



Understanding hoarding in the UK

with Alex Tyler of Clutter B Gone



Hoarding is often reduced to stereotypes about mess, yet for millions of people, it represents a complex mental health condition that shapes how they live, make decisions, and relate to their belongings. The scale is significant, with estimates suggesting between 2.5% and six percent of the UK population being affected, according to Hoarding Disorders UK.¹ However, it is believed that due to stigma and shame, many cases remain hidden from services and public view. Living spaces can become difficult to use, safety risks may increase, and everyday tasks can feel overwhelming when possessions carry emotional weight. As awareness grows, the conversation is slowly shifting from judgement toward a deeper understanding of hoarding as a behaviour influenced by factors such as trauma, neurodiversity, and the need for psychological safety.

This shift is increasingly visible in the work of professional organising services that sit between housing, social care and mental health support, where practical intervention must be balanced with emotional sensitivity. Founder of Clutter B Gone, Alex Tyler brings more than a decade of public service experience into that space, using her background supporting people with complex needs to shape a compassionate approach to clutter and hoarding. Drawing on her own late autism diagnosis and a lifelong strength in organisation, Alex built the company around the idea that decluttering should prioritise trust, readiness and individual pace rather than rapid clearance. Through partnerships with councils, housing providers, and residents themselves, Alex's work reflects a growing recognition that behind every overcrowded home is not simply excess belongings, but a person navigating loss, stress or change.

¹ Hoarding Disorders UK. "WHO classification" (Last accessed 24 February 2026), <https://hoardingdisordersuk.org/definitions/>

A recognised mental health condition

In 2018, the World Health Organization recognised hoarding as a mental health condition characterised by the accumulation of items, as well as by the emotional and cognitive processes that make decision-making around possessions intensely challenging. People with a hoarding disorder often have persistent difficulty discarding possessions regardless of their value, alongside strong urges to acquire, and significant stress when items are removed. Such behaviour results in living spaces becoming so crowded that their intended use is compromised, affecting everything from cooking and sleeping to basic safety within the home.



Common misconceptions about hoarding

While clutter is a common and often temporary part of everyday life, hoarding differs in its persistence, impact and underlying drivers. Through her work, Alex has seen how frequently the behaviour is linked to trauma, loss or major life change, noting that many people are aware there is a problem but feel unable to shift it alone. As she explains, "Some people turn to drink, some people turn to drugs, and more and more people now turn to hoarding. It's a coping strategy for them". Objects can hold memories, security or a sense of preparedness, meaning discarding them can trigger anxiety, grief or fear. This further reinforces the need for support that combines practical organisation with emotional understanding.

Hoarding is often misunderstood, and misconceptions about the people who live with it are widespread. A common myth is that homes affected by hoarding are dirty or unhygienic. "What you find a lot of the time is people who hoard, their places are actually very clean," Alex explains, noting it's rare to find a home genuinely filthy – showing that clutter doesn't equal neglect. Another common misunderstanding is that people who hoard simply lack self-control or could stop if they tried. Alex is clear: hoarding is a mental health condition, not a matter of willpower. "If they are continuously buying stuff and they are hoarding, they are substituting for something," she says. The behaviour often develops as a coping mechanism, replacing what might otherwise be directed into substances, routines, or other forms of emotional management. Awareness of hoarding is still limited compared with more widely recognised mental health issues such as depression or PTSD, leaving many without the understanding or support they need.



Alex emphasises that the prevalence of hoarding is increasing both in the UK and internationally, yet it remains under-recognised. "People do need help. They do need support. But it hasn't got the same awareness as the more common mental health conditions," she explains. Misconceptions about cleanliness and control contribute to stigma and delay intervention, making compassionate, informed approaches like hers all the more important. Even on day one of a decluttering process, when trust is being built and residents are hesitant, patience, empathy and respect are essential to ensure the process enables recovery rather than causes harm.

Inside the decluttering process

Decluttering a home affected by hoarding is rarely a simple matter of removing items; it's a careful, person-centred process that balances practical organisation with emotional sensitivity. Alex explains that trust and rapport are the foundation of every job, as residents often feel anxious or resistant when a team enters their home. To overcome this, her team finds common ground, sparks conversation, and even uses humour to ease tension. Empathy and patience are essential, and Alex deliberately recruits people who understand the emotional weight behind possessions: "We have to be respectful, we need to be empathetic. It's their possessions, and it means a lot to them."

