


CHECKLIST: SAFETY CHECK

Hoarded homes create serious safety hazards—fire risks, tripping hazards, blocked exits, pest infestations, and more. You can't fix everything—and no one's asking you to—but you CAN assess risks and take steps to protect yourself where possible.

None of this is intended to scare you. It's important that you be aware of where potential hazards lie, both in your current home and in every home you live in from here on out. Lots of people never learn preparedness, so you're way ahead.

This checklist helps you identify safety issues and prioritize what you can address or need to report.

Note: This does not make you the safety officer of the house. It is designed to help reduce your stress about safety in your home and make you aware of serious issues that need to be reported.

 **IMPORTANT:** If you identify serious, immediate safety risks (like blocked exits, fire hazards, or structural issues), you may need to involve outside help. Your safety is more important than keeping secrets.

Time Needed

20-30 minutes for initial check
5 minutes for monthly checks



When to Do This

Once to establish baseline, then monthly or whenever something changes or you need reassurance

Before You Start

What this checklist IS:

- A way to identify and document safety issues
- A tool to help you prioritize what to address
- Information you can use if you need to involve authorities
- A tool to help you build good preparedness habits

What this checklist is NOT:

- A requirement that you fix everything (you can't)
- Something to increase your anxiety (just awareness)
- A judgment on you or your family

Again, you are not responsible for making the whole house safe. But you CAN work on your own space and know what risks exist.

Fire Safety

Fire is the #1 risk in hoarded homes. Assess these carefully.

☐ Check smoke detectors

- ☐ Is there a smoke detector in/near your room? (Fire codes usually require one in or just outside every bedroom.)
- ☐ Does it have a working battery? (Press test button; this will be loud)
- ☐ Can you hear it from where you sleep?
- ☐ **Action needed:** If there's no detector or the battery is dead, this is CRITICAL to fix
 - ☐ Ask a parent to get a detector or replace the battery
 - ☐ Replace the battery yourself; it's not hard (usually a 9-volt or AA battery; check to be sure)
 - ☐ Get a new one if possible (some fire departments give free detectors)
 - ☐ If you get ignored, consider telling your school counselor (**this could be life-threatening**)

☐ Identify exit routes from your room

- ☐ Can you get to at least TWO exits from your room?
 - **Primary:** Door to hallway
 - **Secondary:** Window (ground floor or with escape ladder)
- ☐ Can you open these exits easily?
- ☐ Are paths to exits clear or blocked?
- ☐ **Action needed:**
 - ☐ Keep at least one path clear
 - ☐ Make sure your window can open
 - ☐ Know how to remove window screen if needed

☐ Check for blocked exits in the home

- ☐ Is the front door accessible and can it open fully?
- ☐ Is there a clear path from your room to outside whether through the house or from the window? (Ideally, you have two clear paths out.)
- ☐ Are your windows blocked by anything?
- ☐ Can you get out in under 30 seconds in an emergency?



RED FLAG: If multiple exits are blocked, this is a CRITICAL safety issue.

☐ **Action needed:**

- ☐ Clear a path from your room to the main exit as much as possible
- ☐ If you can't clear it, create an alternate escape plan (window with ladder if possible)
- ☐ Know your escape route in the dark; use your phone's flashlight if you need to

☐ **Look for fire hazards**

- ☐ Are there items touching or very near heat sources (heaters, stove, lamps)?
- ☐ Are electrical outlets overloaded (multiple plugs in one outlet)?
- ☐ Are extension cords buried under piles or furniture?
- ☐ Are cords frayed at all?
- ☐ Are there piles of paper or cardboard near any heat source?
- ☐ Do you smell gas or burning smells?



RED FLAG: Any of these are SERIOUS fire risks.

☐ **Action needed:**

- ☐ Move items away from heat sources if you can
- ☐ Unplug overloaded outlets when they're not in use
- ☐ Document any issues you find and report them to authorities if your parent won't address them
- ☐ Report gas smells immediately (call gas company or 911). **Do not ask for permission.** (You don't have to give your name.)

☐ **Have a personal emergency plan**

- ☐ If a fire breaks out, what's **your** exit path?
- ☐ Where is your family meeting spot outside?
- ☐ Do you have a bag with essentials you can grab quickly? (phone, ID, medications, important documents if you have them)
- ☐ Can you get out of your window if needed?

☐ **Action needed:**

- ☐ Plan your exit route if you don't have one, and practice it in your head
- ☐ Keep your "emergency grab bag" near your bed or door
- ☐ Always know where your phone is



CRITICAL FIRE SAFETY RULE:

If you cannot safely get out of your home in under 30 seconds because of blocked paths, this is an emergency situation that requires fixing or outside intervention.

Structural & Environmental Hazards

☐ **Check floors in your room/walking paths**

- ☐ Can you walk without tripping?
- ☐ Are the floors stable (no holes or weak spots)?
- ☐ Can you see the floor or is it covered?
- ☐ Are there sharp objects on the floor?
- ☐ Are there any unstable piles that could fall over in an emergency?

