Actions to take when dealing with compulsive hoarding:

1. Assess the risk (including capacity assessment)
2. Engage with / organise a multi-agency meeting
3. Identify resources available (including community and family resources)
4. Look for therapeutic responses (GP, counselling, drug and alcohol services)
5. Investigate the legal processes necessary and consider statutory service eligibility

For more information on compulsive hoarding visit:

- NHS Choices at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) and search for compulsive hoarding
- Anxiety UK, a national registered charity at [www.anxietyuk.org.uk](http://www.anxietyuk.org.uk)
- Help for hoarders - information, support and advice for hoarders and their families [www.helpforhoarders.co.uk](http://www.helpforhoarders.co.uk)

[www.safeguardingdurhamadults.info](http://www.safeguardingdurhamadults.info)
**What is compulsive hoarding?**

Compulsive hoarding includes ALL three of the following:

1. A person collects and keeps lots of items, even things that appear useless or of little value to most people
2. These items clutter the living spaces and stop the person from using their rooms as they were intended
3. These items cause distress or problems in day-to-day living

Hoarding is different from collecting as people who hoard don’t display their possessions; items are usually kept in disarray

**You can identify compulsive hoarding when there are signs of:**

- Difficulty getting rid of objects
- Clutter making it difficult to use furniture, appliances or move around easily
- Losing important items like money or bills in the clutter
- Feeling overwhelmed by the volume of possessions that have ‘taken over the house’
- Being unable to stop taking free objects
- Buying things because they are a bargain or to stock up
- Not inviting family or friends into the home due to shame or embarrassment
- Refusing to let people into the home to make repairs

---

**When dealing with a person who hoards:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do</th>
<th>Do not</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ✓ 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 language that reduces defensiveness and increases motivation  
For example, you could ask how the emergency services would manage to enter the property if you need help. How can we make things safer for them?  
✓ Highlight strengths  
This helps forge a good relationship and paves the way for resolving the hoarding problem  
✓ Focus the intervention initially on changing patterns of behaviour, safety and organisation of possessions and later work  |
| ✓ Do not use judgmental language  
Imagine your own response if someone came into your home and spoke in this manner, especially if you already felt ashamed  
✓ Do not use words that devalue or negatively judge possessions  
The person may react strongly to words that reference their possessions negatively, like “trash”, “garbage” and “junk”  
✓ Do not make suggestions about the person’s belongings  
Even well-intentioned suggestions about discarding items are usually not well received  
✓ Do not try to persuade or argue with the person  
✓ Do not touch the person’s belongings without explicit permission  |

A multi-agency toolkit with lots of advice and useful information is available to download:  
[www.safeguardingdurhamadults.info/Pages/Professionalsinformation.aspx](http://www.safeguardingdurhamadults.info/Pages/Professionalsinformation.aspx)