

Clutter Clean Up

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Educational Objectives

- Participants will learn steps to decluttering.
- Participants will face emotional roadblocks when decluttering.
- Participants will develop clutter-free habits.

Have you ever asked yourself, “Where did all this stuff come from?” Over the years it is easy to collect things, keep sentimental items, buy things just because they’re on sale or keep those clothes that you just might fit into again. In doing this, we tend to build mounds of things we don’t need. However, these are our things – we saw, chose, bought and thought we needed them. But in a week, month or year, we may have forgotten we even have these things. Clutter can also come from inheriting sentimental items from others or the guilt of getting rid of something that belonged to loved ones. We often have an emotional tie to our things.



The idea of decluttering your home can be overwhelming with feelings of sadness, anxiety and guilt. The thought of tackling a large job such as downsizing, moving or cleaning an estate can be daunting. When you feel overwhelmed, try to focus on taking one small step at a time. Set daily action steps. Commit to the process and keep working on it as you’re able. You will be amazed at the progress you can make!

To keep a nice and tidy home, you should declutter on a regular basis. Clutter can make a home look smaller, cause house fires and even cause injury from tripping over things and falling, or things falling on you! Too much clutter also invites some unwanted critters into our homes to make nests. And in the end, our clutter becomes someone else’s job to clean up.

How do we get started?

First, write down your decluttering goals. What do you want your home to look like? What would make it function better? Why are you starting

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this journey? When you understand *why* you are doing this and what *results* you want, you will have a clear vision and more motivation to tackle the mounds of stuff collected over the years. Remember to make your goals specific and realistic, with a deadline. For example, “I will clean one drawer or shelf for 15 minutes three times this week.”

Make a list of a few household items, such as bed sheets, towels, coffee cups, soap, etc. Ask yourself, how many of these should a person have? For example, you could decide to keep two sets of sheets per bed or two coffee mugs per person. Making this list before you begin decluttering allows you to decide how many to keep. You may be surprised when you open the closet and find 12 sets of sheets stashed away!

Once your goals are written down, start with a small area that does not hold much sentimental value. The medicine cabinet in the bathroom, the bottom desk drawer or the cabinet of plastic containers are great places to start. Choose a room, then an area to work. Stay in that room until you have decluttered every inch. Give yourself time, but a deadline is imperative to reaching your goal. There are several free printable decluttering checklists online to help guide you. Once you see and feel the results of decluttering, it will motivate you to continue. If you begin to lose motivation, go back to your written goals. Why do you want/need to declutter your home?

Emotions and Decluttering

Asking yourself “Why am I doing this?” can bring up many different feelings. It may be as simple as spring cleaning. Or your reason may be to move to a new home or clean after the death of a loved one. In his book “Let it Go,” author Peter Walsh states that a person has three main feelings when deciding to clean out clutter: sadness, anxiety and guilt.

When downsizing or cleaning an estate, you will find items that bring up memories. If these memories are of people who are no longer in your life, sadness can take over. If you are leaving your home of many years, this too can bring on sadness or a feeling of loss. Anxiety comes when we are faced with the reality that this decluttering must happen. At these times, remember the reason why you began. Even if the move or reason is a happy one, it can still cause anxiety. Feelings of guilt may occur when you begin to part with items that have sentimental value.

When dealing with these emotions, ask yourself why this item causes me sadness, anxiety or guilt. Am I keeping this just because of these feelings? If so, what steps can I take to let these items go? When you decide to let go of the stuff, you can also let go of the unhealthy emotions, but keep the positive memories. You may want to enlist the help of others to lighten the mood and make the task more pleasant. You may even have a “purge party!”



What to Do With the Clutter

When you begin the process of decluttering, look at your goals and create a room-by-room plan with a timeline to help you move forward. But what do we do with the stuff? Find an area that can hold three piles:

1. Trash/Recycle pile
2. Maybe pile
3. Legacy pile

The trash/recycle pile will be easy to start. Throw away old papers, magazines and any broken or worn-out items you are not emotionally attached to. You will be amazed at the amount of trash you collected.

The maybe pile contains items you may not need but hesitate to get rid of. This is where we often get stuck. Questions to ask yourself about these items are: Is it broken, damaged or missing pieces? Do I have something else that serves the same purpose? Am I holding onto it out of guilt? If I saw it in a store today, would I buy it again? Does it fit? Do I really love it? Have I used it in the past six months? Is keeping it worth the space it takes up? Answering these questions will help you to move those items to the trash or legacy piles.

A fun activity to do when working through the maybe pile is a version of would you rather. In this activity, ask yourself – would I rather have a living room full of magazines and newspapers,



or a place for people to sit down? Would I rather have a garage full of boxes I don't open, or a place to park my car? This helps to contextualize your things and can make it easier to let go of items you thought you needed.

Items you know you want to keep become your legacy pile. These are items you will use daily and those that will be passed down to others. Aside from the day-to-day items we need to function, ask yourself what you're passing on to others. What do you want to be remembered for? These items should tell your story. Then, ask your loved ones if these are things they would like to have later. Grandmother's China set is probably not something the next generation wants. However, there may be a dish Grandma used for her special casserole that a young person would treasure.

The trash/recycle pile should be taken out after each decluttering session. You cannot see progress if the back porch is full of trash bags. Once you decide something is trash, it needs to go. Things you are donating or recycling should be loaded into the car and taken the next day. Doing this a few times a week will show progress and prevent your piles from becoming another source of clutter.

In the legacy pile, organize what is there. Dishes in one area, clothes in another, picture frames should be separate from lamps, coffee cups separate from water glasses. In doing this, you will start to form categories. In each category,





you will see how many of the same things you are keeping. It may be time to take things from the legacy pile and place them in the trash/recycle pile. Also, you may organize it into boxes for individual people.

The final step is to create decluttering habits. This process is ongoing and must continue in your future. Decluttering habits include:

- Realize it is a lifestyle change and requires an ongoing effort.
- Remind yourself of your goals.
- Begin daily decluttering habits, such as throwing away junk mail immediately and putting mail in a designated spot.
- Change your shopping habits. Limit what comes into your home by what you really need and have space to store.

Collecting all your things took years. Decluttering will take time as well. Making a plan and sticking to it will help you feel positive about your home. You will be less stressed about cleaning and gain feelings of achievement for tackling a hard project and dealing with the emotions tied to it. Plus, you will relieve the burden from the “stuff” that takes up precious space in your life.

Club Activity

Have participants bring 5-10 small random things from their homes. Make three signs labeled “Trash/Recycle,” “Maybe” and “Legacy,” and place them in a space where participants can make piles. Have members place their items in the piles of their choosing and discuss why. These are random objects, so some will have meaning and some will not. Do not force participants to disclose memories. Talk about why each item was placed in each pile.

Websites for free printable decluttering checklist:

<https://www.mollymaid.com/cleaning-tips/schedules-charts-and-checklists/declutter-house-checklist/>

<https://mailchi.mp/fcbeec476400/tidying-checklist>

<https://www.sunnydayfamily.com/2017/02/declutter-checklist.html>

Resources

Matt Paxton, J. M. (2022). In J. M. Matt Paxton, *Keep the Memories Lose the Stuff*. Portfolio Penguin Random House.

Walsh, P. (2019). In P. Walsh, *Let it Go Downsizing your way to a Richer, Happier Life*. Rodale Books Random House.