

## Children who grow up in this environment

- Children of Hoarders (COH) compete with “things” and/or animals for affection.
- COH must keep their family’s secret; they often fear that the secret will be discovered and that they’ll be taken away.
- When the hoarder regularly picks through the trash to recover things that were thrown away “wrong,” the child begins to question his or her own competence.
- COH may be jealous of how classmates or friends live and ashamed of their own houses; COH become creative liars to explain why people can’t visit their homes.
- When they can’t find something, some hoarders tend to misdirect their anger; COH believe they are responsible for the situation and feel guilty all the time.
- When COH work to clean up the mess and *make everything better*, the hoarder might react with anger and scorn; this damages self-esteem.

## Raising awareness & creating understanding

There is hope. With increased awareness, understanding, and support, families can manage hoarding.

You can help. Please feel free to reproduce this brochure and distribute it to local groups for children such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, Headstart, Alateen, and others.

Additional resources for children in your community include guidance counselors, social workers, school psychologists, and other appropriate child advocacy specialists.

Additional brochures are available upon request.

Please contact us at:

[info@childrenofhoarders.com](mailto:info@childrenofhoarders.com)

**Thank you for helping  
to raise awareness!**



**Children Of Hoarders**

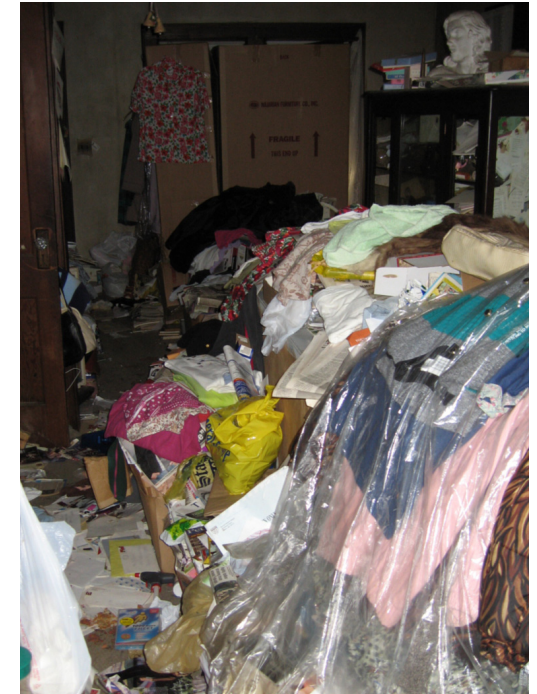
*Opening hearts, minds, and  
homes with understanding*

[www.childrenofhoarders.com](http://www.childrenofhoarders.com)



# Did You Know Some Children Live in this Environment?

**IT’S THE FAMILY SECRET.**



A Hoarder's Dining Room. © 2006 HoardersOn

Some children live in a dysfunctional home like this because their authority figure has distorted beliefs about things. These parents or guardians have a serious condition called:

**HOARDING**

Please help us raise awareness about this disorder and offer support for the children who live like this.

**It’s not “just a mess” to them.**

CHILDREN OF HOARDERS  
GUESS AT WHAT “NORMAL” IS,  
AND MAY BELIEVE THAT THE  
CONDITION OF THEIR HOUSE  
IS ALL THEIR FAULT.

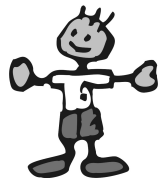
## What is Hoarding?

It is estimated that 1.4 million homes in the United States are hoard homes. Hoarding is not a result of laziness or harmless “packrat” habits. It is a condition that has been addressed in research as a type of obsessive compulsive disorder (OC-Hoarding).

Hoarding is defined by specific behaviors: acquiring a large assortment of items and failing to discard what seems to be useless or of little value. Living spaces become so cluttered that they can't be used for their intended purposes.<sup>1</sup>

These homes fall into a serious state of disrepair because maintenance or repair people cannot enter the home. In the case of animal hoarding, animal waste may be present throughout the home.

However, hoarding has only recently become a subject of research. A great deal of work remains to be done to further describe and pinpoint the medical cause(s) of this condition.



<sup>1</sup> Frost & Hartl's (1996) definition of clinical hoarding.

## Hoarding affects more than just the Hoarder

To all its occupants, a dangerously cluttered hoard home presents various health risks: trips and falls, mold/dust allergen exposure, and fire hazards. Disease can be spread through animal waste, if present.

People who hoard might also suffer from depression and/or perfectionism. Research shows that many hoarders suffer from a combination of disorders. Hoarding might be a symptom of more than one illness. Children of Hoarders (COH) may be neglected as a result of the hoarding and other accompanying disorders.

Mental health disorders are very difficult for a child to understand. Children often feel responsible for the well-being of their suffering parent.

COH guess at what “normal” is and are impacted by the experience, even after they become adults themselves.

## Children need support

COH need a place to get support and talk about their feelings, which can include: the fear that public authorities will discover the family secret and remove the children from the home; the shame of keeping a family secret and the creative lying that goes with it; and the suspicion and guilt that it's all their fault.

COH need to know they aren't “bad” or incompetent for throwing away legitimate trash.

Please help to raise awareness about Hoarding. Children of Hoarders could benefit tremendously

from the type of support that is available to Children of Alcoholics.

XS (pronounced “excess”) is a suggested name for such a children's support group. It would provide discreet and sensitive support for children who are still actively guarding the ‘family secret’.

## For More Information

### RESOURCES

Obsessive Compulsive Foundation Hoarding Website  
[www.ocfoundation.org/1005/index.html](http://www.ocfoundation.org/1005/index.html)

### BOOKS

Overcoming Compulsive Hoarding  
[www.newharbinger.com](http://www.newharbinger.com)

### OCD SPECIALISTS

David F. Tolin, Ph.D.  
[www.instituteofliving.org/ADC/compulsive\\_hoarding.htm](http://www.instituteofliving.org/ADC/compulsive_hoarding.htm)

OCD Doctors and Clinics  
[www.geonius.com/ocd/doctors.html](http://www.geonius.com/ocd/doctors.html)

### HOARDING TASK FORCES

Dane County Hoarding Task Force  
[www.co.dane.wi.us/aging](http://www.co.dane.wi.us/aging)

Fairfax County Virginia Hoarding Task Force  
[www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/trash/hoarding.htm](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/trash/hoarding.htm)

New York City Hoarding Task Force  
[www.cornellaging.com/gem/hoa\\_nyc\\_hoa\\_tas.html](http://www.cornellaging.com/gem/hoa_nyc_hoa_tas.html)

National Council on Aging  
Interagency Hoarding Task Force  
[www.ncoa.org/content.cfm?sectionID=240&detail=242](http://www.ncoa.org/content.cfm?sectionID=240&detail=242)

The Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium  
[www.tufts.edu/vet/cfa/hoarding/taskforc.htm](http://www.tufts.edu/vet/cfa/hoarding/taskforc.htm)