☐ **Action needed:**

- ☐ Clear walking paths in your room
- ☐ Always wear shoes or slippers
- ☐ Mark or avoid weak floor spots if you can't fix them

☐ **Check for water damage or leaks**

- ☐ Are there water stains on ceilings or walls?
- ☐ Do you see or smell mold or mildew?
- ☐ Are there active leaks?
- ☐ Is anything damp or wet that shouldn't be?



RED FLAG: Mold is a health hazard, especially black mold.

☐ **Action needed:**

- ☐ Report any leaks to your parent
- ☐ Avoid any areas with heavy mold if possible
- ☐ If mold is extensive, report it to authorities as a health hazard

☐ **Check for pest infestation**

- ☐ Do you see rodents (mice or rats) or droppings?
- ☐ Do you see roaches, fleas, bedbugs, or other bugs?
- ☐ Are there signs of pest damage, like holes, chewing, or poop?



RED FLAG: Heavy infestation is a health and safety risk.

☐ **Action needed:**

- ☐ Keep food out of your room, or in sealed containers only
- ☐ Use pest deterrents in your space (see [How Do I? Decluttering](#) tips)
- ☐ Document extent of infestation
- ☐ If severe, may need to report for health reasons

☐ **Check air quality**

- ☐ Does the house smell strongly of mold, rot, pee/poop, or chemicals?
- ☐ Is there visible mold growth?
- ☐ Do you have trouble breathing or frequent headaches?
- ☐ Is there adequate ventilation (can you open windows)?



RED FLAG: Poor air quality affects your health long-term.

☐ **Action needed:**

- ☐ Open your window whenever possible
- ☐ Use a fan to circulate air in your area if you have one
- ☐ Spend time outside when you can
- ☐ If you have ongoing breathing issues, see a doctor and explain your living situation. (Doctors are mandated reporters and may have to report unsafe living conditions, but they'll typically talk to you first about what they're concerned about and what happens next.)

☐ **Check for hazardous materials**

- ☐ Are there chemical smells, like gas, solvents, or cleaners?
- ☐ Are there old batteries, paint cans, or chemicals stored improperly?
- ☐ Are there expired medications lying around?
- ☐ Are there needles or other biohazards out in the open?



RED FLAG: Hazardous materials are dangerous and need proper disposal.

☐ **Action needed:**

- ☐ Don't touch hazardous materials
- ☐ Report anything dangerous to your parent; if you're ignored, report to authorities
- ☐ Keep yourself away from these areas when possible

Personal Space Safety

Focus on what you CAN control—your own space.

☐ **Assess your room**

- ☐ Can you close your door?
- ☐ Can you lock your door (if that's allowed and safe)?
- ☐ Is your bed accessible and safe to sleep in?
- ☐ Can you reach your belongings without climbing on things?
- ☐ Is there clear floor space around your bed?
- ☐ **Action needed:**
 - ☐ Clear at least 2 feet around your bed
 - ☐ Make sure you can exit your room quickly
 - ☐ Request a lock if privacy is an issue and it's safe to use one

☐ **Check your belongings security**

- ☐ Are your important items safe from damage, theft, or loss?
- ☐ Do you have a place to lock valuables?
- ☐ Are medications and personal items secure?
- ☐ **Action needed:**
 - ☐ Get a small lockbox for important items if you can (documents, money, medications)
 - ☐ Keep essentials in your backpack if your room isn't secure
 - ☐ Store items at school locker or trusted friend's house if you need to

☐ **Assess emotional safety**

- ☐ Do you feel safe in your room and home?
- ☐ Are there people who respect your boundaries?
- ☐ Are there violence or threats in your home?



RED FLAG: If you don't feel physically or emotionally safe, you need help.

• **Action needed:**

- Talk to your school counselor or other trusted adult
- **Call a hotline if in immediate danger: Childhelp 1-800-422-4453**
- Know your exit plan if the situation escalates

Monthly Safety Check (Quick Version)

Do this once a month; it takes 5 minutes:

- ☐ **Test smoke detector** (press button; this will be loud)
- ☐ **Check exit paths** (are they still clear?)
- ☐ **Look for new hazards** (has anything changed?)
- ☐ **Check your emergency bag** (still have essentials?)
- ☐ **Assess pest situation** (better, same, worse?)

If anything has gotten worse, address it or document it.

When to Involve Outside Help

Some safety issues are too big to handle alone. You may need to involve authorities if:

IMMEDIATE DANGER (Call 911 or leave immediately):

- Fire or gas leak
- Structural collapse
- Violence or immediate threat to your safety
- Medical emergency

SERIOUS SAFETY ISSUES (Report to CPS, code enforcement, or school counselor):

- Multiple exits are blocked with no way to clear them
- Severe pest infestation (mice, roaches, fleas)
- Extensive mold or water damage
- No working utilities (heat, water, electricity)
- Hazardous materials that won't be removed
- Conditions that are making you sick

HOW TO REPORT:

- Your school counselor can help you decide next steps
- Local code enforcement will check for violation inspections
- Child Protective Services, if you're a minor in danger
- Fire department will do safety inspections, including smoke detectors and clear paths
- The health department will check for pest or mold issues

