

organize today!

Ideas and tips to help you live
an organized, simpler life at work and home

De-cluttering Made Easy

The word “clutter” derives from the Middle English word “clotter,” which means coagulate. Think stagnant, accumulated, stuck! When it invades our homes and offices, we become disorganized. We lose things, forget to pay bills, procrastinate, and waste time.

This issue of *Organize Today* explains the reasons why we accumulate clutter and tells how to deal with the clutter we’ve built up in our lives. You’ll also learn how to prevent it from accumulating in the first place.

It’s a great time to stop contemplating your clutter and dedicate some time to conquering it!

The “whys” of clutter

So, you know your life is full of clutter — things you don’t need, things you don’t necessarily want, and way more than you’ll actually use. But where the heck did all this stuff come from?

It might be hard to pinpoint the exact moment when clutter invaded and took over your life. Maybe you grew up in a cluttered household, so living with an overabundance of “things” has always felt natural. Or perhaps clutter is just beginning to form. (Time to nip it in the bud!)

Why are some people more prone to clutter than others? Following are a few reasons. If you see yourself in any of these scenarios, take heart. Just recognizing what leads you to accumulating clutter can help you make the transition to a clutter-free life.

YOU INHERITED IT FROM YOUR PARENTS: If your parents were packrats, you can thank them for your love of abundance. And as you continue your life full of clutter, consider the fate you are dealing your loved ones if you don’t attempt to change. Your children might continue the cycle of clutter, or you may drive your mate and friends crazy.

YOU MIGHT NEED IT “SOMEDAY”: Back in the days of the Great Depression and the World Wars, people justifiably saved just about everything because of scarcity and rationing. However, in this day and age, there is no reason to continue this thought pattern. Thinking something will come in handy “one day” is NOT reason enough to keep it. By letting go, you’ll find that most of the time you’ll never need those things again. And if you do, you’ll likely find similar (or better) things to replace them.

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The Whys of Clutter, continued

CLUTTER IS PART OF YOUR IDENTITY: Is your identity somehow related to your possessions? Or, are you overly sentimental about your things? Remember that even if you get rid of the clutter, you still have the great memories associated with specific items. Allow yourself to release unloved or unuseful gifts from well-meaning friends and family. You are not throwing away your friends' kindness or love; you are simply releasing the unneeded items to make room for the things that matter most to you.

YOU'RE BOMBARDED BY "MORE IS BETTER" REASONING BY MANUFACTURERS: Do catalogs invade your mailbox? Are companies constantly trying to sell you the newest do-hickey, clothing, or home decor? Look around your kitchen and count your small appliances and gadgets. Most likely, they simply add clutter to your life, taking up space. Next time the urge to buy grabs you, ask yourself if it will REALLY make your life better.

CLUTTER FILLS AVOID IN YOUR LIFE: Clutter can help to hide loneliness, anger, fear, and other important emotions. It fills time and space and keeps you focused on things other than

your problems. When you free the clutter, you'll free yourself to deal with the real issues around you. It may be tough at first, but the rewards are endless. Similarly, some people want to hide in their clutter. They use an abundance of "stuff" to hide or shelter themselves from the outside world. A good way to start getting back into the swing of life is to de-clutter just one room. You'll still be able to retreat to your safe place, but the lack of clutter will begin to feel freeing rather than terrifying.

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Of course, you may not see yourself in any of the above scenarios. Perhaps you've simply accumulated a little clutter in your life due to a shortage of time, too many work or family demands, or lack of organizing skills. This is perfectly normal. Not everyone who defines her life as "cluttered" will fit into the above scenarios. But for those who know that clutter is seriously affecting their lives, the above reasons may help define the source and allow them to start the decluttering process.

Whatever reasons you've accumulated clutter, once you recognize them, you can move forward and begin your new life. Read on to learn techniques to get rid of those things that weigh you down.

Identifying clutter with three easy questions

What exactly is clutter? Ask yourself the following three questions about each item in your home. If you can't answer yes to at least one, it's probably clutter!

1. Is it beautiful? A stunning piece of artwork enriches your life because it brings joy each time you see it. A gorgeous vase full of fresh flowers reduces stress and energizes your spirit.
2. Is it useful? You use your 12-cup coffee maker every day. You couldn't make it through the week without it. (Don't confuse this question with, "Will it be useful someday?")
3. Is it loved? The antique pocket watch from your grandfather is a precious reminder of him. Your favorite cashmere sweater makes you feel fabulous.



