

Chapter 1

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Overview

The first session of the declutter class focuses on providing participants with an orientation to the class. Class rules and confidentiality are reviewed. Participants are oriented to the expectation that they bring items with them each time they come to the group, so that they can practice decluttering skills in session with their own items.

At the beginning of this session group therapists should introduce themselves and spend a bit of time getting to know the participants.

Each participant is asked to sign a treatment contract that outlines the group rules. We recommend that group leaders collect the signed forms and make a photocopy for their records. Signed forms can then be returned to participants so that all parties have a copy. In the confidentiality agreement, participants are also asked to respect the confidentiality of other group members and not to share information from session outside of the class.

Participants may express some reservations about some of the group components, such as sharing photos of the home. We have found that it is good to take some time in this first session to address participants' concerns and to reiterate the rationale for each of these requirements. Participants usually identify and understand the concepts of skill practice and accountability, and recognize that while they may be mildly to moderately uncomfortable, these components are likely to be catalysts for change.

Participants are also socialized to some of the expectations of the group, including weekly homework, bringing objects to sort and discard in session, and sharing photos of one's home. Participants are initially oriented to the group structure and the manual layout. Participants are given some basic psychoeducation about terms and concepts that are commonly referred to in the group, including "churning" (i.e., the process of simply moving objects from one location to another without discarding) and the "OHIO" (only-handle-it-once) method. Participants are encouraged to use a three-receptacle method of discarding throughout the course of the group. The three-receptacle method involves using receptacles to sort the final location of objects, e.g., trash, donate, and keep. Participants are encouraged to use no more than 3–4 receptacles as decision-making complicates substantially with each additional potential end point for an object. This three-receptacle method should also be practiced throughout the course of the group when sorting and discarding are conducted in session.

In this session participants are also provided with psychoeducation about the diagnostic criteria for HD, and information on how hoarding may differ from collecting and nonclinical clutter/disorganization. Participants are given some brief information about the effectiveness of group CBT for HD. The importance of daily practice and homework completion is introduced.

During introductions, group members can be encouraged to introduce themselves and say a bit about why they are attending the group at present. This is designed to facilitate connection between members of the group and to aid in learning of names. Again, it is encouraged that name tags or other identifiers be used in the first 1–3 sessions of the group to facilitate interaction between group members. Participants are asked to speak a bit about why they are motivated for treatment, both to normalize hoarding behaviors and related consequences within the group, and to enhance recognition of individual motivators for change. Verbalizing these motivators also allows other group members to be aware of others' treatment goals to enhance accountability. The session also includes a brief review of some of the many problems that HD can create, and participants are encouraged to identify any consequences that are relevant to them that they would like to change.

The session ends with assigning homework to be completed prior to the next session. As part of the homework, participants are reminded to bring items from home to the next session, to review materials from the session, and to take photos of all of the main areas of their home to send to group leaders or to bring to class. Participants are also assigned a worksheet entitled “What Has Hoarding Taken From Me?” as homework. On this form they are asked to identify some ways in which hoarding has impacted their lives negatively.

Empirical Support and Rationale

In this initial session, it is important to ensure that all group members understand the treatment contract and feel prepared to adhere to it. If a participant misses this initial group, we typically schedule an independent (brief) session with them in order to go over these rules and ensure understanding and commitment. While the group structure may seem rule-heavy and somewhat strict, we have found that the group runs much more efficiently when expectations are outlined, and rules are clear and implemented reliably. Anecdotally, we have found that participants appear to have better outcomes when structure is emphasized and adhered to. This is consistent with one small study by Muroff et al. (2009), who found that in a small sample of individuals completing CBT for HD, a small group ($n=8$) that had a more formalized protocol with clear rules and structure improved significantly more than previous groups ($n=24$) that were less structured. We feel that this is likely due to the executive functioning deficits and disorganization that are central to this population. When deadlines and schedules are adhered to, it can improve the “flow” of the group dramatically. It can often be tempting to avoid enforcing the rules, as they can seem strict at times. However, we have found that when participants are well socialized to the rules up front, and the rules are implemented with compassion, participants have responded well to the rules and structure.

