



Hands On  
Services

# How To Help A Hoarder



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# HOW TO HELP A HOARDER

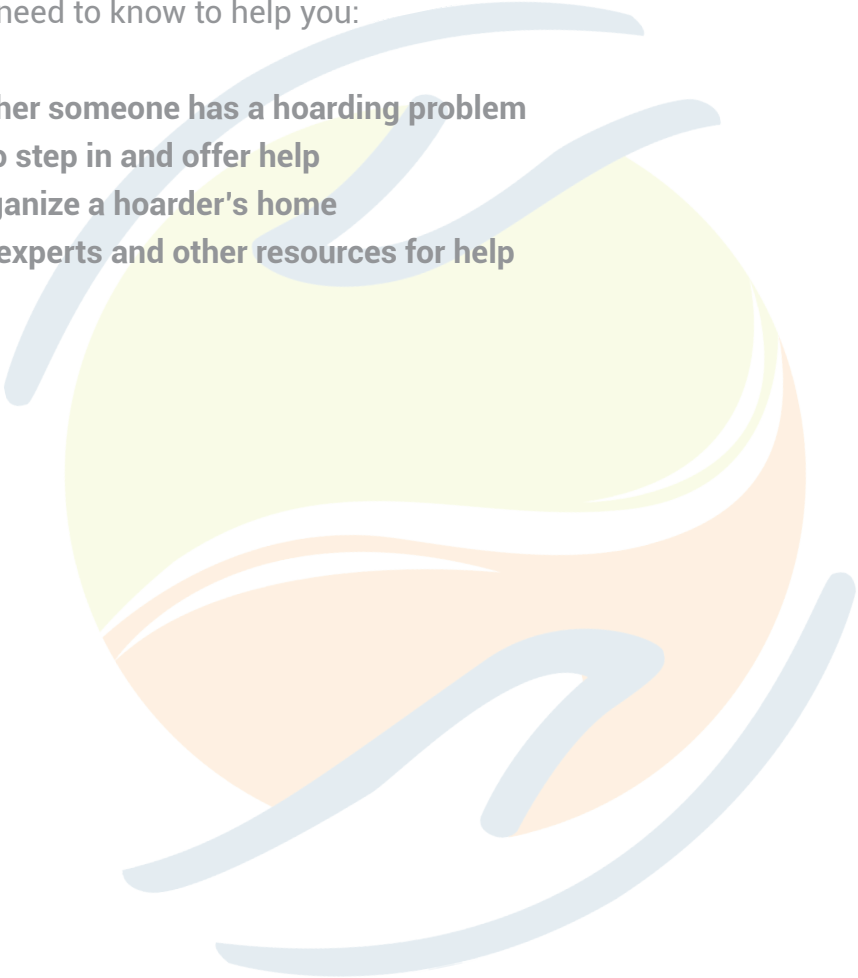
If you suspect your loved one is a hoarder, it can be an emotional and challenging time for everyone involved.

Hoarding, often considered an obsessive compulsive disorder, occurs when a person's home becomes so cluttered that it impacts a person's life and health. Hoarding is estimated to affect up to 6 percent of the population, or 19 million Americans.

Cleaning a hoarder's home can seem like an impossible task, especially when discarding items can turn into a highly emotional situation for the hoarder.

As a loved one or friend, you want to help. But how?

Here's what you need to know to help you:

- **Identify whether someone has a hoarding problem**
  - **Know when to step in and offer help**
  - **Clean and organize a hoarder's home**
  - **Reach out to experts and other resources for help**
- 





# WHAT ARE THE 5 STAGES OF HOARDING?



**"Change your life today. Don't gamble on the future, act now, without delay."**

**-Simone de Beauvoir**



Everyone's home becomes messy from time to time, but knowing when a living space crosses the line into hoarding can be difficult. How do friends and family know when a loved one simply has clutter, is developing hoarder tendencies or has a serious hoarding problem?

**The severity of a hoarding case typically falls into one of 5 stages.** This scale will help you identify whether a loved one has a hoarding disorder and, if so, the seriousness of the situation.

## 1 Stage 1

At this stage, family members may not be able to recognize that their loved one is experiencing hoarder tendencies. The household environment is considered standard, meaning:

- **Entrances and exits are accessible.**
- **Household appliances are functional.**
- **There may be some clutter, but it's not excessive.**
- **Surfaces are typically clean.**
- **The health of the resident isn't outwardly affected by the surroundings.**
- **The resident still invites family and friends inside.**

You may notice some clutter, but overall, it isn't impacting how the home is used or the health of the resident.

