

## Resource 16.6. Dos and Dont's for Coaches in Hoarding Situations

Here are some guidelines to start off on the right foot and stay there when helping someone in a hoarding situation.

1. Remember, the most important thing people hoarding need to do is change their relationship to their things. See Chapter 4 in *Conquer the Clutter*. Using the strategies in that chapter, the process of decluttering usually happens more easily. Acknowledge the accumulation, but don't make it the focus in the beginning.
2. Make the people your focus. Ask them how they are feeling about having someone in their home, about you specifically being there, life in general, and only then, how things got to this point.
3. Use whatever term they use for what they do. They may never use the term *hoarder*. That's perfectly fine. There is nothing gained by applying labels.
4. Don't confront denial until you have a solid positive relationship.
5. Language is powerful. Be aware of your personal standards and feelings about clutter and deteriorated environments. Check yourself for possible blaming inferences. No one is at fault.
6. Working in hoarding situations with someone who is anxious and reluctant is frequently tiring and frustrating. Scan yourself for fatigue and burnout. Pace yourself accordingly. Remember, one 15-minute work period followed by only one more work period, and only if you can commit to the complete 2<sup>nd</sup> 15 minutes. Otherwise, stop and take a break.
7. We are entitled to our own thoughts, values, and opinions. We are not entitled to apply them to others who come to us for help. People have the right to live the way they choose, according to their own standards and values. Occasionally, there are

consequences for this choice. We cannot *make* others do things differently to save them from the right to learn through consequences. We are wisest and most helpful when we are aware of our prejudices and judgmental internal dialogue. I encourage everyone to consciously repeat to themselves, as I sometime must, “*My personal preferences stop at the door.*” If we fail to do so, we put ourselves at risk of unexpected slips of the tongue, which are demonstrated in our facial expression, tone of voice, and other body language. We will make the other an adversary, not an ally, as we work together.

8. Don't barrage people with questions. Ask what you need to know most, one question at a time, slowly and gently. Give people time to reflect and reply in their own way. Treat every person who hoards as you would want someone you love to be treated. This principle works for the full range of work necessary in hoarding situations, from simple to serious. Sometimes we feel the pressure to make fast and extensive headway decluttering. These are *our* feelings and priorities. It is best not to pass them on to other people. They have their own pressures and priorities.
9. Don't be the expert. Don't let anyone cast you in the role of expert. You are the guide, advocate, and coach.
10. Don't promise things you can't do. Focus on what you can do. Ask what they most need help with. Even if you can help with only a small segment of one of their needs, that is honest progress. Trust will develop from there.
11. Don't bluff. Say what you mean and mean what you say. If you aren't sure, say so. Check your facts when you aren't sure and get back to them.
12. Don't try to buy a relationship with the person hoarding by privately taking sides against enforcement officials or anyone else, even if your personal opinion about the

requirements of the authority figures is not positive. Work to build understanding between all parties. With your support, people who hoard need to follow the same rules and laws as everyone else. They are part of society, and special rules do not apply to them. Be aware, however, that with hoarding disorder now in the *DSM-5*, hoarding can qualify as a disability, and they may have legitimate rights to reasonable accommodations.

