Working with people who hoard
Myth
Removing clutter and property will remove the issue of hoarding.

Truth
- Large scale clean-ups without the client’s permission do not work – it is likely to have a long term negative impact on the client’s mental health
- Large scale clean-ups even with the client’s permission may not work
- There are no medications proven to be effective for hoarding yet

Myth
Fires in hoarding properties will behave in the same way as they do anywhere else.

Truth
Fires were contained to the room of origin in 90% of all residential fires. In hoarding homes, however, that percentage dropped to 40%, indicating that hoarded materials promote the spread of fire through a dwelling.

Myth
Hoarding only takes place in certain types of property.

Truth
Hoarding can be found in all property types and for all types of tenure. Hoarding properties in high rise premises pose very particular risks to the community and to firefighters. Hoarding in private residences creates some specific issues with regards to the application of legislation.
**Myth**

People with hoarding issues can’t see all the stuff and dirt, they don’t mind it.

**Truth**

They can see it but they need to mentally block it out. It is called clutter blindness. But when they do start to talk about it, this can be a sign they are ready for change and help.

**Myth**

There is nothing we can do about it.

**Truth**

With the proper support help and guidance hoarding problems can be resolved.

**Myth**

People with hoarding issues love their belongings more than their family.

**Truth**

They have extended their personality into everything in their lives and so they will shut down if pushed too much by loved ones to discard things that all have an equal value to them.
Myth
People with hoarding issues are just dirty and lazy.

Truth
Usually just the opposite is true. But they have often undergone a traumatic experience or had a huge period of instability in their lives. They experience shame and fear which paralyses them and makes it very difficult to understand how they can return to the way they were before. Incorrect intervention can often cause further trauma if they feel they have been perceived to be someone who they are not.

Myth
People with a tendency to hoard are lazy, dirty people who like living in cluttered environments.

Truth
Individuals with a tendency to hoard are not gender or societal specific. Many things can contribute to this complex condition including biological, psychological and social factors.

Myth
All people with hoarding issues have OCD.

Truth
OCD and Hoarding Disorder are distinct conditions which were once linked when studies first started.
Myth
*People only hoard things at home.*

Truth
Hoarders in offices and other business premises are not uncommon, and can lead to blocked escape routes and increased risk of a fire.

Myth
*Evicting people with hoarding issues teaches them a lesson and stops them hoarding again.*

Truth
Being evicted is a traumatic experience, and can create such anxiety for a person with hoarding issues that their tendency to hoard can increase.

Myth
*People with hoarding issues don’t like to talk about it.*

Truth
There are currently various support groups around the UK, mainly in London.
How to talk to someone who is hoarding

Don’t!

Use judgmental language.
Like anyone else, individuals with hoarding will not be receptive to negative comments about the state of their home or their character (e.g. “What a mess!” “What kind of person lives like this?”) Imagine your own response if someone came into your home and spoke in this manner, especially if you already felt ashamed.
Use words that devalue or negatively judge possessions.

People who hoard are often aware that others do not view their possessions and homes as they do. They often react strongly to words that reference their possessions negatively, like “trash”, “garbage” and “junk”.
Let your non-verbal expression say what you’re thinking.

Individuals with compulsive hoarding are likely to notice non-verbal messages that convey judgment, like frowns or grimaces.

Make suggestions about the person’s belongings

Even well-intentioned suggestions about discarding items are usually not well received by those with hoarding.
Try to persuade or argue with the person
Efforts to persuade individuals to make a change in their home or behaviour often have the opposite effect – the person actually talks themselves into keeping the items.

Touch the person’s belongings without explicit permission
Those who hoard often have strong feelings and beliefs about their possessions and often find it upsetting when another person touches their things. Anyone visiting the home of someone with hoarding should only touch the person’s belongings if they have the person’s explicit permission.
Imagine yourself in the hoarding client’s shoes.

How would you want others to talk to you to help you manage your anger, frustration, resentment, and embarrassment?

Match the person’s language.

Listen for the individual’s manner of referring to his/her possessions (e.g. “my things”, “my collections”) and use the same language (i.e. “your things”, “your collections”).
Use encouraging language.

Use language that reduces defensiveness and increases motivation to solve the problem (e.g. “I see that you have a pathway from your front door to your living room. That’s great that you’ve kept things out of the way so that you don’t slip or fall.

• I can see that you can walk through here pretty well by turning sideways.

• The thing is that somebody else that might need to come into your home, like a fire fighter or an emergency responder, would have a pretty difficult time getting through here. They have equipment they’re usually carrying and fire fighters have protective clothes that are bulky. It’s important to have a pathway that is wide enough so that they could get through to help you or anyone else who needed it.
Highlight strengths.

All people have strengths, positive aspects of themselves, their behaviour, or even their homes. A visitor’s ability to notice these strengths helps forge a good relationship and paves the way for resolving the hoarding problem (e.g. “I see that you can easily access your bathroom sink and shower,” “What a beautiful painting!”, “I can see how much you care about your cat.”)
Focus the intervention initially on safety and organisation of possessions and later work on discarding.

Discussion of the fate of the person’s possessions will be necessary at some point, but it is preferable for this discussion to follow work on safety and organisation.
CIR Ratings

With a show of hands how many people chose which rating on the CIR?

We’ll have a brief discussion about why looking at:

- Subjective nature of assessment
- Personal standards
- Personal beliefs about cleanliness

Courtesy of: Oxford University Press (Abstract from Compulsive Hoarding and Acquiring Therapist Guide by Gail Steketee and Randy O. Frost)
Starting to consider change

Support person to make one small change at a time – clear one small space

Do not rush into action planning. Consider what the person wants to do

Use a picture board – What would you like these shelves to look, what would you like this space to look like, what would you like this room to look like. Go through magazines and select images. Leave the picture board with the person.
Garden
Britain in Bloom
50 tonnes of rubbish removed from the garden
Help from friends – part of the community