



THE **SPACE** MAN

Decluttering and Hoarding Support



WHAT IS HOARDING?

HOARDING IS A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION, NOT A LIFESTYLE CHOICE

Definition:

“Hoarding is the excessive collection and retention of any material to the point that it impedes day to day functioning.”

(Frost & Gross, 1993)



PUTTING IT SIMPLY...

Hoarding is the compulsive acquisition of stuff coupled with the need to keep everything.

DSM V DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA

A. Persistent difficulty discarding or parting with possessions, regardless of value.

B. This difficulty is due to a perceived need to save the items and to distress associated with discarding them.

C. The difficulty discarding possessions results in the accumulation of possessions that congest and clutter areas and substantially compromises their intended use.

D. The hoarding causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

E. The hoarding is not attributable to another medical condition (e.g., brain injury, cerebrovascular disease, Prader-Willi syndrome).

F. The hoarding is not better explained by the symptoms of another mental disorder (e.g., obsessions in OCD, decreased energy in major depressive disorder, delusions in schizophrenia etc).

ICD 11 DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA

Accumulation of possessions that results in living spaces becoming cluttered to the point that their use or safety is compromised.

Accumulation occurs due to both:

Repetitive urges or behaviours related to amassing items and difficulty discarding possessions due to a perceived need to save items and distress associated with discarding them.

The symptoms result in significant distress or significant impairment in important areas of functioning.



THE COLLYER BROTHERS, NYC, 1947





SOME OF WHAT CAME OUT OF THE HOUSE...

170 tons of stuff

30,000 books

14 grand pianos

A horse-drawn carriage

A model T Ford car

An x-ray machine

WHO WERE THEY?

Dad was a doctor,
mum an opera singer

Homer was a lawyer

Langley was a concert
pianist and piano
dealer

WHO IS A HOARDER?

- How old are they?
- Male or female?
- Educated?
- Working?
- Any signs or clues?

IN FACT IT'S VERY COMMON

Around 5 percent of the population has this problem - that's one in twenty

Only a small percentage come to light

Sufferers believe they're useless, a failure

It leads to social isolation

It co-exists with other conditions such as depression, anxiety, agoraphobia, bipolar etc

IS IT BECOMING MORE COMMON?

No, it's just more known about PLUS...

- The population is growing
- We're living longer
- More of us live alone
- More of us suffer with mental health issues
- Stuff has never been more easily available and cheap - pound shops, car boot sales, charity shops, ebay, shopping channels etc

WHEN DOES IT BECOME A PROBLEM?

When it makes normal daily life impossible

When it causes distress or affects safety

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES?

TRAUMA is often the source

Almost any emotional upset can lead to hoarding...

Abandonment, fear, cruelty, loss, abuse, bereavement, illness, accident, redundancy

CONTROL is a key theme

When someone loses control of one area of life, they can seek to regain it another

PEOPLE v POSSESSIONS

PEOPLE	POSSESSIONS
Unreliable	Reliable
Unpredictable	Predictable
Let you down	Never let you down
Can be abusive	Always passive
Die	Do not die
Hurt you	Can never hurt you
Don't return your love	Love you whatever
Make you feel bad	Make you feel good
Get drunk	Always sober
Call you names	You get the idea!

