

CHECKLIST: BEFORE A FRIEND COMES OVER

Having a friend over when you live in a hoarded home feels impossible. But sometimes you want—or need—to have someone visit. Maybe you're tired of always going to their house. Maybe you want to feel normal. Maybe you just want one friend to see that you're still you, even though your home is chaotic. Maybe you want desperately to break the seal on the enormous secret you've kept for so long.

This checklist helps you prepare your space and yourself for having someone over, with realistic expectations about what you can and can't control.

Important: You get to decide if/when you're ready for this. There's no pressure to have anyone over if you're not comfortable. This is hard. I know because I lived through it.

Time Needed

1-3 hours
depending on the
state of your space



When to Do This

The day before or day of the visit, when you have energy

Before You Decide: Is This Safe and Realistic?

- ☐ **Assess if it's actually possible**
- ☐ **Ask yourself honestly:**
 - ☐ Can I make my room presentable enough that I won't be mortified?
 - ☐ Is there a clear path to get to my room?
 - ☐ Are the common areas like the entryway and bathroom usable?
 - ☐ Will my parent allow this and react appropriately?
 - ☐ Do I have the energy to prepare for AND handle the visit?
 - ☐ Will I make myself crazy trying to manage my parent(s) and my friend's reaction?

Red flags that might mean “not yet”:



- No way to access your room without climbing over things
- Bathroom is completely unusable
- Parent will react badly or embarrass you
- Severe pest infestation that can't be hidden
- Animal smells are overwhelming and can't be covered
- You're just not emotionally ready for someone to see the mess

It's okay to say no. Alternative: Meet at park, library, their house, restaurant, etc.

☐ **Choose the right friend**

• **Best first friend to have over:**

- Someone you really trust
- Someone who isn't judgmental
- Someone you've known a while
- Someone who's seen some mess before (not everything has to be perfect at their house either)
- **Bonus:** Someone who already knows your situation

• **Not ideal friend(s) for first visit:**

- Someone new you're trying to impress
- Someone who's very critical or gossipy
- Someone whose parents might report your living conditions
- A large group, really any more than two

☐ **Set boundaries with your friend**

☐ **Before they come, consider telling them:**

- "My house is messy—like, REALLY messy. I wanted to give you a heads up."
- "We're going to hang out only in my room, not the rest of the house."
- "My parent has some challenges with clutter—please don't comment on it."
- **How much you disclose is up to you**

The Day Before (If Possible)

☐ **Do a major clean of your room**

- ☐ If you haven't already, follow the [Creating My Calm Corner exercise](#)
- ☐ Clear as much of the floor space as you can
- ☐ Make your bed
- ☐ Remove any trash
- ☐ Put away clothes; clean ones put away and dirty ones in a hamper or laundry room
- ☐ **Goal: Your room looks like a teenager's room—not a disaster zone but also definitely not perfect**

☐ **Prepare the path to your room**

- ☐ Can they walk from front door to your room without squeezing or climbing?
- ☐ If not, can you clear a narrow path to walk?
- ☐ Move stuff to the side if you can
- ☐ At least clear any tripping hazards

☐ **Check the bathroom**

- ☐ Is it relatively clean or can you clean it easily?
- ☐ Is the toilet usable?
- ☐ Is there toilet paper?
- ☐ Can they wash and dry their hands?
- ☐ Is the floor clear enough to walk in?
- ☐ **If bathroom isn't usable, have a backup plan** (tell them your bathroom isn't working and they to go before they come, or plan to take a walk during the visit to someplace with a bathroom)

☐ **Talk to your parent**

- ☐ Ask or tell them you'd like to have a friend over, if it's safe to do so
- ☐ Ask them to please not comment on the state of the house
- ☐ Ask them to give you and your friend space/privacy
- ☐ **If this conversation will make things worse, skip it**

☐ **Prepare things to do in your room**

- ☐ Have a plan so you're not just sitting there awkwardly
- ☐ Watch something on your laptop, play games and music, or do homework or crafts
- ☐ **Goal: Activities that keep you in your room**

Day of Visit: 2-3 Hours Before

☐ **Quick room reset**

- ☐ Even if you cleaned yesterday, do a quick visual sweep
- ☐ Pick up anything that accumulated
- ☐ Open window for fresh air
- ☐ Light some incense or use room spray sparingly
- ☐ Make your bed if it's not already
- ☐ **5-10 minute refresh**

☐ **Personal hygiene check**

- ☐ Shower or wash up
- ☐ Put on clean clothes
- ☐ Brush your teeth
- ☐ Make sure you have on deodorant
- ☐ **You want to feel confident, not self-conscious**

☐ **Set up your room for hanging out**


- ☐ Clear a space to sit (on your bed, on the floor with pillows, in clutter-free chairs)
- ☐ Have snacks or drinks if possible
- ☐ Charge your devices if you're going to watch something
- ☐ Have blankets or pillows for comfort
- ☐ Make it feel like an intentional hangout space