☐ **What happens when you report:**

- Someone will likely visit the home
- They'll check to see whether conditions are safe
- Your parent may be required to make changes
- In extreme cases, you might have to stay somewhere else temporarily
- **This is scary but sometimes necessary for your safety**

☐ **If you are afraid your parent will find out you made the call:**

- Before calling, dial *67 to mask your Caller ID for that specific call
- On your iPhone, go to Settings > Phone > Show My Caller ID and toggle it off, hiding your number for every outgoing call
- Use Signal or Burner, which offer encrypted calls and additional anonymity features
- Don't say your name
- Say you're a concerned neighbor

☐ **Document everything:**

- Take photos of hazards, if it's safe to do so
- Write down dates and what you observed
- Keep records of your reports
- This isn't tattling—it's protecting yourself

Emergency Preparedness

In case you need to leave quickly:

☐ **Create an emergency grab bag**

Keep near your bed or in closet where you can grab it with:

- Phone and charger
- ID, birth certificate, social security card, if you have them (or copies)
- Any medications you take
- Change of clothes and underwear
- Small amount of money if you have it
- List of important phone numbers (written down, in addition to in your phone)
- Hygiene items (toothbrush, deodorant)
- Comfort item if space allows

☐ **Know your emergency contacts**

- Friend's parent who would help
- Relative you could call
- School counselor's number
- Hotline numbers saved in phone or from the [Resources](#) on More Than Messy web site
- Local shelter information

☐ **Have an exit plan**

- If you need to leave suddenly, where will you go?
- How will you get there safely?
- Who will you call?
- **Think this through before you need it**

Troubleshooting

"I identified major safety issues but my parent won't fix them."

- Document everything (photos, written notes)
- Report to your school counselor or code enforcement if you feel comfortable
- **Your safety is more important than keeping the secret**
- You're not betraying your parent—you're protecting yourself (and possibly them)

"I'm afraid to report because of what might happen."

- Talk to school counselor about your fears
- They can help you understand what to expect
- **Sometimes things have to get uncomfortable before they get better**
- Your safety is the priority

“I can’t afford safety items like smoke detectors or locks.”

- Many fire departments give free smoke detectors
- Schools sometimes have emergency assistance funds
- Reach out to your counselor about resources
- Community organizations may help

“Everything feels unsafe and I’m overwhelmed.”

- You don’t have to fix it all
- Focus on YOUR space first (your room)
- Address the biggest risks first (fire, exits)
- Get help—this is often too much for one person

“I’ve lived like this for years, why does it matter now?”

- Just because you’ve survived so far doesn’t mean it’s safe
- You deserve to live in safe conditions
- The risks are real even if nothing has happened yet
- You’re becoming more aware—that’s growth, not a problem
- Think about how much easier it will be if you’ve at least thought through it
- You want to keep up with these types of issues when you live on your own

Accessibility Considerations

Safety checks may require physical mobility. Adapt as needed: If you can’t physically clear paths or move items, identify what needs moving and ask for help. If sensory issues make it hard to tolerate certain hazards (like pest checking), do visual sweeps only or ask someone to help. If executive function makes the full checklist overwhelming, just do the fire safety section—that’s the most critical. If you have limited mobility and can’t evacuate quickly, create a specific plan that accounts for your needs (where you’ll go, who will help, how you’ll communicate you need help). Safety isn’t one-size-fits-all—work with your abilities and limitations.

Important Reminders

- **You are not responsible for making the entire home safe.** But you CAN address your space and know the risks.
- **Reporting safety issues is not betrayal.** Even though it may feel like it. It’s self-preservation.
- **Your safety matters more than keeping secrets.** If conditions are dangerous, get help.
- **Document everything.** Photos and notes are powerful if you need to prove conditions.
- **Have an exit plan.** Hope that you never need it, but know what you’d do if you did.

Real Talk

Living in an unsafe environment is terrifying, especially when you're aware of the risks but feel powerless to fix them.

You see the blocked exits. You smell the mold. You know the smoke detector doesn't work. You hear the mice at night. **And you feel stuck. And sometimes paralyzed.**

Here's the hard truth: Some safety issues are beyond your ability to fix.

You're not a contractor. You're not an exterminator. You're not your parent's keeper. **You're a teenager or young adult trying to survive.**

But here's what you CAN do:

You can make YOUR space as safe as possible. You can know your exit routes. You can have an emergency bag ready. You can document conditions. You can report when necessary.

And most importantly: You can prioritize your own safety, even when it feels like betraying your family.

Reporting unsafe conditions isn't betrayal. It's recognizing that you deserve to live somewhere where you don't constantly worry about fire, injury, or illness.

Your parent's way of life doesn't erase your right to safety.

Do what you can. Document secretly if you need to, but if possible, let a trusted adult know what you're documenting and why—they can help you know if and when you need to report. This is one area you may need to risk discovery. Document what you can't fix. Ask for help when needed.

You deserve to feel safe in your own home.

And if you can't feel safe there, you deserve help getting somewhere safely where you can.