

Inside the Mind of a Clutterer



Use this handout to learn about why we acquire and keep possessions: the similarities and differences between *your average person* and an individual with excess clutter or hoarding, and the barriers that can contribute to clutter. **For use by: Helpers, Therapists**

Reasons for Keeping and Acquiring Possessions

People who have clutter tend to keep the same type of things, and give the same reasons for keeping them, as people without clutter. [Frost & Gross, 1993; Petrusa et al., 2008]. All people acquire and keep possessions for one of three reasons:

Sentimental – feeling emotionally attached to an item

Instrumental – having a need or use for an item

Intrinsic – enjoying the aesthetic value or appeal of an item

[Roth & Miles, 2000]

But people with clutter tend to take these reasons to the extreme. They believe items to be valuable, useful or important, when most people would classify them as worthless or of limited value [Frost & Gross, 1993; Petrusa et al., 2008].

Sentimental Reasons

These objects fill an emotional need or provide an emotional uplift. These are possessions that:

- Become a connection to (or reminder of) memories, people or past events.
Examples: a wedding picture, a family heirloom
- Act as a source of comfort or safety.
Examples: a favourite warm sweater, a cozy chair
- Are seen to be an expression of personal identity.
Examples: a flag representing one's heritage, a slogan bumper sticker

Wanting to keep things that invoke warm thoughts or feelings is a natural desire. However, these items become clutter when they take over so much space, time and energy that they interfere with living in the present (see *Tips for Sentimental Items*).