# WHAT ARE THE 5 STAGES OF HOARDING?

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## Stage 2

At this stage, hoarding tendencies become more obvious to a visitor. You will notice there is less attention paid to housekeeping, and clutter is beginning to overtake the home. One room may even become a dumping ground.

Other items you may notice include:

- The family member or friend is becoming more withdrawn from interacting with others, and instead finds more comfort in his or her belongings.
- One major exit may be blocked in the home because of an excessive amount of belongings.
- Some plumbing or electrical systems may not be fully functional, or a major appliance may no longer work.
- Odors may be present, such as from dirty dishes that have piled up or diminished sanitation facilities.
- Whether the resident is taking medications properly is questionable.

In this stage, the resident may be aware of the clutter and even embarrassed. Because of this, the homeowner may feel anxious or depressed. Walking through this home may require light personal protective equipment (PPE) as well.

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## Stage 3

There is no question there is a hoarding problem at this level. Clutter has begun to overtake the house, and even moved outdoors. Areas that are normally free of clutter, such as hallways or stairwells, now are at least partially blocked.





# WHAT ARE THE 5 STAGES OF HOARDING?



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The house also may feature:

- Broken HVAC systems that have not worked for longer than a season;
- Several non-functional appliances, non-working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, and possible structural damage;
- An excessive number of pets, beyond what typical municipalities allow in their codes of ordinance;
- At least one room not being used for its intended purpose, such as a bedroom or even a bathroom;
- Hazardous substances in small quantities; and
- Heavily soiled areas and sanitation problems.

The resident likely will experience hygiene issues, and possible health issues from the environment and not eating well. Your loved one may also become defensive if you try to help. A heavier type of PPE is recommended when entering this home, such as gloves and respirator mask.

4

## Stage 4

At this stage, the welfare of the resident is at a critical level. The home has become dangerous because of hazardous conditions that include mold, structural damage to the home and bug infestations. Other conditions at this level include:

- Excessive outdoor clutter
- Damaged walls and water-damaged floors
- Poor animal sanitation
- No linens on the bed

# WHAT ARE THE 5 STAGES OF HOARDING?

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- Rodents and excessive spiders and webs
- Several rooms cluttered and impassable
- Appliances used inappropriately, and kitchen no longer functional
- Rotting and expired food

Your loved one's health may have declined sharply as well, and may even have stopped bathing altogether. Full PPE is advised at this point, including respirator masks, disposable coveralls and safety goggles.

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## Stage 5

Level 5 is the most serious stage of hoarding. In addition to the conditions outlined in Level 4, someone experiencing this level of a hoarding disorder is likely at rock bottom.

- No room is used for its intended purpose.
- Animals are at risk to one another and to people because of stressed behavior.
- Broken plumbing, electrical and septic systems have made the home uninhabitable.
- Primitive sources are used for heating and lighting, such as candles or kerosene lamps.
- Severe mold and infestations are causing health issues to the resident.

Loved ones who are experiencing this level of hoarding also may have serious depression, and daily basics such as eating and sleeping are difficult.

*Note: This hoarding scale takes into consideration several aspects of what a hoarding situation may look like. This scale is intended as an assessment tool only, and not as a diagnostic tool for psychological evaluation.*



**"Set your goals high, and don't stop till you get there."**

**-Bo Jackson**







## WHEN DO YOU STEP IN?

Now that you have an idea of what level of hoarding your loved one may be experiencing, your next step is deciding how to proceed.

Hoarding can quickly go from simple clutter to a serious health issue if a family member

or friend does not receive help.

**“Hoarding can quickly go from simple clutter to a serious health issue if...”**

Understanding where you or a loved one falls on the hoarding scale is important so you can take the next step in getting you or your loved one the help that, in some circumstances, is critically needed.

## YOUR GUIDE TO HELP YOU DETERMINE WHEN TO STEP IN



No Action Is Required



A Coordinated Effort Is Required And Urgent



Prompt Action Is Recommended



The Hoarding Is At Extreme And Dangerous Levels To Everyone Involved

# IF YOUR FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND IS DISPLAYING TENDENCIES FROM:

**Level 1 (low), some action is recommended.** No special knowledge in working with the chronically disorganized is needed, and a household environment that is described under this level is considered standard. If you're worried about possible hoarding tendencies, keep an eye out for any increased levels of hoarding or disorganization.