One may notice that there is a lack of thorough presentation of a cognitive-behavioral “model” of hoarding etiology or development. Participants may become confused by complicated discussions of the multiple factors that play a role in the maintenance and development of hoarding (as mentioned above, this model can be quite complex!). Participants may not be likely to remember components of these models after treatment (Ayers et al., 2012). Therefore, a full case conceptualization model is not laid out up front but rather woven into the individual chapters as each “bad guy” is discussed. The manual specifically limits formal discussion of the various factors that may cause hoarding behaviors. Participants will likely have questions about these issues, and often wonder how developmental factors such as trauma may have influenced or caused their hoarding behaviors. Obviously, these questions can be addressed, but we recommend staying away from lengthy/complicated discussions about the developmental “model” of hoarding. This is not to diminish the impact of these factors, but to simplify relevant content for participants, and to encourage a focus on the here-and-now.

1. Welcome to the Declutter Class

Welcome to the Declutter Class!

Group leaders should introduce themselves to the group, and provide contact information. Remind class members that the class lasts 16 weeks, and each session is designed to last 90 minutes. All participants should be provided with a group workbook.

This is the group workbook, which we will use throughout the course of the group. Please keep your workbook in a safe place, as you will need it during each group. Please bring the workbook with you to each of the sessions.

Today we group leaders will spend a lot of time talking, but hopefully we will also have some time to get to know each other. Today we will talk about what you can expect to learn in the group, and will discuss some general rules and guidelines for the group.

Point out to participants the **class tasks** icon in their workbooks, as shown here.

During the group we will be teaching you lots of new information and skills. We will also do lots of tasks together. When you see this picture it means that we will do a group task. These tasks will vary, but they are an important part of the group.



Inform participants that the workbook uses a fictional case example, Rita, to further illustrate group techniques and skills. These **participant story** sections will be marked by an image of the participant, Rita, as shown here.

The graphic of Rita in your workbook indicates that Rita will explain how she used the skills to help her hoarding symptoms. Rita and her story are a good way to see how the skills from the group can be applied.



Sorting and Discarding

Throughout the course of this group we will suggest using a “three-box” method of sorting through your possessions.

Discuss the receptacle method with group members. Group members are encouraged to use three receptacles (boxes, bags, bins, etc.) for sorting. Participants typically have three boxes or bins: one for items to keep, one for items to donate, and one for trash items. Emphasize how there should be no “deal with it later” box, and that the goal of the group is to get participants in the habit of making decisions, not delaying decisions.

Introduce the concept of “churning.” Many people with HD will have made attempts to clean up the clutter. However, those efforts frequently involve just moving things from pile to pile. This “churning” behavior may feel like cleaning up, but it’s not. In this group, we will emphasize making decisions and taking action. In that spirit, introduce the concept of “OHIO:” “Only handle it once.” That is, whenever possible, items should only be handled once before a decision is made and action taken.

In addition, participants should carefully choose their boxes; for example, having a box full of items “to give to daughter-in-law” is not a helpful box if the daughter-in-law has requested not to receive items, and having a “sell” box is not all that helpful if the individual overestimates the value of his or her possessions. We tend to discourage participants from trying to sell most items, as for most people in the group the amount of planning and organization that is necessary to sell the item often outweighs the monetary value of the item.

The goal of this group is to help you to reduce your clutter. Our experience shows us that people in the group do best when they practice sorting and discarding using three boxes (or bins or bags):

- a. Keep*
- b. Trash*
- c. Donate/Recycle*

We will be using this system throughout the group, so we encourage you to immediately set up this system in the area you wish to work on. You may wish to label your receptacles so you remember which is which. You might find this practice difficult, but we will work on ways to help you manage feelings of distress that come up.

