



Decisions, Indecision, & Clutter in Hoarding Situations

Elspeth Bell, Ph.D.

March 29, 2014

+ Disclosures



- I'm never indecisive, well maybe, but I don't think that I am.
What do you think?
- (No disclosures)

+ Objectives



What will you be getting out of this presentation?

By the end of this presentation, participants will be able to:

- Develop guidelines for assisting hoarders in making their own decisions
- Describe decision-related challenges faced by hoarders and distinguish between guiding and controlling the decision-making process
- Apply strategies for helping clients determine their personal values and priorities



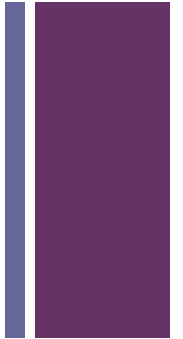
Exercise:

How do YOU make a decision?

- General guidelines
- Questions to ask yourself
- Goals of the decision
- Personal preferences



What are you asking of your clients?





Characteristics of Hoarding Disorder

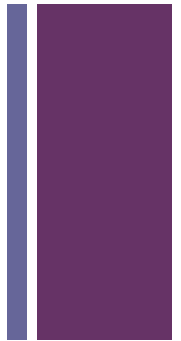


How are these related to the decision-making process?

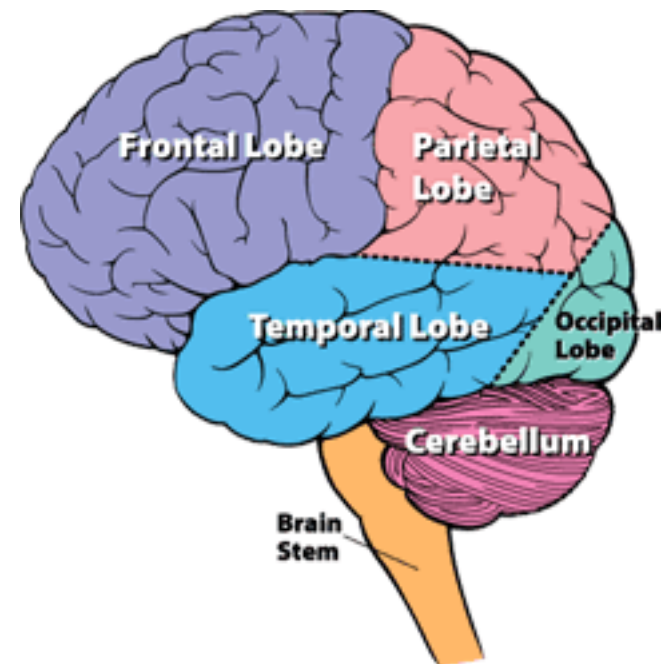
- Persistent difficulty discarding or parting with personal possessions
 - Strong urges to save items
 - Emotional distress
 - Indecision associated with discarding
- Accumulation of a large number of possessions
 - Filling up and cluttering the active living areas
 - Preventing normal use of the space
 - Uncluttered living areas are due to others' efforts (e.g., family members, authorities)



Your Frontal Lobe: The Brain's CEO



- Coordination and management of cognitive skills
 - Planning
 - Problem Solving
 - Attention
 - Memory
 - Initiating Activity
 - Monitoring Activity
- Synthesizing
- The gap between intention and action
 - Executive Functioning Deficits
 - Attention Deficits





“A cowgirl gets up in the morning, decides what she wants to do and does it.”

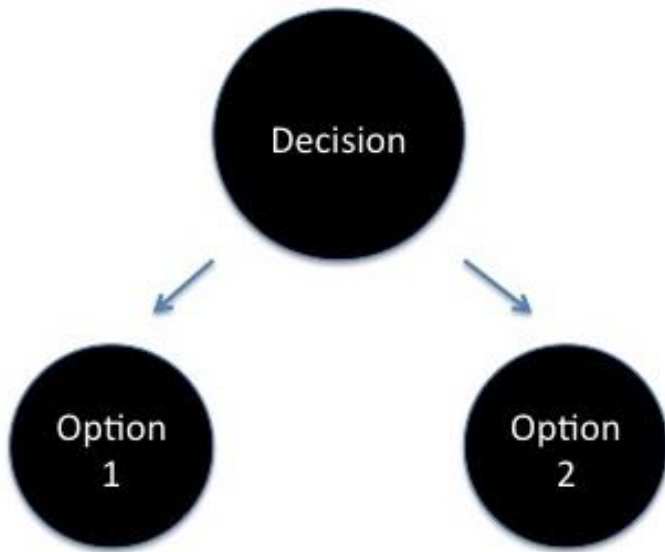
– Marie Lords

Why is it never this simple?

