

Supporting Residents who Gather Things: Hints for the Resident Support Aide (RSA)



Use Person-Centered Language

You may find that some residents, mainly those living with dementia, may gather things (for example: large piles of paper, leftover food). Though sometimes called 'hoarding', 'gathering' and 'collecting' are person-centred ways to describe this behaviour.



Work with the Team

Helping with these types of behaviours is a team effort. You will need to use good communication as part of a team. It is very important that you talk to the personal support workers and nurses caring for the resident, if they are available, to get more information on the resident. By working with the team, you will learn key information about the resident, if a plan for supporting the resident is already in place, and what has worked well or less well in the past to support the resident.



Know the Resident and Build Trust

A resident may gather items because of a life experience. To the resident, the things they gather may be very important. For example, a resident who has lived during a war may gather food. As an RSA, you may be asked to do light housekeeping tasks - this could include clearing a resident's room of some items. However, it may take time and trust to clear the items. You will need to use good communication to build a relationship with the resident.

- Always tell the resident your name and why you are there
- Ask for permission to help the resident "tidy up"
- Provide a basket for loose items to keep these together and explain it is for the resident to keep their things
- Leave some items behind; don't throw out everything
- As you build trust, you can encourage the resident to "donate" some items – even if you think items have no worth, they have meaning for the resident



Share Safety and Health Concerns with the Team

If there are safety or health concerns about an item (e.g., food going bad or plastic cutlery), work with the team to plan which high risk items to clear and when. If a resident gathers low risk things (e.g., paper napkins, foam cups), plan with the team how to slowly clear these over time.

- Provide items to collect that are safer (e.g., bright papers instead of plastic knives)
- Clean the room of unsafe or unhealthy things (e.g., food going bad) when the resident is away from the room