



## DISRUPTIVE, IMPULSE–CONTROL, AND CONDUCT DISORDERS

### KLEPTOMANIA

#### What it is:

Kleptomania is characterised by the repeated failure to resist impulses to steal items, even though the items are not needed for either personal use or monetary value. Individuals with kleptomania experience increasing feelings of tension before the theft, and experience feelings of pleasure, relief or gratification when committing the theft. Typically the items stolen are of little value to the individual, or are of such a nature that the individual would have been able to pay for them. Often these stolen items are discarded, or given away as gifts. The disorder may cause legal, career and family difficulties for the individual. Individuals with kleptomania typically try to resist the impulse to steal, and they do realise that they are committing a crime. They may feel depressed and guilty about the theft, and frequently fear being caught or arrested.

Individuals with kleptomania will typically not steal when arrest is possible or probable, but they usually do not plan their theft in advance. The theft is also done without assistance from others. Individuals with kleptomania do not steal in an attempt to express anger, or exact revenge, nor do they do it because of hallucinations or delusions. Conduct disorder, a manic episode and antisocial personality disorder should also be ruled out before making a diagnosis of kleptomania.

#### Common symptoms:

1. Recurring failure to resist the impulse to steal objects that are not needed for either personal use or monetary gain.
2. Increasing feelings of tension before committing the theft
3. Feelings of pleasure, gratification or relief while committing the theft
4. The stealing is not done to express anger, or as an act of revenge
5. The stealing is not done as a result of hallucinations or delusions



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### **Causes:**

Neurotransmitter pathways in the brain that are associated with behavioural addictions appear to play a role in kleptomania. Women have been found to be more likely to develop the disorder than men. Relatives of individuals with kleptomania have been found to have higher rates of obsessive-compulsive disorder, as well as higher rates of substance use disorders.

**Remember to always consult a mental health or medical practitioner regarding any questions you may have about a mental health diagnosis and treatment options.**

This factsheet is based on information obtained from the DSM-5:  
American Psychiatric Association, 2013. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition.*