At this point in the group, group leaders show participants the receptacles that they have marked as “trash” and “donate/recycle.”

Here are the bins that we will be using throughout the course of the class. You will notice that one is marked “donate/recycle” and one is marked “trash.” If you elect to put your item in the donate/recycle bin, we will donate or recycle it for you.

Sometimes participants will want to know whether discarded paper materials will be shredded/recycled. In our groups we have a large bin for confidential material shredding that already exists in the clinic and we volunteer to place paper materials with identifying info in the shredding bin for participants.

Bringing Clutter from Home to Group

*In order for you to complete various group assignments we will ask you to bring in a small bag or box of your belongings from home **each week**, starting in week 3. You will not be required to discard anything until you feel ready, but it will help us*

to learn about your symptoms and demonstrate the skills that will be helpful for reducing your clutter. It might be tempting to pre-sort your belongings before class, leaving the “good stuff” at home and only bringing in things that would be easy to discard. For the sake of this practice, we don’t want you to pre-sort what you bring in. Just take several belongings from one area of your home, regardless of your thoughts about keeping or discarding them.

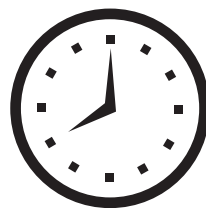
Address any questions or problems the participants have with the idea of bringing items to session. Emphasize how participants should quickly grab items from a location (e.g., sweep arm across a table, sweeping all items into a bin to bring to session), without pre-screening items. Inform participants that the goal of having them bring items in is to practice skills in session, and therefore they should *not* bring in items they have already decided they are going to discard. Remind them that they will not be forced to throw anything away.

Participants should be encouraged to bring many items, typically a box or bag of at least 10 items. Remind them that the degree to which these items are used in session will vary, but that they are expected to have many items to work with in session should the therapists ask them to practice.

Staying on Schedule

Show group members the clock sign (a copy for use can be found in Appendix A).

You will notice that we have a sign with a clock on it. We will use this to help keep class members on track. We have found from our past groups that many class members have important stories to tell, but there often just isn’t enough time to get through all of them. We want to make sure that we stay on track and get through all the materials to help you reduce your clutter. We will use the stop sign as a reminder for you to finish up with what you are saying quickly and as a signal that we need to move on. When we use the clock sign, it doesn’t mean that we’re not interested in what you have to say! It just means that we need to make sure everyone gets a chance to talk and that we have enough time to cover the material for the class. Please respect your fellow group members by not interrupting, and by allowing everyone a chance to contribute.



Photos

Inform class members that they will be asked to take photos of their homes throughout the course of the class and normalize that this process can be uncomfortable for some class members.

We ask you to take photos of your clutter now, at the start of treatment, and as you work through treatment. The photos help us to be able to monitor your progress and

give you feedback, since we are unable to visit your home. The photos also help you keep track of your progress, and help you be accountable to the group. In talking to past groups, we have found that they often state that “accountability” is one of the factors that helps them make progress in the group. It is a lot like a weight loss group: you would most likely weigh yourself in front of the group to show your progress and to show the group where you are, so that they can give you feedback and support you.

We know that this aspect of the class might also be difficult for you. You might feel embarrassed showing pictures of your home, or you might worry that your pictures won’t show enough progress over time. We understand that it can be hard, but in our opinion, taking and showing pictures is very important. It helps to break the wall of secrecy and shame that so often surrounds hoarding, and helps you and us get a good understanding of how well the program is working for you.

The photos also help you see how far you’ve come. It is easy to forget how much progress you have made in the group and focus only on what is left to be done. In past groups, when participants have reviewed their “before” and “after” photos at the end of class, they have often been blown away by the difference, which was much greater than they thought!