☐ **Do a final walk-through of the path**

- ☐ Front door → your room
- ☐ Is it passable?
- ☐ Is there any last-minute stuff you can move?
- ☐ Check for smells; use air freshener if you need to and have it

☐ **Check bathroom one more time**

- ☐ Do a quick wipe-down if it needs it
- ☐ Make sure toilet paper is accessible
- ☐ Make sure there's soap at the sink and clean hand towels or a roll or stack of paper towels
- ☐ If it's too bad to show/use or you're just not ready for them to see it, have a backup plan ready

 **Breathe. If you have a panic attack at any point while you're getting ready and need to bail, just do it. It'll be better for your mental health. Just send a "change-of-plans" text and let that be that.**

When Your Friend Arrives: Managing the Visit

☐ **Meet them outside if possible**

- ☐ Walk them in yourself, giving you control over the entrance
- ☐ You can narrate: "Don't look at the living room. Let's head straight to my room."

☐ **Move quickly through common areas**

- ☐ Don't hang around in messy spaces
- ☐ Keep moving toward your room
- ☐ Distract your friend with conversation
- ☐ Act casual. You can acknowledge the mess, but if you don't make it a big deal of it, they might not either.

☐ **Get to your room and close the door**

- ☐ Once you're in your space, you have more control
- ☐ Close your door if you can for privacy and to hide the rest of the house

☐ **Acknowledge the “elephant in the house” if you need to**

- ☐ If they comment, “Yeah, my house is pretty messy; my parent struggles with that. It sucks, but I just try to keep my space as clean as I can.”
- ☐ Keep it brief and redirect to your planned activity
- ☐ You don’t owe anyone detailed explanations
- ☐ **Most friends will follow your lead—if you move on, they will too**

☐ **Keep them occupied**

- ☐ Do whatever you planned to do
- ☐ Keep the energy moving
- ☐ If there’s any awkwardness, keep talking/doing things

☐ **Be prepared to handle bathroom breaks**

- ☐ If the bathroom is unusable, mention that at the beginning of the visit so you have time to go somewhere else
- ☐ You can say, “Want to walk to the gas station with me?” or, “We can go to the park if you need a bathroom.”
- ☐ If the bathroom is okay for them to use, just tell them where to go: “It’s down the hall, first door on the left.”
- ☐ Don’t apologize excessively, just point the way

Managing Your Emotions During the Visit

☐ **Notice if you’re spiraling**

- ☐ Catastrophizing: “They’re judging me, they’ll tell everyone, I’m so embarrassed.”
- ☐ Use mindfulness: “I’m safe right now. We’re having fun. They’re still here.”
- ☐ Ground in the present: What are you actually doing right now? Focus on that.

☐ **Remember what you can control**

- You can’t control what they think
- You can’t control the state of the house
- You CAN control: being a good friend, having fun, making them feel welcome in YOUR space

☐ **Watch for their actual reactions**

- Are they actually judging you, or is that your fear talking?
- Most friends care about YOU, not your house
- If they’re still hanging out and seem comfortable, you’re okay

After They Leave

☐ Check in with yourself

- ☐ How did it actually go?
- ☐ Was it as bad as you feared?
- ☐ Did they seem uncomfortable or fine?
- ☐ What would you do differently next time?

☐ Process your feelings

- ☐ You might feel relief, shame, pride, exhaustion—or all of these. This is normal and absolutely to be expected.
- ☐ Use the RAIN mindfulness technique if you're processing difficult emotions
- ☐ Talk to someone if you need to
- ☐ Tell yourself you just did something really hard—something you might have once thought wasn't even possible—and give yourself a high five

☐ Decide about next time

- ☐ Do you want to do this again?
- ☐ With the same friend or someone else?
- ☐ What would make it easier?
- ☐ It's okay if the answer is “not for a while”

☐ Maintain your space

- ☐ Keep your room clean like it was for the visit
- ☐ Don't let it immediately slip back into chaos
- ☐ This is practice for maintaining your space regularly, both now and in the future

If It Goes Badly

If your friend reacts negatively:

☐ Stay calm

- ☐ Their reaction is about them, not you
- ☐ You don't have to defend yourself or your family
- ☐ “Yeah, it's a lot. This is what I deal with.”

☐ Set a boundary if needed

- ☐ “Please don't tell people about this.”
- ☐ “I know it's messy—I'm working on keeping my space calm.”
- ☐ “Can we not talk about this?”

