

There's help for horders

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HAVE you been told you are a “hoarder”?

Perhaps you have Christmas cards from the 1990s stuffed in a closet or 50 umbrellas, bought because the price was too good to refuse?

Collecting sentimental keepsakes or buying items in bulk is no reason for alarm, psychologists insist.

But if your compulsion to amass items is overtaking your life, it may be time to get help.

Australasian Association of Professional Organisers member Tanya Lewis spends her days helping hoarders declutter their homes and lives.



“Hoarders require a lot of one-on-one time and encouragement,” Lewis says.

“They tend to be ashamed of their disorder, too embarrassed to invite people into their home to the point where appliances such as hot-water services break down and they are too embarrassed to have a tradesperson come to their house and would rather live without hot water.”

Lewis, who is based on the Mornington Peninsula, says there are many different types of hoarding, including food, paper, clothes, plastic or those who hoard with “no real pattern”.

She says hoarders tend to hide things and “put great value on what you and I believe to be rubbish”.

Psychologist Sam van Meurs says collecting things, in itself, is not a problem; collecting things to hide an anxiety disorder is a health issue, and the good news is it can be resolved.

“A good way to identify a problem is when a compulsion to hoard starts affecting relationships, health and work lives,” van Meurs says.

“If it is taking up an hour of your time a day, you are likely suffering an underlying emotional disorder.”

Psychologist Michael Street, of Life Resolutions Carlton, says problem hoarders feel “out of control”.

“If your friends and family tell you your hoarding is a problem and you won’t listen, this is also a sign you may need some help,” Street says.

TIPS FOR HOARDERS:

- Keep a light-hearted attitude to hoarding items to keep your habit in perspective.
- Try not to get defensive if friends or family call you a hoarder - they are only trying to help.
- Acknowledge you hoard and ask yourself why. Is it to build a collection of precious items or is it because you feel anxious?
- Before you start the clean-up, know why you are doing it.
- Don't tackle the whole house at once. Work on clearing one area or room at a time.
- Work in short time-frames. Aim for two hours and build up to four hours maximum.
- There are no wrong decisions when you are deciding what to throw out - just try to avoid binning tax records younger than five years old.
- Reward yourself generously for your accomplishments.

More information

See www.lifeline.org.au or phone 13 11 14 if your hoarding is compulsive and you feel out of control.

See www.beyondblue.org.au for a symptoms checklist.

See www.aapo.org.au to find a professional organiser.