There are several ways that you can share your photos with the group. If you have a camera on your phone you can use that, and you can either send the photo to us via email, or bring the photo to session on your phone, or print it out. As with all information in the group, the photos that you show us/send us are completely confidential and are not shared outside of the group. If you do not have access to a digital camera you may need to purchase a disposable camera to take hard-copy photos.

When taking photos, we would like one photo for every main area of your home. So this usually works best if you simply stand in a doorway and take a photo of that room. We want to see all the rooms of your home, regardless of whether they are currently cluttered or not. We want to see the cluttered rooms to talk about your goals in these areas and track progress over time, and we want to see the non-cluttered areas to make sure that they stay this way and you do not engage in churning – simply moving objects from one room to another without much going out.

Does anyone have any questions about this? We will ask that this week you take photos of every room in your home, so that we can get a sense of where you are starting from. We will share all of your photos at the beginning of the next group.

CLASS TASK: Introduce Yourself!

To get started let’s start with introductions. Please tell us briefly:

- Your first name.
- Why reducing your clutter is important to you right now.



Group leaders should also provide class members with contact information for their preferred method(s) of contact. Participants have a place to write down this information on page 3 of their workbooks.

2. Class Rules and Guidelines

You will notice that there are a lot of rules and structure to the group. If you have been in a therapy group before, you may find this group to be much different. We will be teaching you many skills to help address your clutter problem, and we have a lot to cover in a short time.

We find that this group works best when we have clear rules and guidelines that everyone in the group follows. On the next few pages you will find a treatment contract and a class confidentiality contract. Please read through these contracts and sign the bottom of the form if you agree.

Because we know from having completed several groups for many years that these rules are very important to the success of the class, we take the treatment contract and class confidentiality quite seriously. Unfortunately, if you do not agree to the treatment contract we are unable to have you in our class. We will take a copy of the signed contract so that we know that you agree to the rules, and you will have a copy of these rules in your workbook to refer to if you have questions in the future.

It is recommended that the group read the forms aloud in order to better process the rules of the group and address questions that arise. If desired, group leaders can ask group members to take turns reading individual rules, and answering questions about rules as they arise. Reinforce how the group rules are not designed to be authoritative but rather to provide structure, organization, fairness, and respect to group members.

Participants will often ask why they are discouraged from dwelling on past events (treatment contract item 6). We inform them that historically, our group members have tended to overly focus on past life difficulties that may have contributed to development of the clutter problem, but may not be workable or relevant now. We remind them that we do not necessarily need to know the reason a problem started, or the cause of it, to be able to treat it. We therefore tend to focus on factors that are maintaining the problem in the present. Group members may wish to point out that “the things that may have started your problem may not be the same things that keep it going in the present.”

In reviewing rule 9, reinforce how it can be difficult to resist obtaining items from other group members especially when group members begin to bring in items to be discarded. For many group members, it is difficult to watch others discard items even if the items are not personal possessions.

*The group therapists also have some rules that **they** will follow. Our rules are that we:*

- *Will not touch any of your possessions without your permission.*
- *Will not throw away any of your possessions without your permission.*

- *Will allow you to make all the decisions about your discarding.*
- *Will be creative and flexible in the treatment process.*
- *Will allow everyone the chance to speak and learn in the class.*
- *Will convey nonjudgmental empathy and compassion, and will strive to understand your situation as accurately as possible.*

Next, group leaders should review the treatment contract and class confidentiality contract (on pages 5 and 6 of the participant workbook). In regards to item 3 of the confidentiality contract, inform participants that while it is OK to talk about group *skills* or the general theme of the group sessions outside the group, the contract requires that personal information about group participants be kept private.