[Take me to the level 1 plan](#)

**Level 2 (guarded), action is recommended.** This is an important stage for intervening and seeking help, since beyond this stage it becomes more difficult to convince the loved one to accept help. A household environment may require professional organizers or related professionals who have knowledge and understanding of chronic disorganization.

[Take me to the level 2 plan](#)

**Level 3 (elevated), prompt action is recommended.** This is a pivot point between a cluttered household and a potential hoarding environment. It is recommended to seek help from experts with significant training in chronic disorganization. This case likely will require a community network of resources, especially mental health professionals.

[Take me to the level 3 plan](#)

**Level 4 (high), a coordinated effort is required and urgent.** At this stage, the welfare of the resident is at a critical level. Professional organizers, family members, mental health professionals, social workers, financial counselors, pest and animal control officers, and licensed contractors all may need to play a role in helping your loved one.

[Take me to the level 4 plan](#)

**Level 5 (severe), the hoarding is at extreme and dangerous levels to everyone involved.** Professional organizers should not work alone at this level of environment. Like Level 4, a collaborative team of professionals and family members is needed, and may include safety agents as well such as a building manager, zoning officials from the city or fire personnel. Formal written agreements among the parties should be in place before proceeding.

[Take me to the level 5 plan](#)





## What Type Of Plan Should You Follow?





Hoarding situations can quickly escalate. However, coming up with a plan to help a loved one can be overwhelming and complicated, especially if the hoarding has reached a critical level. At Levels 4 and 5, health and safety becomes an issue, and often neighbors will complain about odors, excessive pets and/or pests. You definitely do not want to have to deal with a legal order, if you don't have to.


Items that should be part of your plan may include:

- **Whether outside, professional help is needed**
- **If personal safety gear is necessary**
- **Which areas of the home you should begin**
- **What area can be used for staging**

Each hoarding situation is different and drafting a tailored plan may require assistance from experienced professionals. However, here is a blueprint for a strategy that will help you and your loved one tackle a hoarder's home.

## **Level 1 Plan**

 **Can Accomplish On Your Own**

 **Recommend Using A Professional Service**

At this stage, no intervention is necessary. If you're concerned that your loved one may be developing hoarding tendencies, here are some guidelines for recognizing the initial signs of a hoarding problem:

- **Inability to throw away possessions**
- **Severe anxiety when throwing away items**
- **Difficulty categorizing or organizing possessions**
- **Indecision about what to keep or where to put things**
- **Suspicion of visitors touching their items**
- **Fear of running out of an item or checking the trash for discarded objects**
- **Functional impairments or major life events that may cause distress, such as family or marital problems, financial difficulties or social isolation**

If someone you know is experiencing any of the above initial signs of a hoarding problem, carefully monitor for progression into Level 2 on the hoarding scale.



## Level 2 Plan

■ May Need To Use A Professional Hoarder Cleaning Service





■ May Need To Seek Help From A Mental Health Professional

Signs of a hoarding problem have become more evident, if you suspect your loved one has a hoarding disorder.

- **Assess the scope of the cleaning that needs to be done.**
  - Does the house need light removal of clutter?
  - Is there a walkway blocked by clutter?
  - Are all plumbing, electrical and major appliances working?
  - Are there any odors present?
- **Assess what help and tools you will need.**
  - For larger amounts of clutter, do you need to rent a dumpster?
  - What kind of cleaning materials should you have on-hand? (disposable gloves, bleach, dust masks, etc.)
  - Would the situation benefit from a professional organizer, who could help organize belongings in an efficient and systematic order?
  - Is the loved one open to meeting with a mental health professional? This is an important stage for intervening and seeking help, since beyond this stage it becomes more difficult to convince the loved one to accept help.
  - Is a professional cleaner needed for floors or other areas of the home that need a deeper clean? Typically, professional cleaners come into a house after clutter has been removed.
- **Create a staging area.** At this level, clutter is more evident, but may not have overwhelmed a home yet. A staging area could be a room that does not exhibit any excess clutter, or a room with minimal clutter.
- **Pick the smallest room where clutter is evident.** This will help ease into the cleaning process. Leave spaces that are designed as storage areas, such as closets or garages, for last. These typically are more challenging to organize.
- **Discard trash first.** This includes:
  - Garbage
  - Expired food
  - Items that are too dirty or damaged to keep
  - Medications, oil-based paint and other items that should be dropped off at designated locations