You'll find that as you inventory your possessions, you may be able to answer "yes" to two or even three of the questions above. Those are the things that are most valuable to you. Remember, the goal of de-cluttering is not to get rid of everything. It's simply to keep only things that you truly appreciate and use.

Tips to banish clutter from your life for good

Studies show that 80 percent of what we use comes from 20 percent of what we own. That means that 80 percent of the things in our homes are rarely or never used. Follow these tips to de-clutter your life.

Start the process of de-cluttering. Divide a room into sections. Pick one section (like one drawer or cupboard) and begin de-cluttering. Ask if you consider each item beautiful, useful, or loved. If not, you can probably get rid of it! If you're still not sure if you should get rid of an item, ask yourself, "What's the worst thing that could happen if I toss this?" The answer may help give you the power to discard the clutter. Also be aware of the size of your space, as smaller spaces obviously hold less stuff.

Work with a buddy. If you're having a hard time letting go of the clutter, enlist the help of a friend or professional organizer to offer an objective viewpoint. She can offer support and ask the tough questions like, "Are you really going to use that?" and "When will you ever wear that again?"

Try to touch things only once while going through this process. Quickly make a decision to keep or toss. It will be helpful to have large, dark-colored garbage bags, plus two large boxes on hand: one for items to donate or give to friends, one for items that need to go to another room in your home. The bags are for items that need to go the dump. (The dark garbage bag will keep you from seeing the contents and having "tossers' regret.")

Find an appropriate home for the items you want to keep. Once you've removed all the items that are not beautiful, useful, or loved, you are left with a room full of things you'll use and appreciate frequently. Assign a space (a "home") for each item and make sure to return it there after each use. Remember, if you don't return each item to its home after use, it turns back into clutter and disorganization will occur.

Give yourself a reward. At the end of a de-cluttering session, give yourself a pat on the back and a little treat, such as a bubble bath, a cup of tea, or a professional massage. Also take some time to relish the calm and tidy space you've created.



Maintenance of a clutter-free life

To stop clutter, prevent it from accumulating in the first place. Don't give clutter a chance to form. As you've probably experienced, once clutter occupies a space, it has a way of multiplying. Always remember to place your emphasis on quality over quantity. In other words, it's not important to have a lot of things, many of which you never use. It's more beneficial to have fewer things, all of which you use and/or enjoy.

Think before you buy. Try to look beyond the initial "thrill of the purchase" and see what provides deeper moments of meaning. Before you buy, think about the time you'll spend in cleaning, storing, and maintaining that item after you bring it home. If you must buy, establish a "new item in, old item out" system where some purging takes place before shopping.

Clutter is anything unnecessary and extraneous. It can be more than the physical clutter most of us think of. Getting organized means clearing out the clutter in your mind, heart, and life. Once you rid yourself of clutter and make space only for what's special, you'll find it's easier to get — and stay — organized! You'll soon reap the benefits of a clutter-free life: more energy, happier relationships, a well-organized home or office, new opportunities, and a better outlook on life.

Whom to call when you're ready to chuck it all

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Goodwill Industries

www.goodwill.org

Visit their website to find locations across the country where you can drop off your donations. (There are 1,900 retail stores nationwide.) They accept clothing, toys, furniture, books, cars, and more.

Vietnam Veterans of America

www.clothingdonation.org

Visit their website to find locations across the country. (Over half the states in the U.S. have pick-up service. Click on the

map to find the phone number of the location nearest you.) They accept clothing, household goods, books, bikes, toys, stereos, bedding, small appliances, and more.

1-800-GOT-JUNK

www.1800gotjunk.com

North America's largest junk removal service. Call 1-800-GOT-JUNK to schedule an appointment. They do all the loading into their truck, and then your junk is recycled, taken to a transfer station, or sent to a landfill. Pricing is based on your city, volume

of material, and the nature of your material. They'll take construction materials, garden refuse, furniture, appliances, and other items. No hazardous waste accepted.

Dumpsters/Roll-Off Carts

To do the work yourself, rent a dumpster. To find one near you, type "dumpster" and your state into your favorite search engine. Or look under "garbage" in the Yellow Pages.

