Hoarding in Later Life

Hoarding is a complex issue that can affect people at any stage of life, but it can present particular challenges in later life. Over many years, possessions can accumulate, and factors such as physical health problems, reduced mobility, bereavement, social isolation, trauma, or cognitive changes can make it increasingly difficult to manage clutter within the home.

Hoarding is not simply a matter of untidiness or collecting items. It is often linked to emotional, psychological, and practical factors that require understanding, compassion, and appropriate support.

For older people, excessive clutter can have a significant impact on safety, wellbeing, and independence. Cluttered living environments can increase the risk of trips and falls, restrict access to essential areas of the home, create fire hazards, affect hygiene, and make it more difficult for care, support, or emergency services to help when needed. In some circumstances, older people may become increasingly isolated from family, friends, neighbours, or support services because they feel unable to welcome others into their home.

Understanding Levels of Clutter

People's perceptions of clutter can vary considerably. What one person considers manageable may be viewed as problematic by another. The **Clutter Image Rating Scale** provides a practical and consistent way of assessing the level of clutter within a home.

Using a series of photographs that show rooms with increasing amounts of clutter, the scale helps individuals, family members, carers, and professionals identify the image that most closely reflects the home environment.

The Clutter Image Rating Scale is not intended to judge or label individuals. Instead, it helps identify whether clutter may be affecting a person's health, safety, wellbeing, or quality of life, and whether additional support may be beneficial. It can also support sensitive conversations about risk while promoting dignity, choice, and independence.

When Should You Be Concerned?

If you are concerned about the level of clutter in your own home, or that of an older relative, friend, neighbour, or person you support, the Clutter Image Rating Scale can provide a useful starting point for discussion.

Higher levels of clutter may indicate an increased risk of harm and could suggest that further assessment, practical support, or specialist intervention would be helpful.

Support is Available

If the Clutter Image Rating Scale highlights concerns about the level of clutter within the home, support is available.

The Hourglass Helpline provides free, confidential advice, information, and support for older people, family members, carers, and professionals who may be concerned about hoarding, self-neglect, abuse, or wider safeguarding issues.

Download and review the Clutter Image Rating Scale below to better understand levels of clutter within the home and identify when additional support may be needed.

If you have concerns about your own situation or that of an older person, please contact Hourglass for advice, information, and support. Our Helpline can help you understand potential risks, explore available options, and access appropriate services at the earliest opportunity.

Webinar Resource

You may also find our webinar, **"Hoarding and Older People: The Impact on Older People, Families and Professionals"**, helpful.

Guest speakers include:

- Linda Fay, Hoarding Specialist
- Kerry Musselbrook, IRISS
- Vicki Pringle, Transform Forth Valley

The webinar explores the causes and impact of hoarding in later life, the challenges faced by families and professionals, and practical approaches to supporting older people while promoting dignity, choice, and independence.

https://youtu.be/3qxQt7L0xfI?si=-sGKZVWUieiht8gW