



## Where to Begin When Hoarding is Preventing the Home Sale

Jeannie called us with panic. Her mother had broken her hip and had been taken to the hospital. The doctor's orders were clear: she was not safe to live alone in her home anymore. Jeannie needed to sell the home to pay for her mother's care. But there was one major problem: *every room in the house was full of stuff, shoulder-high, and only narrow paths between the piles allowed people to walk from room to room.*

How could Jeannie possibly sell the home with such an overwhelming obstacle? She was still bewildered that her mother had been living in such conditions.

Hoarding is a behavioral disorder which is characterized by acquiring and failing to throw out a large number of items that would appear to have little or no value to others (e.g., papers, notes, flyers, newspapers, clothes); or severe cluttering of the person's home so that it is no longer able to function as a viable living space.

Adult who are hoarders are able to hide it from family for years, and even decades, by not allowing anyone to come into their home. When safety, health, or financial reasons force the home sale, often this is the first time in years that loved ones see the inside of the home. They are shocked, guilt-ridden, and at a complete loss for where to begin.

Though it is a large task, the cleaning and sale of a hoarder's home can definitely be accomplished. Here are a few tips we've learned that may be of help to your family:

- **Get professional help.** There are services that specialize in cleaning out a home. They can do it quickly, thoroughly, and without the emotional stress that family and loved ones have. Families who try to accomplish this alone often lose tens of thousands of dollars in lost time at work, also suffering from the intense physical and emotional stress involved. Getting help makes sense for many reasons.
- **Make a decisive plan.** Not everything can be saved, and a "green" plan of cleaning and recycling every item piece by piece can take months of time and effort. Make three piles save, donate, and throw away. Rent a dumpster if necessary, to eliminate dozens of trips to the dump. Make a list, and tackle one room at a time.
- **Put off detailed sorting for later.** Family photos, letters, or memorabilia can be very time consuming to sort mid-project. Keep the goal in mind of clearing out the home and selling it. Rent a small storage unit to hold memorabilia and valuable until after the home is sold, then you can take your time to sort them later.
- **Try to have the senior homeowner moved** before any sorting or cleaning steps begin. It is a highly emotional and volatile situation when the hoarder is present when removing items from the home. Bring the items that are most meaningful to them to their new home for comfort and familiarity before any work begins. Then, take care of the cleanout process without the stress of their protests and agitation.

The topic of serving seniors who have a hoarding disorder through their home sale is one that can fill volumes. Allow SASH to assist you in navigating this journey with support, guidance, and experience, for the most dignified and smooth home sale experience possible.

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