SOME OF THE ISSUES

Social isolation

Low self esteem

Rifts with family
and friends

Depression and
other mental
health issues

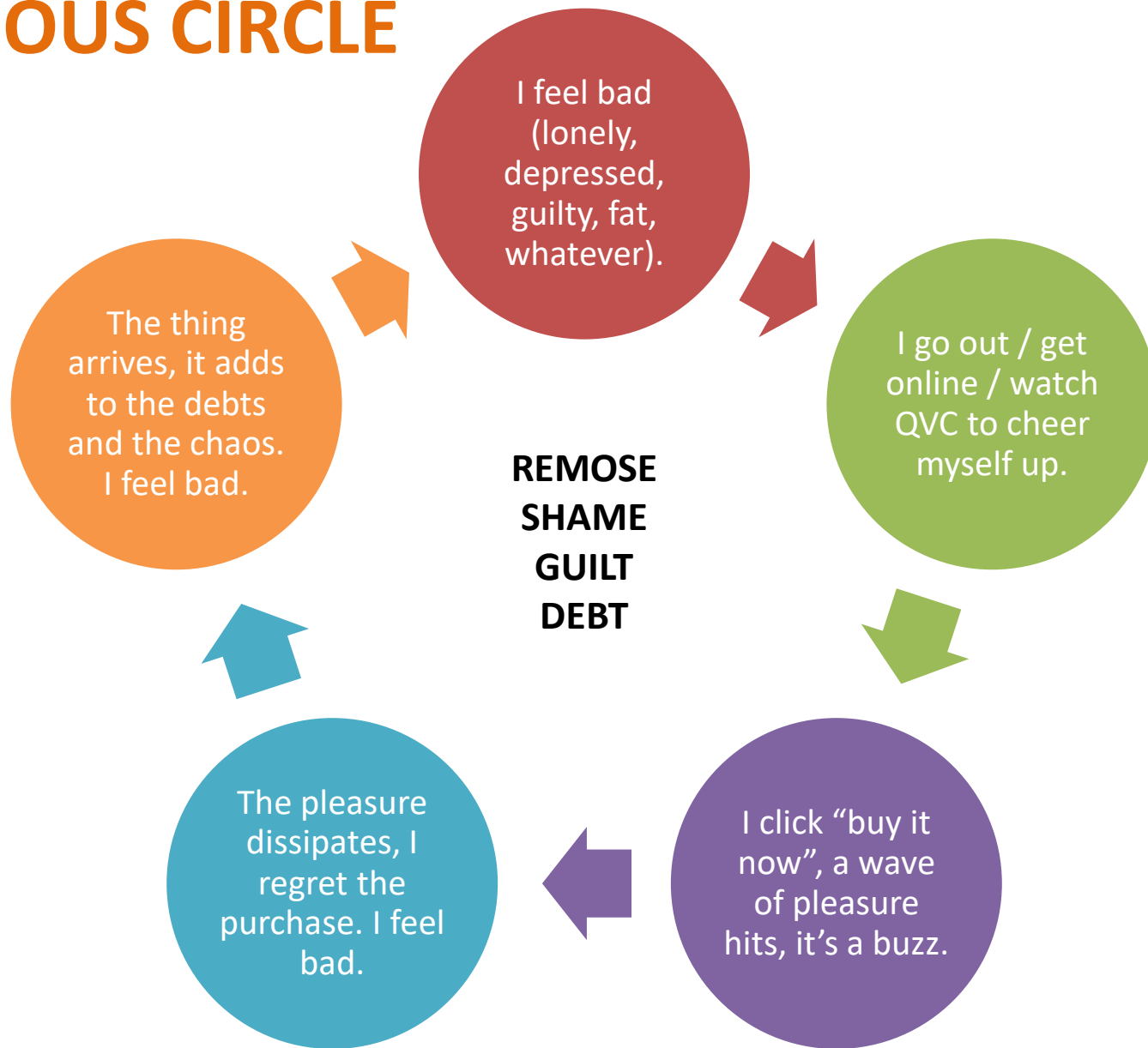
Difficulty holding
down a job,
looking after kids

Financial
problems, debt is
common

Addiction e.g.
QVC, eBay

Health problems –
lack of light, bad
air, mould

A VICIOUS CIRCLE



EMOTIONAL SAFETY

The stuff can represent something else...

- Nest
- Womb
- Cocoon
- Cockpit

Is the hoard there
to keep the person
safely IN or to keep
other people OUT?

**QUOTE
FROM THE
MOTHER OF
ONE OF MY
CLIENTS**

**“She used money
to self-harm as
someone else
might use a
knife.”**

IT'S NOT THE STUFF...

IT'S *GETTING* THE STUFF

Very often you will find the home full of
unopened packages

In which case, why the inability to get rid
of anything?

A photograph of a room completely covered in a chaotic pile of various items, including papers, plastic containers, toys, and household objects. A small, light-colored dog is lying down in the center of the clutter. A window in the background shows some greenery outside.

CONTROL

Whatever the hoard, be it designer handbags or bottles of urine, CONTROL is the reason it's being kept.

“It's my stuff, I chose it, I bought it, I got it, I found it, I want it, I'm keeping it.”

TYPES OF HOARDING

Anything can be the basis of the hoard, here are a few examples from my work:

- **Cats**
- **Water**
- **People**
- **Clothes**
- **Milk bottles**
- **Board games**
- **CDs and DVDs**
- **Anything and everything that comes into the house**

REASONS AND RATIONALE

“I need that because...”

- It's for a future project.
- I'll cut out the recipes.
- I plan to redecorate.
- It belonged to my mum.
- My weight goes up and down.
- It's useful stuff that I will use.
- I might end up buying another.
- You can't get them anymore.

ALTRUISM AND THE NORMALISING DISCOURSE

“I’m keeping things out of landfill”

“I like to give things to my family”

“I’m doing my bit for the planet”

“Someone could make good use of it”

“That can be repaired and donated”

“I’m collecting them for the primary school”

SOME ISSUES

FEAR OF WASTE

- Can become obsessive about recycling
- Can't bear the thought of later needing an item
- The financial value of individual things is a factor

ALLURE OF OPPORTUNITY

- Owning something means you also own its potential
- The stuff represents what the person might become
- Our sense of identity is invested into our possessions

COMFORT AND SAFETY OF OBJECTS

- Change is frightening
- It may be chaos, but I know where everything is
- It all comes back to control over your own life

INFORMATION PROCESSING

Order in the chaos

- The individual knows roughly where things are
- Clearing up can cause anxiety over losing things

Perception of value

- What looks like junk to you is treasure to them
- Hoarders often are very imaginative and creative