Treatment Contract

1. **Willingness to discard.** The purpose of this class is to help me to reduce my clutter and improve my quality of life. For this reason, I am willing to discard items in my home. I will be able to control what I keep and discard, but I am open to discarding at least some of the items in my home.
2. **Being on time.** I understand that if I am 15 minutes or more late to the class (according to the clock in the classroom) I will not be able to attend class that week. If I am less than 15 minutes late the class will not stop to review what I have missed but I may join the class for that week.
3. **Bringing in clutter from home.** I agree to bring in some of the clutter from my home *to every class* (starting in week 3). This will help me apply and practice the skills from class. This is an extremely important part of the class. I understand that if I do not bring items each week I may be withdrawn from the class.
4. **Maintaining regular attendance.** I understand that if I miss 3 sessions or am late by 15 minutes or more for 3 sessions I may be asked to leave the class. This is because it is distracting for other class members. If I do miss a class, I understand that I am responsible for contacting the class leaders to find out the homework assignment. Homework must still be completed for missed classes.
5. **Completing assigned home exercises each week.** I agree to turn in all assigned homework worksheets at each class. If I miss this goal, I understand that I will be asked to meet privately with the class leaders to problem solve any difficulties. If I miss this goal more than 3 times I may be withdrawn from the class.
6. **Focusing on making changes to my current life and not dwelling on past events.** During the class, I will only bring up past events if it is for the purpose of making changes to my current situation.
7. **Letting others have their turn to speak.** I will not interrupt others or divert a topic of discussion. I understand that the class leaders will use the clock sign to signal me to finish up what I am saying quickly before moving on to the next topic.
8. **Ceasing all social conversation with other class members by the start of the class.**
9. **Refraining from giving belongings to other class members or acquiring materials from other class members unless instructed by the class leaders as part of demonstration of skills.**

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Class Confidentiality Contract

This is a contract for confidentiality among the members of this class.

1. Each member of the class agrees to keep personal information discussed in the class private.
2. Any information shared by a class member about himself or herself should be considered private information. This information should not be shared with anyone outside of the class.
3. Due to potential conflicts, we do not recommend contact between class members outside of the class.
 - I agree to respect the right of others to follow this recommendation.
 - I agree to not share contact information while at the class.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

3. What is Hoarding Disorder?

Inform participants that HD is marked by the following problems:

1. Difficulty throwing things away because of a perceived need to save things.
2. Experiencing excessive distress when trying to throw things away.
3. Having so much clutter that one is unable to use rooms and objects in the home for their intended use.

Also discuss with participants that individuals with hoarding disorder often have a problem of *excessive acquiring*. That is, they buy or pick up more items than they need, and bring them into the home, adding to the clutter. Excessive acquiring is not currently one of the diagnostic criteria for hoarding disorder, but we have found it to be present in most cases.

Review with participants some common consequences related to hoarding/clutter, such as those listed below.

Many people with hoarding disorder report that the clutter in their home can lead to many problems, including:

- *Unsanitary and unsafe living conditions*
 - *Mold, water/roof leaks, structural decay, pest infestation, animal feces, trip/fall hazards, fire hazards*
- *Difficulties getting contractors or emergency workers into the home*
 - *Doorways may be blocked, or passages narrow, inhibiting movement of repair personnel or emergency personnel in the case of an emergency*
- *Difficulties with family members*
 - *Family members disapproving of clutter or acquiring habits*
- *Reduced social contact*
 - *Arguments and discord with family or friends*
 - *Refusing to allow people into the home, such as repair persons, family, or friends*
- *Problems with the legal system*
 - *Eviction, complaints*
 - *Social services agencies to oversee protection of children or elderly*
- *Dissatisfaction with the functioning of the home*
- *Losing/being unable to find items that are important*

Ask group members to indicate whether they have experienced any of these hoarding-related impairments, or other impairments not listed here.

