

# All you need to know about Swedish Death Cleaning

Marie Kondo advised us to keep only the items that spark joy, Mrs Hinch's hacks help us keep our homes spick and span - now there's Swedish Death Cleaning. It sounds a bit morbid, but is it? Norfolk professional organiser **Anita Fortes** tells us more.

## What is Swedish Death Cleaning?

It's the idea that as we reach our senior years, we should clear our clutter rather than leaving the burden of it to our family after our death.

Decluttering before you die, a process called 'dostadning', is part of Swedish culture and a book called *The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning* was published in 2017 by Margareta Magnusson. It's certainly not a new concept, but the book has got people talking about it. She also talks about decluttering in later years to experience a better quality of life, so the book is not just about preparing for death.

## It sounds a bit morbid - is it?

Many may see it this way, but I think that's because we find it so very difficult to talk about death and reflect on our own mortality. I have never found it to be morbid, in fact it's usually the opposite! To me it seems entirely sensible to declutter in your later years. It will make it easier for your family when you are no longer here, but it also makes life easier for you in the here and now. In my job as a professional organiser, I often see what happens when the clearing task is left to family following a bereavement.

Many adult children are reluctant to start a conversation about death with their parents, but making plans for a loved one's death can bring relief and solace for all concerned.

## Have you helped any clients with Swedish Death Cleaning?

Yes I have, but it's rarely referred to in those terms. Often, as we are working together, older clients will comment that they don't want to leave a house full of clutter for their children to sort out. They talk about who they want specific items to go to as they declutter and sometimes attach handwritten notes to items. They see it as 'putting their house in

order'. I also work with bereaved children and families, who are in the process of selling the family home following the death of a parent. They may be faced with sorting through 20 or 30 years worth of family belongings at a time of great distress and upheaval. It can be a huge physical task and an intensely emotional one.

Wishes may be unknown when it comes to making decisions about keeping or letting go of particular items, especially sentimental ones. Would my Mum want me to keep this? Would she be upset about it going to charity? Am I doing the right thing? They often feel a great burden and sense of responsibility.

## How have they found the experience?

Transformative and a great relief, as most decluttering experiences are. Firstly, it makes a big difference to their present lives - the home feels lighter and is better organised, there are fewer things to look after and think about and everything is a wanted or needed possession.

In addition, they know that they are not leaving a big sorting task to their families, so there is a huge sense of relief.

A client I am working with at the moment has a huge amount of paperwork, documents and personal momentos that we are gradually sifting through and sorting. She sees this act of decluttering as a future gift to her daughter.

## Does there tend to be a particular event in their life that prompts them to want to put their house in



Swedish Death Cleaning is the latest Scandinavian lifestyle trend to capture the imagination  
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## order? And what ages do clients tend to be?

The Swedish advise people over the age of 65 to death clean, if they haven't already, but also say that it is never too late or early to start.

When people contact me it tends to be because clutter is having an impact on their lives now and they are feeling overwhelmed by it, and that can occur at any age.

It may be taking up much needed space, causing anxious feelings or they want more order in their lives. They may have a medical condition or physical limitations that means that they are unable to clear without help. Or they may be moving home and need to declutter prior to packing.

Older clients often do start to become mindful of what they might leave behind and want to declutter so that they can make sure that their belongings are dealt with according to their wishes. They will put things aside for particular family members or friends or name items in their wills.

I also work with people who have hoarding tendencies and often it's the adult children that contact me because they are concerned that the volume of clutter is a health and safety risk.

## It's the time of year for spring cleaning - if people, say, have a day or a weekend to dedicate to looking after their home, which tasks would you suggest they tackle?

If they have a good chunk of time I would advise to have a good clear out of one of the 'hidden' spaces, such as loft, basement or garage. These are the areas that we go to less often and tend to be dumping grounds for all sorts of clutter. I often work with people who have completely lost track of what is in the loft!

If time is a little shorter, go through your linen cupboard and declutter your bedding and towels - we nearly always have too many.

Or if you can only manage 10 minutes, sort through that sock drawer!

**Anita Fortes is a professional organiser and founder of A Neater Life. To find out more visit [aneaterlife.com](http://aneaterlife.com)**