HELPING



Things hoarders do NOT need

- Tough love / a firm hand
- Friends and family to get rid of stuff
- A shed / garage / tent* / storage
- Anything which takes control from them

** Ask me about tents!*

MY APPROACH

Person-centred

Non-judgemental

Talking is vital

Building trust

Support-based

Lots of short visits

Start small

Build new habits

**I AM
OFTEN
ASKED...**

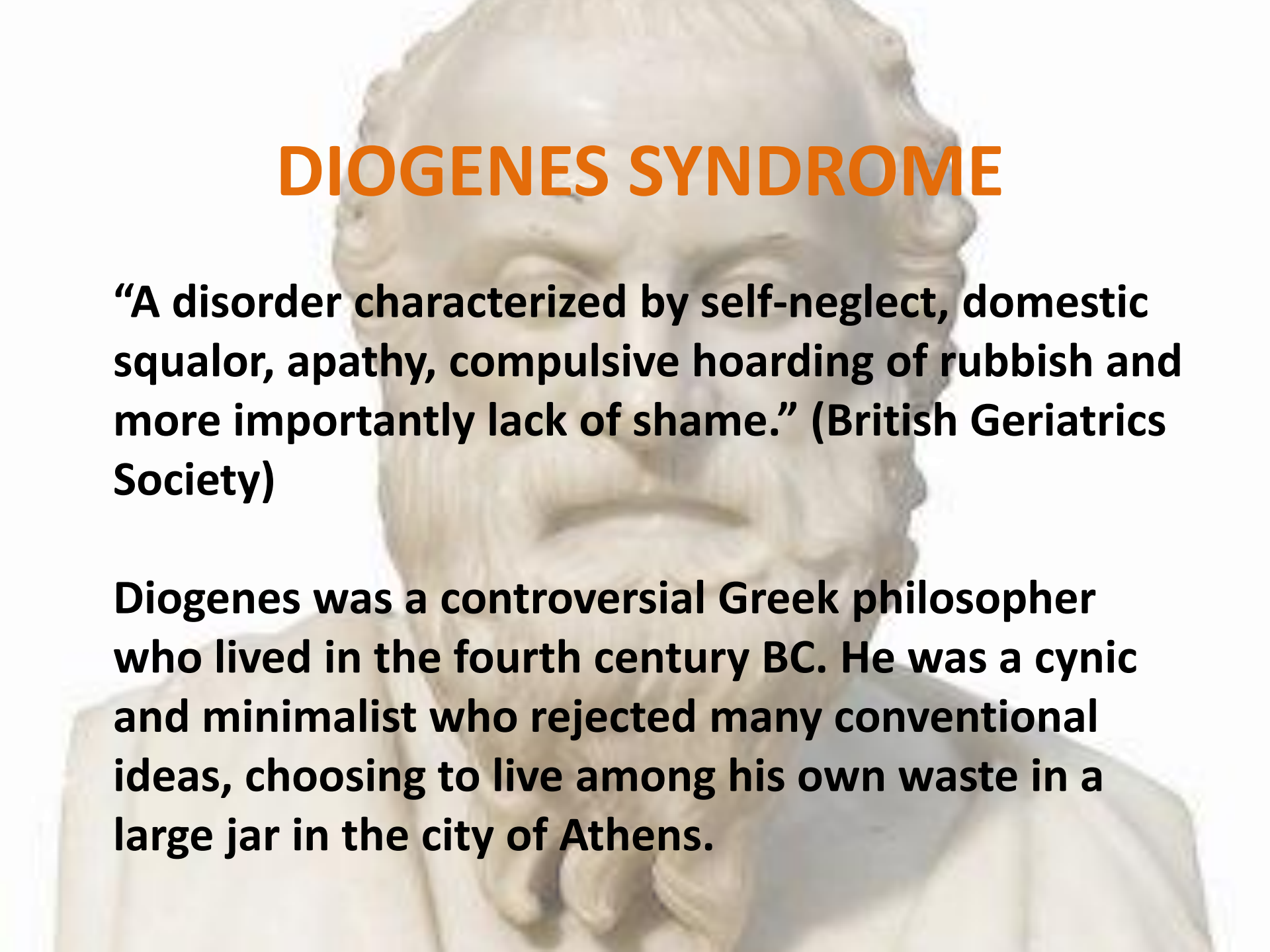
What's the
strangest thing
I've decluttered in
a hoarded house?

AND HERE IT IS...



TIMES TOP TEN 1978-79
JOHN CLEESE
FUNNIEST MAN ON TV

**I would love to know how this ended up in the
scullery of a council house in Harlow!**



DIOGENES SYNDROME

“A disorder characterized by self-neglect, domestic squalor, apathy, compulsive hoarding of rubbish and more importantly lack of shame.” (British Geriatrics Society)

Diogenes was a controversial Greek philosopher who lived in the fourth century BC. He was a cynic and minimalist who rejected many conventional ideas, choosing to live among his own waste in a large jar in the city of Athens.

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