4. What Will I Learn in This Class?

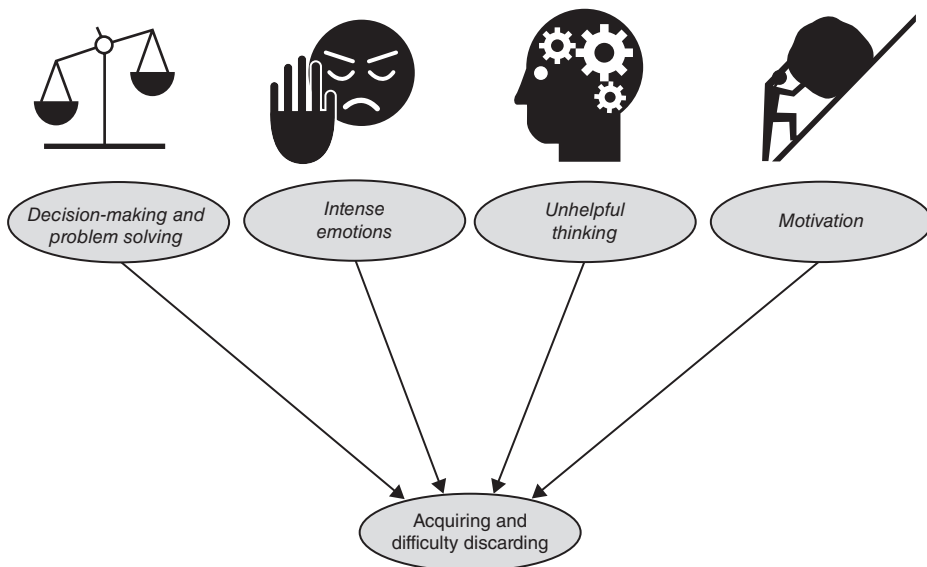
Next, we will talk about what you will learn in this group. In this group we will help you to:

- 1. Learn more about what contributes to you having clutter.***
- 2. Learn evidence-based skills to reduce the clutter in your home.***
- 3. Learn how to apply the skills on a consistent basis.***

1. Learn More About What Contributes to You Having Clutter

Guide participants to the illustration in their workbook.

We have found that these four “bad guys” tend to work together to create hoarding problems. Keep in mind that all of you likely vary in how much each of these factors contributes to your clutter problem. For example, some of you may have difficulties in one or two of these areas and not the others; some of you may have moderate difficulties in some and high in others; or some of you may have strong difficulties in all the areas. Not to worry: the goal of the group is to help you understand which of these areas is most problematic for you, and to target strategies at those areas.



2. Learn Evidence-Based Skills to Reduce the Clutter in Your Home

From session 3 through 10 we will be teaching you skills to reduce the clutter in your home. We call these skills “evidence-based” because we know from previous research that they work! The skills are not easy to do, though, and require lots of repetition and perseverance. Just like learning any new skill, it takes time! We are confident, however, that if you work on these skills a little bit each day you will make improvements in your clutter.

While you may find that some of these factors drive your hoarding behavior more than others, we find that learning skills in all of these four areas is helpful regardless of the primary cause of your clutter problem. Therefore, as we work through the strategies to target these factors, we ask that you give them your best effort and try all of them thoroughly, regardless of how much you think they might apply to you. You may find some things do not work for you and that's OK, we just ask that you really try everything thoroughly before you decide you don't like it or don't want to use it. Usually that means trying it for at least a month or two.

3. Learn How to Apply the Skills on a Consistent Basis

This is the most important part of the group. From session 11 onwards we will be putting all the skills together and making these skills your new habits. This takes lots of practice and repetition. After lots of practice with these skills we expect that you will make much improvement in reducing the clutter in your home.

5. How Well Does the Declutter Class Work?

Discuss with participants that it is important to have realistic expectations for progress within the group. Emphasize that while substantial reductions in clutter are expected during the course of the group, much progress in decluttering occurs after the group has been completed.

We use the techniques that we show you because past group members have found them to be very helpful. Also, past research that we have conducted suggests that most people who complete the group feel much better and have substantially less clutter at the end of the group, improvements in quality of life, improved safety within the home, less acquiring, and increased ability to let go of possessions when necessary.

