



Tips for Communicating with People Who Hoard



Hoarding is a fair housing concern and can cause tremendous damage to your community. A resident that hoards may be defensive, embarrassed, unwilling to change, or in denial if they feel that you don't care, understand, or value them.

If you discover a person hoarding in your community, your words and actions can go a long way towards resolving the issue and earning their trust. You should focus on being non-judgmental, addressing safety concerns, and communicating effectively with the resident. Use these tips for communicating with people who hoard.

3 Tips for Communicating with People Who Hoard

1

Be respectful as you use their lease as well as specific health and safety violations when explaining the situation. Keep your words, tone, and facial expressions free of judgment when talking with the person.

“John, this place is a mess! Why don’t you keep your apartment clean? There are bugs and junk everywhere! This is disgusting.”

Try saying this:

“John, your lease states that you’re responsible for keeping the apartment in good condition — that is, maintaining the unit to avoid structural damage, working utilities, and infestations. I’m worried your apartment may be hazardous. What can we do to fix this?”

2

The well-being of the resident should be your first concern. Calmly and accurately describe the potential health and safety hazards to themselves, other residents, and the community. If necessary, ask organizations such as local sanitation, emergency, and health departments for input or cooperation before talking with the resident.

“Ellen, you’re ruining the community for everyone else. If you trip over this stuff and get hurt, it’s your own fault!”

Try saying this:

“Ellen, the blocked exits could be a problem in an emergency. Emergency workers would be unable to get into the apartment quickly. I’ve talked with our local fire marshal to determine how we can fix this problem. Would you be willing to work with us to keep you safe?”

3

Use language matching when talking to the resident. If the person refers to their belongings as “collections,” you should not use words like “trash” or “junk”.

“It’s time to toss this junk. No one needs thousands of old bottles or this stack of news papers. Get your trash cleaned by Friday or else!”

Try saying this:

“Leslie, your collection of vintage bottles is impressive. I’m sure these items are very valuable to you; can we talk about ways to organize or store them, so that you can avoid injuries and have access to working utilities in the apartment?”