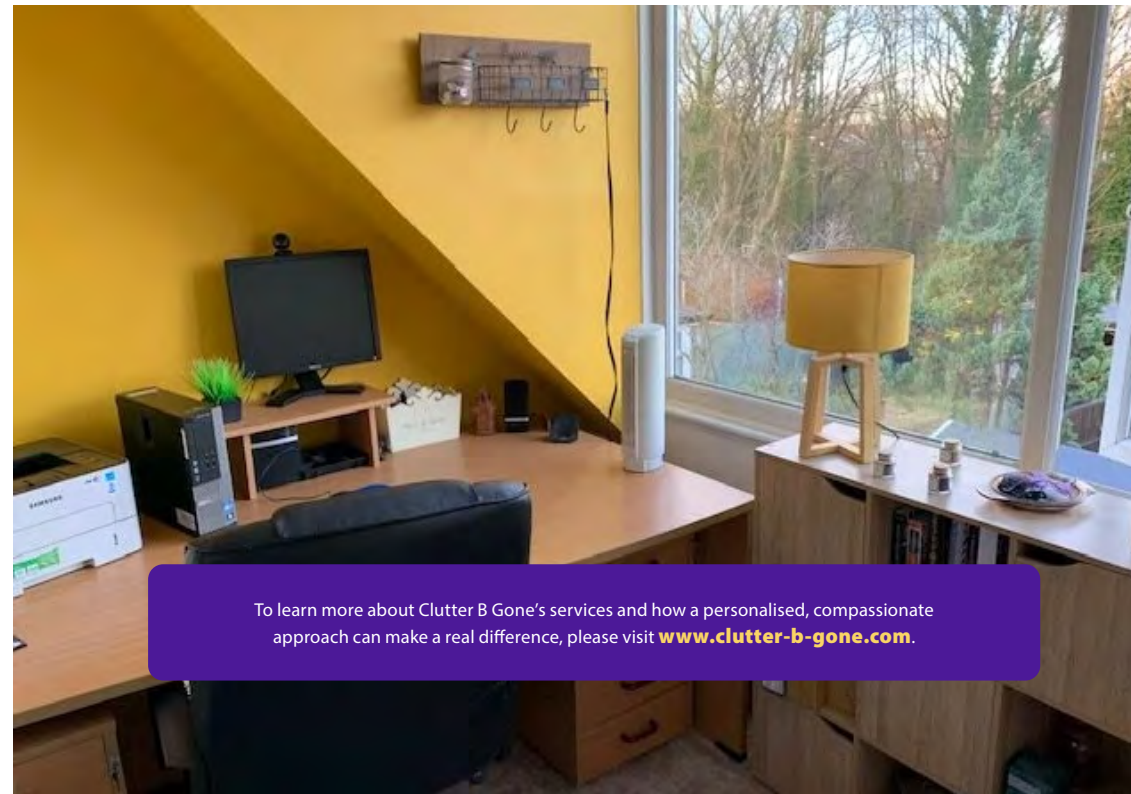
Her team works closely with both the commissioning client – often a council or housing association – and the resident, or "customer." Residents are encouraged to participate throughout, making decisions and guiding the pace. Neurodiverse clients are supported with smaller teams and slower pacing. Every project also benefits from an on-board counsellor, ensuring that emotional needs are addressed alongside the practical organisation. This approach transforms decluttering from a transactional task into a genuinely supportive process.



How to help a loved one – or yourself

For anyone living with hoarding, the first step is honest self-reflection. Alex advises that individuals must consider whether they feel ready to engage in decluttering, because attempting it too soon can do more harm than good. Acceptance is crucial, with individuals needing to recognise their hoarding disorder and be willing to seek help. This is because being mentally prepared allows people to approach the process calmly and take an active role in decisions about their own space. Equally important is not prejudging the support on offer. Many clients worry that a decluttering team will remove everything at once, but Alex is quick to reassure them that this isn't the case. Her approach is tailored to each person, prioritising trust, communication, and collaboration, letting residents benefit while staying in control.

When speaking with a loved one, Alex suggests framing concerns around care and safety rather than criticism: explain that living in unsafe conditions is a health risk, and that help is available. Approaching the conversation from a place of concern rather than blame encourages dialogue and trust, setting the stage for meaningful support. In Alex's experience, combining patience, understanding, and professional guidance can make the difference between stagnation and sustainable change, allowing both residents and their families to regain a sense of control and wellbeing.



To learn more about Clutter B Gone's services and how a personalised, compassionate approach can make a real difference, please visit www.clutter-b-gone.com.