However, it is important to have realistic goals; you likely still will have some clutter and some related difficulties at the end of the treatment program. You likely did

not accumulate all of your objects overnight, and therefore it often takes a long time to declutter as well. It may take months to years to declutter to the point that it is not distressing or interfering with your life. However, you should be feeling better, less cluttered, and more confident in your skills as you go through the group, so please let us know if you are finding that is not the case! The important thing is that you learn the skills and how to apply them so that you continue to improve even after the group has ended.

6. Homework

Reinforce to participants the importance of regular homework completion.

Doing homework is not always pleasant. It's time consuming and can be difficult, both emotionally and physically. We understand that your life may already be quite busy, and that you may not want to do things that feel bad. But we cannot emphasize enough how critical this part of the class is.

This is because we have found from our previous classes that people who do their homework consistently each week get the best outcomes. For example, one recent research study found that 80% of those who did their homework regularly responded to treatment versus only 20% of those who did not do their homework regularly. In other words: If you do your homework consistently, you will probably have a very good outcome of this class. If you do not do your homework consistently, you will probably not have a very good outcome of this class.

For this reason we will give you homework every session. We want you to get the most out of the class so we want you to do your homework every day. As mentioned in the treatment contract we discussed earlier, if you do not do all your homework consistently we may meet with you individually to discuss what may be getting in the way.

Outline the homework tasks for week 1, as follows:

- 1. Reread information from week 1 (including Rita's story).**
- 2. Take "before" photos of ALL main areas of your home.**
- 3. Complete the "What Has Hoarding Taken From Me?" worksheet.**
- 4. Other:** _____
- 5. Other:** _____

You will see your homework for this week listed on page 11 of your workbooks.

We recommend spending at least 1 hour a day working through your homework, which may include reading back through your worksheet or completing specific tasks. Remember that the more you do the homework, the more likely you are to

improve! You will hear us remind you of this often during the course of the group – because it is very important! You can decide how much you put into this and how much you get out of it. We have found that individuals who do not do the homework are unlikely to improve substantially during the course of the group.

Sample Answers to Common Questions

Question: I'm going on vacation/having surgery/etc.; what if I have to miss some sessions?

Answer: We understand that emergencies happen, and usually a couple or even a few missed sessions is not a substantial problem. Obviously we recommend that you attend as many sessions as possible to get the most benefit from the treatment, and we hope that you will attend all the sessions! As specified in the treatment contract, however, if you miss more than three sessions, we will meet with you individually to discuss what has been getting in the way and possibly to help you problem solve some of the barriers to completing treatment successfully. We may also discuss with you whether completion of the group is in your best interests right now. Sometimes we find that group members have other issues that may take priority, and that's OK – in which case we will simply encourage you to reattend the declutter class when you are able to give it your full attention. We tend to discourage participants from continuing with the group if they have missed four sessions or more as this is simply not enough attendance to get the full benefit of the group. We would rather have you take this class at the right time and succeed than take it at the wrong time and be disappointed.

Question: What if something comes up (e.g., a serious illness, family emergency, etc.) that stops me from doing the weekly homework assignments? Will I be thrown out of the group?

Answer: We understand that issues come up that make it challenging to complete the homework. We also understand that the group homework can be time consuming. However, as we know that the homework is so important to your success in this group, we ask that you put your best effort into it, even if you are having additional life stress or difficulty. We often find that times that we are stressed, busy, and fatigued are the best times to practice skills from the group, as these are the times that we are most likely to fall back on old habits! As mentioned in the treatment contract, if you are repeatedly unable to complete the group homework, one of the clinicians may meet with you individually to discuss your progress in the group. He or she may help you problem solve some of the barriers that have gotten in the way of completing homework. The clinician may also discuss with you whether it is appropriate to continue with the declutter class. As always, we want to make sure the group is a priority in your life – and if it is not, that is OK – but we will ask you to refrain from participating now and return at a time when you can put your best effort in. If you are simply having difficulty completing the assignments because you are having trouble understanding them or have questions, please contact the group leaders and/or discuss your concerns/questions in the group!

