for Compulsive Acquiring, Saving, and Hoarding, Randy O. Frost, Gail Steketee and David F. Tolin (2007)

Clear Your Clutter with Feng Shui, Karen Kingston (1999)

Clutter Control: Useful Tips For Getting Rid of the Mess, Susan Wright (1999)

Cluttering: A Clinical Perspective, Florence L. Myers and Kenneth O. St. Louis (editor) (1986)

Clutter's Last Stand: Its Time To De-Junk Your Life!, Don Aslett (1984)

Compulsive Hoarding and Acquiring, Gail Steketee and Randy O. Frost (2007)

Compulsive Hoarding and Acquiring - Therapist Guide, Gail Steketee and Randy O. Frost (2006)

Conquering Chronic Disorganization, Judith Kolberg (2006)

Creating Sacred Space with Feng Shui, Karen Kingston (1996)

Getting Control: Overcoming Your Obsessions and Compulsions, Lee Baer, Ph.D. (2000)

"*Help at Home*", A guide to help you get hooked up with IHSS, available from the Independent Living Resource Center

How to Conquer Clutter, Stephanie Culp (1989)

"*How to Deal with Paper Clutter*", Available from the Independent Living Resource Center

Lighten up!: Free Yourself from Clutter, Michelle Passoff (1998)

National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization Publications:
"Backsliding", "Body Double Work" and "Heirs of the Chronically Disorganized",
Available at www.nsgcd.org/publications/pro_pubs.php

Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders in Adults: A Comprehensive Clinical Guide, Lorrin M. Koran (1999)

Organizing from the Inside Out, Julie Morgenstern (2004)

Overcoming Compulsive Hoarding: Why You Save and How You Can Stop, Fugen Neziroglu, Jerome Bubrick, Ph.D. and José A. Yarura-Tobias (2004)

Stop Clutter from Stealing You. Life: Discover Why You Clutter And How You Can Stop, Mike Nelson (2001)

Stop Obsessing!: How To Overcome Your Obsessions and Compulsions, Edna Foa, Ph.D. and Reid Wilson (1991)

Take Time for Your Life, Cheryl Richardson (1999)

The Messies Superguide: Strategies and Ideas for Conquering Catastrophic Living, Sandra Felton (1991)

The OCD Workbook: Your Guide To Breaking Free From Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Bruce M. Hyman and Cherry Pedrick (1999)

The Simple Living Guide, Janet Luhrs (1997)

You Mean I'm Not Lazy, Stupid, or Crazy?!: The Classic Self-Help Book For Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder, Kate Kelly , Peggy Romundo and Edward M. Hallowell (2006)

Women with Attention Deficit Disorder: Embracing Disorganization at Home and in the Workplace, Sari Solden (1995)



◆ ONLINE RESOURCES ◆

American Psychiatric Association: www.psych.org

Animal Hoarding: A Review of the Literature: www.wordbridges.net/elderabuse/AAR/Vol1Issue3/hoardinglitreview.html

An organized collection of relevant research on animal hoarding, with an emphasis on hoarding by elderly people.

Bazelon, Center for Mental Health Law: www.bazelon.org

Center for Internet Mental Health: www.mentalhealth.com

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder:
www.chadd.org

Chore Genie Organizer Program: www.wecosoft.com/geniescorner

A comprehensive website outlining tips for a cleaner home and a forum to speak with others about organization of home and office.

Clutterers Anonymous: www.clutterersanonymous.net

12-step fellowship of individuals who share experience, strength and hope with each other in order to solve their common problems with clutter and help others recover.

Clutterless Recovery Groups, Inc.: www.clutterless.org

Support for individuals who find it difficult to discard unwanted possessions using psychological principles to change behavior with newsletters, literature, information, referrals, conferences, pen pals and group meetings.

Disability Rights Resource Guide: www.disabilityresources.org

FlyLady, for daily organizing strategies: www.FlyLady.net

Frequently Asked Questions: user.cybrzn.com/~kenyonck/add/faq_clutter.html

Resource for common questions about clutter and why people hoard.

Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium: www.tufts.edu/vet/cfa/hoarding/index.html

Site to increase awareness of a complex disorder which has until recently not received serious attention by medical, mental health and public health professions. Similarities to other forms of hoarding behavior are discussed.

Hoarding Support Groups: understanding OCD.tripod.com/hoarding4_supportgroups.html

A resource providing information about local hoarding support groups and hoarding support groups on the web.

Mental Health America: www.mentalhealthamerica.net

Mental Health Association of San Francisco: www.mha-sf.org

Messies Anonymous: www.messies.com

Multilingual 12-step program aims to improve the quality of life for disorganized homemakers. Provides motivation and a program for change to help members improve self-image as control of house and life is obtained. Optional donation at meetings.

Messies Home on the Web: www.geocities.com/heartland/meadows/3337

A website created for fellow messies.

National Association of Professional Organizers: www.napo-sfba.org

National Attention Deficit Disorder Association: www.add.org

National Institute of Mental Health: www.nimh.nih.gov

National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization: www.nsgcd.org

Newsgroups and Other Information: www.faqs.org/faqs/alt-recovery/clutter

Obsessive Compulsive Foundation: www.ocfoundation.org

Online Support Groups:

www.groups.yahoo.com/group/DitchThatClutter

www.groups.yahoo.com/groups/Declutter-Support

www.groups.yahoo.com/groups/TwelveStepGroup

San Francisco Bay Area Center for Cognitive Therapy: www.sfbacct.com

Understanding Obsessive-Compulsive Hoarding:

understanding OCD.tripod.com/index_hoarding.html



Acknowledgements

MHA-SF wishes to thank the following individuals and organizations for their contributions to this booklet:

Bar Association of San Francisco, Volunteer

Legal Services Program

Conard House, Inc.

Dave Crow, Crow and Rose, Attorneys at Law

Frances Strassman, More Than Order

Michael A. Tompkins, PhD, Bay Area Center

for Cognitive Therapy

Michael Magy

Monika Eckfield, RN, MSN, UCSF/School

of Nursing

S.F. Adult Protective Services

S.F. City Attorney's Office, Code

Enforcement Team

S.F. Independent Living Resource Center

S.F. In-Home Supportive Services, Public

Authority

S.F. Mayor's Office on Disability

This brochure was sponsored in part by a grant from the City and County of San Francisco Human Services Agency, Department of Aging and Adult Services.

The Mental Health Association of San Francisco (MHA-SF) is dedicated to improving the mental health of residents in the diverse communities of San Francisco through advocacy, education, research and service. In all its programs, MHA-SF works together with people and families challenged by mental illness and with the agencies that serve them to promote prevention, access to services, leadership and independence.

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