- **Begin sorting.**
  - One room at a time, take each room's contents to the staging area you created earlier.
  - Separate belongings into groups with other similar items.
  - Pick the one item from each group the owner wishes to keep, and donate or discard the rest. (The exception to this would be any family heirlooms for sentimental pieces.)
- **Deep clean the property.** Once living conditions are free of clutter, a deep cleaning process can begin. Many professional cleaning companies will provide services if the clutter is removed.
- **Continue support.** This likely will be an emotionally exhausting journey for the hoarder, even at this level.
  - Let your loved one know you are there for support - before, during and after the cleanup.
  - Don't make fun of the hoarder or show anger during the cleanup.
  - Don't downplay the importance of the hoarder's belongings, or ask why the person hoards.
  - Offer any assistance to ensure the loved one or friend continues receiving any support from mental health professionals.

## Level 3 Plan

-  May Need To Use A Licensed Contractor For Home Repairs
-  May Need To Use A Licensed Exterminator To Remove Any Pests
-  A Professional Hoarder Cleaning Service Is Advised
-  Seeking Help From A Mental Health Professional Is Critical

At this level, there is no question there is a hoarding problem. Creating an organized plan will help you and anyone involved in the cleanup navigate this intervention.

- **Assess the scope of the cleaning that needs to be done.**
  - Does the house need significant removal of clutter?
  - Is there a walkway and/or doors blocked by clutter?
  - Are all plumbing, electrical and major appliances working?
  - Are there any odors present?
  - Are smoke and carbon monoxide detectors working?
  - Is there any structural damage to the home?
  - Is there an excessive number of pets?
  - Are there any hazardous or soiled areas?



- **Assess what help and tools you will need.** How you answered the questions above will help guide you in determining which types of help you need for this cleanup.

- A **mental health professional** can assist in assessing the situation and your loved one. Even after a home is cleaned, your loved one will need to address the underlying cause for the clutter.
- A **professional organizer** can help organize belongings in an efficient and systematic order.
- Cleaning materials** should include disposable gloves, bleach or other cleaners, dust masks, glasses or goggles, coveralls, and boots or shoe covers.
- Renting a dumpster** or other disposal container and help remove large amounts of clutter.
- A **professional cleaner** likely will be needed after the clutter has been removed. At this stage, there may be hazardous areas, so working with a cleaner specialized in this area is necessary.
- A **licensed contractor** can help with any home repairs or structural damage, as well as any plumbing, electrical or appliance issues.

- **Create a staging area.** At this level, clutter is likely throughout the home. There also may be a room that is not used any longer for its intended purpose. Try to find an open space, and clear a pathway to this space. You could also use a back patio or yard if necessary.

- **Pick the smallest room to start.** This will help ease into the cleaning process. In more severe cases of hoarding, bathrooms often are neglected. This would be a good place to start since access to running water will be necessary throughout the cleaning process. Leave spaces that are designed as storage areas, such as closets or garages, for last. These typically are more challenging to organize.



**"Setting goals is the first step in turning the invisible into the visible."**

**-Tony Robbins**





- **Discard trash first.** This includes:

- Garbage
- Expired food
- Items that are too dirty or damaged to keep
- Medications, oil-based paint and other items that should be dropped off at designated locations



- **Begin sorting.**

- One room at a time, take each room's contents to the staging area you created earlier.
- Separate belongings into groups with other similar items.
- Pick the one item from each group the owner wishes to keep, and donate or discard the rest.
- The exception to this would be any family heirlooms for sentimental pieces. However, helping people who hoard decide what is truly sentimental may be the biggest challenge.



- **Deep clean the property.** Once living conditions are free of clutter, a deep cleaning process can begin. Many professional cleaning companies will provide services if the clutter is removed.








- **Continue support.** This likely will be an emotionally exhausting journey for the hoarder.

- Let your loved one know you are there for support - before, during and after the cleanup.
- Don't make fun of the hoarder or show anger during the cleanup.
- Don't downplay the importance of the hoarder's belongings, or ask why the person hoards.
- Offer any assistance to ensure the loved one or friend continues receiving any support from mental health professionals. **This is critical to ensure the hoarding problem does not continue or worsen.**



## Level 4 Plan

-  City Zoning Official Is Likely Necessary To Discuss Bringing Home Up To Code
-  A Licensed Exterminator Is Likely Necessary To Remove Any Pests
-  A Licensed Contractor Is Necessary For Home Repairs
-  A Professional Hoarder Cleaning Service Is Critical
-  Seeking Help From A Mental Health Professional Is Critical

At this level, the welfare of the resident is at a critical level, and a plan should be implemented as soon as possible. Any plan put into place will require assistance from a team of professionals.

