

Sorting Exposure Guidelines

Hoarders often avoid the discomfort of sorting and deciding what to keep and what to discard. This avoidance allows things to accumulate, and contributes to the clutter in the home.

To address this problem it is necessary to face their discomfort and desensitize themselves to the process of sorting. The way to do this is via exposure exercises.

Exposure refers to the process of gradually doing the things that have been avoided. It requires planning and teaching. Here are some guidelines.

1. Explain it first, and help the patient understand that they are in control of it.
2. Develop a general list of the kinds of things that might be easier to discard, and harder to discard.
3. Pick a particular area of the home to get started, with clutter.
4. Start sorting by separating easier from harder items.
5. Let the patient speak out loud about their fears of discarding some items.
6. Help the patient decide by using pros and cons. Permit an undecided category.
7. Put the things to discard in a staging area. Make a detailed plan of how to move those items out.
8. Go back to undecided category and review with each item. Continue until no undecided items remain.
9. Plan for possible future problems in the newly cleaned area.
10. Reinforce the efforts made, and review how it was done.