

Chaotic Times

Organised Chaos Newsletter

"Helping you to
clear clutter and
feel -

Better!"

Issue - June 2012

'Hoarding & OCD'

Dear Friends of Organised Chaos

Welcome to the June edition of **Chaotic Times!**

This month I thought I'd discuss the concept of hoarding, especially in relation to OCD. There have been a variety of TV programmes over the last few months devoted to this topic. Some seem to be using rather a voyeuristic approach; but I was quite impressed with two programmes produced by the BBC.

In August last year, "My hoarder mum and me" followed Jasmine Harman's efforts to gain an understanding of her own mother's condition and help her begin to let go of years of accumulated belongings.



Jasmine with her mother

Last month there was a follow-up programme, "Britain's biggest hoarders", also presented by Jasmine. She visited two homes, each bursting at the seams with hoarded possessions. In this second programme Jasmine called on the support of a decluttering specialist, not me, I hasten to add, and a psychologist.

This is clearly a personal quest for Jasmine, and she's passionate about wanting to help not only the hoarders themselves but their families and loved ones. If you missed "[Britain's biggest hoarders](#)", you can see a clip on the BBC website.

The clip features Alan and his wife Marion who have to clear clutter from their front garden or face a big fine from the local authority. To his credit, Alan, ultimately responds to the help provided and works with friends and family to shift the huge piles of stuff outside their house.

It is not for me to ponder the reasons why Alan and the others have arrived in this state. But I *do* believe it's important to appreciate that nobody actually *chooses* to live like this. I hope that over time there is more help, support and understanding available for hoarders and their families.



OCD and accumulating clutter

Most people associate OCD with an obsessive neatness, or sense of order that is extreme and impacts on normal life. Also, with an exaggerated desire for hygiene (such as repetitive hand washing) beyond what is necessary for health. As with most conditions, there are many variants, and I learned earlier in the year that OCD can manifest itself in the inability to let go of things and indeed a tendency to hoard.

Viv's OCD - Case Study

Viv told me she was convinced she had OCD in relation to not being able to part with things. However, she was keen to make some changes as she knew that family life with her husband and two children was suffering.



I realised that this session would be stressful for Viv as she'd never shared her hoarding problem with anyone outside the family. We soon broke the ice and got chatting, and I was impressed with how much insight this lady had regarding her situation.

It was apparent that at an intellectual level she understood her actions were illogical and also detrimental to family life. However, her OCD meant she was bound to certain daily rituals and felt very strongly that if these weren't adhered to, then terrible things would happen. Viv began to recognise that she had an issue with hoarding and OCD when she found it difficult to recycle bottles unless they had their matching lids.

Viv's OCD had an emotional foundation and was particularly strong around her children's belongings. I got the impression that Viv wanted to keep everything in relation to her children, even as those things were outgrown. Almost as though she had a resistance to them growing up.

As a starting point we tidied like with like, so the contents of the room were less random. I suggested that it was OK for her to hoard her own possessions, but that her children should be given the right to decide if they no longer wanted some of their toys.

Most small children are keen to part with toys they consider to be "babyish" as this gives them a sense of their own development. Viv agreed to give this a try. We put all the toys together to make this task easier.

By the end of our session Viv had parted with relatively few items, but she *had* managed to break through an invisible barrier. When we next spoke, she told me the toy decluttering had gone well. She'd resisted all urges to ignore her children's wishes and had donated things to the local playgroup so she could feel good about the decision.

Viv recently told me she's gone from strength to strength as a result of taking that first step. She's changed her thought process and now 'manages' her OCD rather than letting it dominate her life. I'm incredibly proud to have been a part of her process.

To conclude, I'd like to share Viv's own feelings about her experience of hoarding and decluttering:

"Hoarding is like building a wall around yourself brick by brick. it feels dark, claustrophobic, suffocating and difficult to remove! If you make small changes to let go of things (brick by brick)' you hardly notice you are doing it and suddenly, you feel the space and freedom to move around your home. It's a great feeling!"

*Best regards,
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