- **Assess the scope of the cleaning that needs to be done.**
  - Are any rooms and doorways impassable because of clutter?
  - Are all plumbing and electrical working?
  - Are major appliances used for their purpose?
  - Are the kitchen, bathrooms and bedrooms functional?
  - Are there any odors present?
  - Are smoke and carbon monoxide detectors working?
  - Is there any structural damage to the home?
  - Is there an excessive number of pets?
  - Are there any hazardous or soiled areas?
  - Are there any water-damaged floors or walls?
  - Is there evidence of rodents and/or bug infestations such as droppings or several spider webs?
  - Has your loved one stopped bathing or caring for him/herself?
- **Assess what help and tools you will need.** How you answered the questions above will help guide you in determining which types of help you need for this cleanup.
  - A **mental health professional** can assist in assessing the situation and your loved one. Even after a home is cleaned, your loved one will need to address the underlying cause for the clutter.
  - A **professional organizer** can help organize belongings in an efficient and systematic order.
  - A **licensed exterminator** will assist with removing any infestations?
  - Cleaning materials** should include disposable gloves, bleach or other cleaners, dust masks, glasses or goggles, coveralls, and boots or shoe covers.
  - Renting a dumpster** or other disposal container and help remove large amounts of clutter.



-A **professional cleaner** likely will be needed after the clutter has been removed. At this stage, there may be hazardous areas, so working with a cleaner specialized in this area is necessary.

-A **licensed contractor** can help with any home repairs or structural damage, as well as any plumbing, electrical or appliance issues.

-A **zoning official** from the city where your loved one resides will be able to work with you in understanding what is needed to bring the property back up to code.

- **Create a staging area.** At this level, clutter is throughout the home and likely blocking doorways. There are rooms that aren't used for their intended purpose either, making finding a staging area challenging. Try to find an open space, and clear a pathway to this space. You could also use a back patio or yard if necessary.
- **Pick the smallest room to start.** This will help ease into the cleaning process. In more severe cases of hoarding, bathrooms often are neglected. This would be a good place to start since access to running water will be necessary throughout the cleaning process. Leave spaces that are designed as storage areas, such as closets or garages, for last. These typically are more challenging to organize.



- **Discard trash first.** This includes:

- Garbage
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- Items that are too dirty or damaged to keep
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- **Begin sorting.**

- One room at a time, take each room's contents to the staging area you created earlier.
- Separate belongings into groups with other similar items.
- Pick one item from each group the owner wishes to keep, and donate or discard the rest. The exception to this would be any family heirlooms for sentimental pieces. However, helping people who hoard decide what is truly sentimental may be the biggest challenge.

- **Deep clean the property.** Once living conditions are free of clutter, a deep cleaning process can begin. Many professional cleaning companies and extermination services will provide services if the clutter is removed.

- **Continue support.** This likely will be an emotionally exhausting journey for the hoarder, especially at this level.

- Let your loved one know you are there for support - before, during and after the cleanup.
- Don't make fun of the hoarder or show anger during the cleanup.



- Don't downplay the importance of the hoarder's belongings, or ask why the person hoards.
- Offer any assistance to ensure that the loved one or friend continues receiving any support from mental health professionals.

## Level 5 Plan

At this level, the welfare of the resident is at a critical level. Any plan put into place will require assistance from a team of professionals.

- If possible, help relocate the resident. Your loved one is likely at rock bottom in this stage. However, his or her health is at severe risk, as are any animals' health and safety that reside on the property.
- Assess the scope of the cleaning that needs to be done.
  - Are any rooms and doorways impassable because of clutter?
  - Are there broken plumbing, electrical and septic systems?
  - Are there primitive sources being used for heat and lighting, such as candles or kerosene lamps?
  - Are there any severe mold or other types of infestations?
  - Are the kitchen, bathrooms and bedrooms functional?
  - Are there any odors present?
  - Are smoke and carbon monoxide detectors working?
  - Is there any structural damage to the home?
  - Is there an excessive number of pets?
  - Are there any hazardous or soiled areas?
  - Are there any water-damaged floors or walls?
  - Has your loved one stopped bathing or caring for him/herself?
- Assess what help and tools you will need. How you answered the questions above will help guide you in determining which types of help you need for this cleanup.