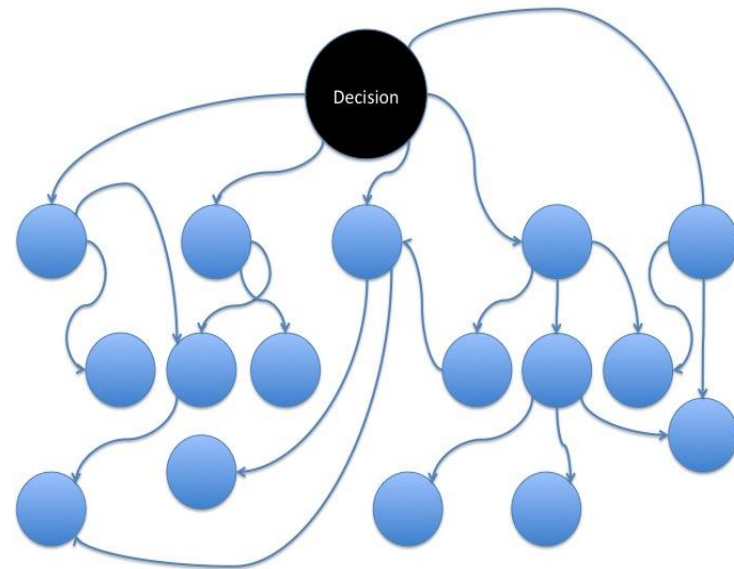


+ Decision Making Process

Straight-Forward



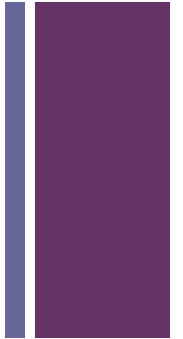
Overly-Complex



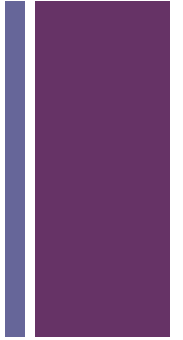
+ Complicating Decisions

Constructing an environment that creates complex options

- Anxieties
 - “What if” worries
- Perfectionism
 - Making the “RIGHT” decision
- Avoidance
 - Emotional discomfort
 - Mistakes
- Memory concerns



+ Step-By-Step Decision Making



- Identify the decision being made
- Gather relevant information
- Identify alternatives
- Weigh the evidence
- Choose among alternatives
- Take action
- Review decision and consequences

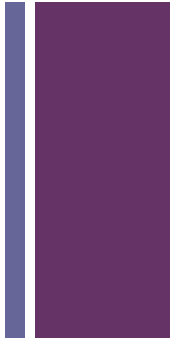
Where do your clients get bogged down?



Identifying the decision being made

WHAT is being decided on and **WHY** is this decision being made?

- Over-inclusive
- Unclear purpose
- Distractibility
- Loss of focus
- Journalistic approach:
 - Who
 - What
 - Where
 - Why
 - When
 - How





Gathering Relevant Information



What is considered ***RELEVANT*** information?

- Excessive researching
- Perfectionism and the search for “better” information
- Avoidance
- Quest for clarity and certainty
- Deadlines and limitations
- “Good enough” efforts

+ Identifying Alternatives

“And everywhere, infinite options, infinite possibilities. An infinity, and at the same time, zero.” – Haruki Murakami

- Perfectionism and wanting to cover every possibility
- Continued procrastination
- Overwhelmed by options

- K.I.S.S. – Keep It Simple, Sweetie!

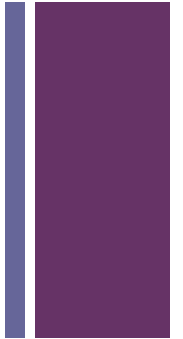


- Limit the number of alternatives to consider

+ Weighing the Evidence

Are you assuming facts that are not in evidence?

- Struggling with trade-offs
- Overvaluation
- Relevance to identified goal
- “T” table of pros and cons





Choosing Among Alternatives



“There can be only one!”

- Wanting to have *the* one decision vs. one decision
- Beyond a shadow of a doubt
- Allowing for a preponderance of the evidence
- A “better” choice
- Making the choice
 - Flip a coin
 - Throw a dart
 - Roll the dice
- Share the decision with others

+ Taking Action



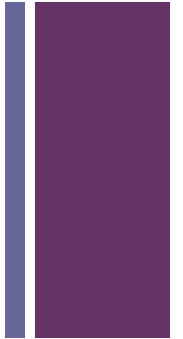
Putting your money where your mouth is!

- Lack of Motivation
- Avoidance
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Not taking action is actually a passive action
- Very little is permanent
- “Doing” can be “Redone” or “Undone”

+ Reviewing Decisions and Consequences

“Let’s go to the videotape!”

- Preemptive reviewing
- “What if...”
- Dread
- Negative mindset hones in on flaws and shortcomings
- Don’t assess until the decisions (and actions) have actually been made
- Practice makes perfect?
- Tolerating emotional discomfort
- “You miss 100% of the shots you don’t take” – Wayne Gretsky



+ Personal Values



What defines you as an individual? What defines your client?

- Creating a “User’s Manual” for each person
- Guiding Questions
- Personal Values Clarification Worksheet
 - (Sofia.edu Career Resource Center, original source unknown)
 - Justice, Altruism, Recognition, Pleasure, Wisdom, etc.

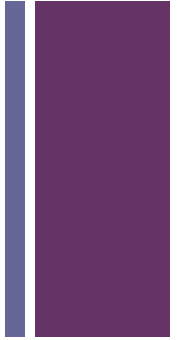
+ Prioritizing



- Difficulty determining importance
- Prioritizing Grid
 - (What Color is Your Parachute? 1997)
 - 1-to-1 ranking to determine larger patterns
- Ranking systems
 - 1 – Unimportant
 - 2 – Of little importance
 - 3 – Moderately important
 - 4 – Important
 - 5 – Very important
- Objective vs. subjective evaluation



Exercise: Reflecting on Past Decisions



What tools would you use to clarify the decision-making process?

- Personal Values
- Questions and prompts that reflect these values
- Prioritizing Grid
- Assessment of situation-specific context



Thank You!

Elsbeth Bell, Ph.D.

Behavior Therapy Center of Greater Washington

Phone: 301-593-4040, ext. 237

E-Mail: ebell@behaviortherapycenter.com

Twitter: [@ElsbethBellPhD](https://twitter.com/ElsbethBellPhD)