☐ **Assess the friendship**

- ☐ A real friend might be surprised but won't abandon you
- ☐ A real friend might even ask how they can help
- ☐ If they're cruel or gossipy, they weren't a good friend anyway
- ☐ **This will almost certainly reveal something about them, not you**

☐ **Get support**

- ☐ Talk to another trusted friend, counselor, or adult
- ☐ Process what happened
- ☐ **Remind yourself: you took a risk, and that was brave**
- ☐ The outcome doesn't define your worth

Alternative Options (When Having Them Over Isn't Feasible)

If home visits aren't possible right now:

☐ **Meet at neutral locations**

- Park, library, coffee shop, mall
- School (stay after for activities or study)
- Community center, gym, church
- Their house

☐ **Do activities outside someone's house**

- Go for a walk
- Chill outside
- Go out to eat
- Attend events together
- Study at the library

☐ **Be honest if you want**

- ☐ "My house is really messy right now; want to meet at the park instead?"
- ☐ "My family is dealing with some stuff—can we hang at your place?"
- ☐ Most friends won't push if you redirect

☐ **Work toward it being possible**

- ☐ Use this checklist to prepare for "someday"
- ☐ Keep working on your room
- ☐ Build toward the day you CAN have someone over—even if you're 25 before it happens.
- ☐ **It's a goal, not a requirement**

Special Considerations

If your friend already knows about the hoarding:

- This makes it easier because they know what to expect
- You can still prep your space, but there's less pressure
- They might even offer to help you clean beforehand
- You could send a pic after you clean to set their expectations
- Let them support you if they offer

If you're having them over as a test to see if they're a "real friend" or whether you can handle the vulnerability:

- ☐ That's valid, but be prepared for any outcome
- ☐ Have emotional support lined up for afterward

If your parent might behave inappropriately:

- ☐ Plan the visit when that parent is out if possible
- ☐ Brief your friend beforehand: "My parent might say/do X—just ignore it."
- ☐ Have an exit plan to leave and go somewhere else if needed
- ☐ **Your safety and comfort matter most**

Troubleshooting

"I want someone to come over but I'm terrified."

- Start with your most trusted friend
- Keep the visit short (even 5-10 minutes, but an hour max)
- Having it be activity-focused (watching a movie or doing homework) takes the pressure off conversation
- Remember: You've survived living there—you can survive showing it to one person

"My room is okay but the rest of the house is a nightmare."

- Focus on your room being great
- Move quickly through common areas
- Say: "The house is a wreck. Let's hang in my room—it's the best space."
- Your room is your territory; own it

"I don't have snacks or things to offer."

- Most friends don't care
- Have them bring snacks
- Activity matters more than refreshments
- If they're hungry, suggest going out to get food together

“What if they judge me?”

- Some might, but that reveals who they are, not who you are
- Real friends will see past the house to who you really are
- You’re giving them a chance to show up for you
- If they can’t, they aren’t one of your people

“What if they tell everyone?”

- Ask them directly not to
- If they do, that’s a betrayal and says something about THEM
- You can control your narrative: “Yeah, my house is messy—I’m dealing with it”
- On a personal note, this happened to me and I survived. Did it suck? Yes, it did. But nobody died.
- Most people are more understanding than you think

“I’ve never had anyone over and I’m in high school.”

- You’re not alone—many kids in your situation haven’t either
- It’s never too late to start
- One person, one time is a huge step
- Be proud of yourself for even considering it

Accessibility Considerations

Having friends over requires physical preparation that may be challenging. Adapt as needed: If you can’t physically clean your room yourself, ask for help from a sibling, friend who comes early, or family member. If executive function makes preparation overwhelming, focus on just three things: clear the floor, make the bed, remove trash. If anxiety makes the whole process unbearable, start with having a friend on a video call from your room before having them over in person. If mobility issues prevent you from clearing paths, focus on making your room itself accessible and explain to your friend that getting there might be tight. **Your worth as a friend isn’t determined by the state of your home.**

Important Reminders

- **You deserve to have friends over.** This is a normal teenage experience you’re entitled to, if you want it.
- **Your home situation doesn’t define you.** You are not the mess.
- **Real friends care about YOU, not your house.** If they can’t see past the clutter, they aren’t your person.
- **This is brave.** Even thinking about having someone over takes courage.
- **You can change your mind.** Right up until they arrive, you can reschedule. That’s okay.
- **One visit doesn’t have to be perfect.** It’s practice for the future.

Real Talk

Having someone over when you live in a hoarded home can be terrifying. TERRIFYING. You're exposing the secret you've worked so hard to hide (you know, the one that isn't yours to keep?). You're risking judgment, gossip, rejection. You're making yourself incredibly vulnerable.

And you know what? It's still worth considering.

Not because you owe anyone access to your space. Not because you have to prove you're "normal." But because isolation is exhausting. Keeping secrets is exhausting. Never being able to be fully known is exhausting.

Maybe this friend will surprise you. Maybe they'll see the house and shrug and say, "Okay, let's play video games." Maybe they'll see the house and say, "Hey, this is a lot—are you okay?" Maybe they'll see the house and not say anything at all, just be your friend like always.

Or maybe they'll react badly. And that will hurt. And you'll survive it. And you'll know they weren't capable of being the friend you needed.

Either way, you'll know. You'll have tried. You'll have been brave.

You don't have to do this. Meeting at the park forever is valid. Keeping this boundary is valid. Protecting yourself is valid.

But if you're ready—or almost ready—or thinking about maybe being ready someday...

This checklist is here.

You're not alone in this. And you're braver than you know.