-  **A City Zoning Official Is Necessary To Bring Home Up To Code**
-  **A Licensed Contractor Is Necessary For Home Repairs**
-  **A Licensed Exterminator Is Necessary To Remove Any Pests**
-  **A Professional Hoarder Cleaning Service Is Critical**
-  **Seeking Help From A Mental Health Professional Is Critical**



- A **mental health professional** can assist in assessing the situation and your loved one. Even after a home is cleaned, your loved one will need to address the underlying cause for the clutter.
  - A **mold remediation specialist** can help tackle severe mold issues.
  - An **animal control officer** can help with removal of pets, some of which may be aggressive after living in these conditions.
  - A **professional organizer** can help organize belongings in an efficient and systematic order.
  - A **licensed exterminator** will assist with removing any infestations?
  - Cleaning materials** should include disposable gloves, bleach or other cleaners, dust masks, glasses or goggles, coveralls, and boots or shoe covers.
  - Renting a dumpster** or other disposal container and help remove large amounts of clutter.
  - A **professional cleaner** likely will be needed after the clutter has been removed. At this stage, there may be hazardous areas, so working with a cleaner specialized in this area is necessary.
  - A **licensed contractor** can help with any home repairs or structural damage, as well as any plumbing, electrical or appliance issues.
  - A **zoning official** from the city where your loved one resides will be able to work with you in understanding what is needed to bring the property back up to code.
- **Create a staging area.** At this level, clutter is throughout the home and likely blocking doorways. There are rooms that aren't used for their intended purpose either, making finding a staging area challenging. Try to find an open space, and clear a pathway to this space. You could also use a back patio or yard if necessary.
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  - Let your loved one know you are there for support - before, during and after the cleanup.
  - Don't make fun of the hoarder or show anger during the cleanup.
  - Don't downplay the importance of the hoarder's belongings, or ask why the person hoards.
  - Offer any assistance to ensure the loved one or friend continues receiving any support from mental health professionals.

# IS THERE ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE?

Yes! As you begin the cleaning process, it likely will be an emotionally exhausting journey for the hoarder. **Seeking help is an important step for both you and the hoarder.**

A professional hoarder cleaning company can provide the vital support and services needed in a sensitive situation that, depending on the circumstances, may be dangerous and a threat to your loved one's health.

At Hands On Services, we use our expertise to provide assistance that integrates with the complex nature of hoarding situations. We understand that the cleanup process is a difficult time for everyone involved, so we perform our work in a way that is

compassionate, respectful and professional.

Unlike many traditional cleaning services, at Hands On Services, our experts are trained to deal with hazardous situations often found in hoarding cases, such as:

- Blocked walkways
- Risks from falling piles of items
- Structural damage to the home
- Fire and chemical hazards
- Unsanitary conditions from molds, bacteria, dust and dirt
- Infestations from animals and bugs

# IS THERE ASSISTANCE STILL AVAILABLE?

With several years of handling hoarding cases, we have developed several crucial steps we take to achieve a favorable outcome. They include:

- Assessing the situation** first to determine safety issues, as well as staff and supplies needed
- Forming a cleaning strategy** to designate what work will be done, when it will be done and by whom
- Arranging for equipment and supplies**, including trucks, dumpsters, cleaning supplies and other contractors
- Implementing the cleaning strategy**, and restoring the home to make it once again safe and livable.

Hoarding is a complicated disorder, and seeking professional help ensures your loved one a greater chance of getting on a path to wellness.



As a professional hoarder cleaning company, we regularly work with other professionals to provide support. These include:

- Social workers
- Pest and animal control officers
- Licensed home cleaners
- Licensed contractors for repairs
- Financial counselors
- Family members and close friends

It may not always be necessary to bring in an expert. However, if you are experiencing concerns about the potential for a loved one to develop hoarding tendencies, other family members and close friends may be able to help you catch the disorder in its early stages.

**We also strongly recommend consulting with a mental health professional** - an important component in getting your loved one the help he or she needs. Developing a support network for both yourself and the loved one you want to help also is essential to finding success during this challenging time.





**Hands On  
Services**

We hope you have found the information informative and eye opening.

If you need help with your hoarder cleaning, feel free to talk to us about your situation we would be more than happy to help you out.

**REQUEST A QUOTE**