



# Session activity: stuff

**Objective:** The aim of our first activity is think about how we can minimise the waste we send to landfill through responsible waste management. Next we open people's eyes to the amount of stuff that deluges their homes and to consider strategies to reduce of flood of things across their threshold. Finally, there is a discussion to explore why we feel the need to own so much stuff in the first place.

## Activity One: The Recycling Game

### Preparation:

**Please note this game requires advance preparation.**

Collect together as many of the following as possible:

Margarine tub	Plastic milk bottles
Plastic trays	Toiletries and shampoo bottles
Yoghurt pots	Brown envelopes
Cardboard	Corrugated cardboard
Drinks carton (tetrapak)	Junk mail
Magazines	Telephone directory or yellow pages
Window envelopes	Aerosol
Aluminium Foil	Drinks cans
Bottle or jar	Battery
Plastic bag	A banana (to represent food waste)
Cling Film	Degradable plastic bag (Co-op plastic bags are currently degradable plastic)
Light bulb	An item of clothing
Jiffy bag	Mobile phone
Crisp packet	Polystyrene foam

(If you can't find any item you can simply write its name on a piece of card)

Using the postcode recycling tool on the website [www.recyclenow.com](http://www.recyclenow.com) to check which can be put in kerbside collections, which can be accepted at the recycling centre and which currently cannot be recycled. The postcode finder may also direct you to your own council's website which may give more detailed information.

### The game

Most of us are fortunate enough to have kerbside recycling schemes, but do we actually know what we can put in them. Here are a number of every day items – I want you to sort them into three piles.

Pile A – suitable for kerbside recycling

Pile B – accepted at recycling at other places

Pile C – not recyclable

The postcode recycling tool should help you with the correct answers for each. A few to watch out for are:

Batteries – should be recyclable by returning to any electrical retailer. In Oxford City, spent batteries can also be collected at kerbside - simply pop them in a clear plastic bag and put them on top of your blue recycling bin on the day of collection. Nb they contain very polluting chemicals, so consider switching to rechargeable batteries whenever possible.

Degradable plastic bags – sadly are not recyclable, and can actually cause significant problems to plastic recycling if they get into normal plastic recycling waste streams as small levels of contamination can affect the recycled plastic's properties.

Mobile phones – should not go into landfill as like batteries, they contain very polluting materials. They can be donated to charities such as Oxfam. They can also be recycled at places such as Currys PC World.

Clothing and textiles – cannot be recycled, but even worn out clothes can be recycled. Donate good quality items to charity and others to textile recycling companies. Look out for the red Air Ambulance bins around Oxford.

Variation – create two sets of materials and split participants into two teams to see who can be the most accurate with their recycling.

## Activity Two: Composting Game

Invite a master composter to join you for part of your session. They should have access to an activity that helps identify what you can put in your compost bin.

## Activity Three: Turning back the tide

King Canute may not have been able to prevent the tide from coming in – but we can do something to reduce the waves of stuff that threaten to deluge our homes.

### How to play

You need: Flip chart paper, blu tack, post it notes and pens

Give each participant some post it notes and ask them to write down five things (one per post it) that regularly find their way into their homes, or seem to take up the space. This could be things they buy, items they are given or anything else that makes their way into their homes such as junk mail, books, food items or electronics.

Ask people to take it in turn to come up to the front and stick their post it notes up on the left hand side of a piece of flipchart paper. As new items are added cluster similar ones together.

Once all the items are up, go through each cluster in turn and ask for suggestions as to how you might reduce them, writing the suggestions next to them on the right hand side of the paper.

When asking for suggestions – prompt people, using the three categories 'reduce, reuse, recycle'

The information sheet on stuff gives lots of practical suggestions you can offer.

## Activity Four: Happiness

A simple solution to reducing the carbon footprint of our purchasing is to simply buy less stuff. However, we value our possessions for so much more than the practical use we get out of them.

The following quotations were written over 100 years apart, but both raise questions about the role that the accumulation of possessions plays in our lives

Quotation one:

In a community like ours, where property confers immense distinction, social position, honour, respect, titles, and other pleasant things of the kind, man, being naturally ambitious, makes it his aim to accumulate this property, and goes on wearily and tediously accumulating it long after he has got far more than he wants, or can use, or enjoy, or perhaps even know of. Man will kill himself by overwork in order to secure property, and really, considering the enormous advantages that property brings, one is hardly surprised. One's regret is that society should be constructed on such a basis that man has been forced into a groove in which he cannot freely develop what is wonderful, and fascinating, and delightful in him – in which, in fact, he misses the true pleasure and joy of living.

*Oscar Wilde*

Our valuing of “stuff” creates a “work-watch-spend” cycle in our lives: we work until we’re exhausted, plop down in front of the TV, and watch (among other things) ads for products that we want... which sends us back to work. By valuing the time we need to do the things that we really value — spend time with family, friends, and neighbours, for instance — we can break this cycle.

*Annie Leonard (The Story of Stuff: How Our Obsession with Stuff is Trashing the Planet, Our Communities, and our Health—and a Vision for Change)*

**Discussion:**

Both Oscar Wilde and Annie Leonard lament the fact that as a society we seem to value ownership and consumption over other things such as spending time with our family.

Which qualities do you think we should value as a society and what are the things that make you happy?

**FIND OUT MORE**

[www.homecomposting.org.uk](http://www.homecomposting.org.uk)

[www. Recyclenow.com](http://www.Recyclenow.com)

[www.thestoryofstuff.com](http://www.thestoryofstuff.com)

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