

Resource 16.2. Conscious Acquiring Process

This step-by-step checklist to turn back impulse buying is a harm-reduction strategy I developed and have used with many clients who struggle with impulse buying.

This process is meant to:

- ✓ slow you down;
- ✓ break the rush of excitement and urgency that fuels impulsive acquisition;
- ✓ support you to develop other options;
- ✓ give you time to rationally consider other alternatives without the influence of the roller-coaster rush of adrenaline, serotonin, or dopamine coursing through your body, influencing a rash, impulsive decision you may regret;
- ✓ support you to make decisions you won't regret later; and
- ✓ help you avoid digging the rut of hoarding even deeper.

1. As much as possible, take a break from shopping while you learn, practice, and integrate self-regulating strategies. Self-regulating is about making a plan and following the plan most of the time.
2. Plan not to go to stores other than for groceries, unless groceries are an issue for you. Do this by delegating other purchases to family and close friends who are supportive of your hoarding challenges and dehoarding goals. Only delegate to those who are 100 percent behind you, so that you do not have to feel defective, apologetic, or indebted for asking.
3. Even when grocery shopping, start practicing shopping only from a list. Do your best to stick to the list by telling yourself the other interesting items you see will still be there the next time and can be added to the next list.

4. If for an *unavoidable* reason you must do non-grocery shopping, commit to making a list and buying only what is on that list.
5. Before you go through the checkout line, pull over to a quiet spot, look at your list, look at your shopping cart, and if there is anything in the cart that is not on your list, try to make yourself put it back in an effort to practice sticking to the list.
6. Carry the “Bring Home or Let Go?” checklist (laminated, if possible) with you and refer to it to decide your best choice today. Even if an item looks like a good purchase, you can always make that same purchase tomorrow with a new list.
7. If for some reason you absolutely cannot return the next day--that is, if the item is some basic *need not want* item (bread, milk, medication, etc.)--leave the basket or cart outside the restrooms or near the checkout, if the cashier will hold it for you for a few minutes while you go outside to get something or use the restroom.
8. Do one of the following:
 - ✓ Leave the building (giving yourself an opportunity to change your state of mind).
 - or*
 - ✓ Go to a quiet place like the restroom. Look in the mirror. Ask yourself if excess buying is what you need to do. Sit and do the relaxation breathing exercises in resource 16.1, “Breathing to Destress.” Center yourself. Review the questions once again and review if the additional items are truly *needs* or *wants*. As inconvenient as this sounds, it is an important step to interrupt the “in the moment” impulse decision-making process.
9. *If and only if* you decide that the items are *needs*, add them to your list. Go back into the store and make your purchases.

10. If *any* of the items are *wants*, make note of them for consideration as possible *needs* for future shopping visits, but remind yourself that they are *not needs today*, and so your best choice is not to buy them today.

- Remind yourself that they or something very similar will be available when you do need them.
- If they are on sale, they are not a “good deal” if you are buying them on credit or if you are using cash that could give you a safety cushion against future unexpected financial surprises or needs.

11. This method is not designed, nor advisable, for expensive items, or items you know already are *definite* impulse buys. If you have a particularly strong attraction to something that is expensive or a definite impulse buy:

- ✓ Remove the item from your cart.
- ✓ If you can't make yourself remove the item from your cart, be sure to go someplace quiet like the restroom, look in the mirror, and ask yourself what you are doing.
- ✓ Ask yourself, “Does this choice move me forward or set me back on the goals I am working on?”
- ✓ Do your best to go home.
- ✓ Call a trusted third party and review the “Should I Bring This Home” question list for acquiring and your reasons for wanting to buy the item(s).
- ✓ Complete a list of the pros and cons of buying and not buying.

12. Try to make yourself sleep on it and wait for the next day.

13. Make a new list and buy from that “considered” list if you still believe the items are your best choice.
14. Slow yourself down. Make your choice consciously.
15. Either return and make your purchases or, if you recognize that the item is an impulse buy and you *resisted* buying it, go look at yourself in the mirror and say:
 - “I did it!”
 - “I just took a huge step forward to the life I want and deserve.”
 - Most of all *be very, very proud of yourself.*