

Appendix 5

Communication good practice and things to avoid

When communicating with someone who hoards do:

- **Imagine yourself in that person's shoes.** How would you want others to talk to you to help manage your anger, frustration, resentment and embarrassment?
- **Match the person's language.** Listen for the way they describe their belongings and use the same language. To the individual they may be keepsakes, bits and bobs, or just outstanding items on a 'to do' list.
- **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 the front door to your living room. It's great that you've kept things out of the way so you won't trip or fall".
- **Highlight strengths.** A visitor's ability to notice their strengths will help establish a good relationship.
- **Focus the intervention on safety and organisation of possessions.** Work later on discarding. Discussion of the removal and disposal of possessions will be necessary at some point, but it is preferable for this discussion to follow work on safety and organisation.

Avoid the following:

- **Judgemental language.** Individuals who hoard will not be receptive to negative comments. The sheer volume of accumulated objects is not 'a mess' or 'a hoard' or a 'fire trap'. This is simply a state of affairs that has come about, often without a clear realisation on the part of the individual until it presents as a significant problem.
- **Words that devalue or negatively judge possessions.** People who hoard are often aware that others do not view their home and possessions as they do. Avoid referring to objects as stuff, clutter, or rubbish whilst you determine how best to refer to objects in your relationship with the individual.
- **Letting your non-verbal expression say what you are thinking.** It is very easy to appear judgemental in terms of posture or facial reactions. Be aware of this and try not to be caught unawares especially when you may be the first person in a long time that has had any real access to the individual's property and they may be feeling extremely vulnerable and exposed.
- **Making suggestions about the person's belongings.** Even well intentioned comments about discarding items too early in the process may not be well received. Allow the individual time to consider how best to think about disposal, once a degree of sorting and organisation has taken place.
- **Trying to persuade or argue with the person.** Often efforts to persuade people to make a change may have the opposite effect. Instead it may be useful to clarify the extent to which you are able to help and to remind the individual of the usefulness of your support if you are both able to make changes by working together.
- **Touching the person's belongings without permission.** Those who hoard often have strong feelings about their possessions and may find it upsetting when another person touches their things. It may be helpful in the first instance to think of the objects as an extension of the person themselves. Always ask permission before assuming they can be picked up, inspected or moved.