Question: Spending half an hour or more a day on homework sounds like a lot! I have a lot of things on my plate and I am not sure I can spend that much time on the assignments!

Answer: We agree that the homework is a lot of work to do, and sometimes it can be hard to manage time and resources in order to get the therapy homework done. If you are unsure that you will be able to complete the homework demands of the group, please come speak to us after the group. We can then talk with you about whether now is a good time to complete the group. We occasionally find that participants have many life demands (e.g., family stress, medical issues, financial issues) and that the group work may be too much of an additional burden or that working on the hoarding problem is just not at the top of the priority list. If that is the case, we may simply ask that you reconsider completing the group at this time.

Question: What if there is inclement weather? Will the group still be held?

Answer: Depending on the likelihood of inclement weather, group leaders may wish to set an inclement weather policy at the start of the group. To make cancellation information easily locatable by participants, we have used cancellation information of local universities or community colleges, telling participants that we are also closed if the university has canceled classes/closed for the day/evening. This way, participants can usually look at the school's website, call the school, or watch the news to determine if the group will be held. If such a facility is not nearby, group leaders may wish to obtain contact information for group participants and warn them to ensure that they can be contacted on days that inclement weather cancellation is possible.

While lower attendance can be expected during inclement weather, we find that having a hard and fast rule for cancellation of the session is necessary to reduce confusion and anxiety. It is also often helpful to obtain alternative contact information from the group members if they need to be contacted in case of an emergency cancellation. We typically try to obtain more than one phone number if available, and ask participants' consent to send emails. We often find that clutter and difficulty discarding may extend to voice mailboxes as well, and that we are often unable to leave messages for participants due to "voice mailbox full" messages. This can lead to participants not receiving messages and driving a long distance in inclement weather, just to find that there is no group being held! Therefore we recommend against a policy of simply calling participants when last-minute cancellations are necessary.

Question: How is hoarding different from just collecting things?

Answer: We love to open this question to the group, and find that the group is often able to answer this question through discussion. We emphasize the following:

<i>Collecting</i>	<i>Hoarding/Problematic Clutter</i>
Items that most people would agree has monetary or sentimental value Items do not impair one from using rooms of the home or items in the home in the way that they were intended Not distressing Items are usually organized and cared for	Others tend to see the items as having little to no value Items impair use of the home, furniture, or appliances in the way that they were intended (e.g., the stove is not usable because it is covered in items; a room is not enterable) Others or the hoarding individual themselves are often distressed by aspects of the clutter Items are usually disorganized and neglected

Question: Do I *have* to bring in items? Every session?

Answer: Yes! You will get the most benefit from the treatment if you bring in your own items to practice the skills with. As we mentioned, we will not make you discard any possessions, and we will not make decisions for you, but we will encourage you to use techniques learned in the class as you make decisions about your possessions. As mentioned in the treatment contact, we view completion of homework as essential to your success in the class; bringing in items is another piece of the homework. The most important part of this treatment is practicing the skills you learn *while attempting to sort and discard your own possessions*.

Question: I have many antiques/collectibles that are worth money. I'm not going to just give these away.

Answer: Of course you may have some items in your home that are legitimately worth money and that you may consider selling. We don't expect you to give away everything. We just want you to be careful to ensure that you are not spending so much time and effort on selling any item that it outweighs the amount of money that you receive in return! We have often seen individuals put much time and effort into selling an item – finding an appropriate place to sell it, researching the prices, posting it/making an ad or listing, and/or meeting with potential buyers. Once you add up such time, it often is just not worth it. We generally take the philosophy of “don't sell it,” as we so rarely find that it is worth the effort. However, we will talk in a later class about limits to set if you truly want to sell items; for example, setting a time limit for how long you are willing to have the item be “for sale” before you give up.