



HOME SWEET HOME NEWS

CONQUERING CLUTTER

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A NEWSLETTER DEDICATED TO HELPING SENIORS STAY IN THEIR OWN HOMES

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Senior Edition, No. 27

EDITORS' NOTE

The mission of this newsletter is to help seniors live longer and more enjoyably in their own homes. Some 42 churches, senior centers, libraries, etc. receive our newsletter while others get issues from our free web page www.homesweethome.com. This issue was written by both editors Anne and Larry Alexander. They can be contacted in Virginia at 1-540-239-8254.

The topic of clutter is important to seniors because as we grow older, we can easily acquire more and more stuff. This can turn into clutter unless we effectively manage it.

CLUTTER—IT JUST KEEPS GROWING

The 3 Ps of clutter—people, places, and products—all contribute to make things worse. The number of people per household has decreased over time. Meanwhile, the average home size has increased from 1,000 in the

1950s to an amazing 2,400 square feet now. Finally, products purchased per person have gone way up. Clutter per room has increased for many of us even though our larger homes hold more.



One of our readers submitted this photo of their basement with the understanding that their name not be identified.

The picture above shows the basement of a larger home filled to the brim. With the added space that basements, garages, and storage sheds provide, clutter has more places to find a home.

In many households, one person often rules as "the clutterer." Usually, they don't, see themselves as the problem. They argue:

- These things are not clutter, they are important memories of my life.

- I want to keep this. I might use it sometime or trade for something else.
- I use all my old magazines. Have you seen my May 1989 issue of National Geographic?
- These old VCR tapes are going to become collector items. I'm keeping them.

With all their possessions, clutterers often can't find what they are looking for. By keeping everything and burying it, they lose much of it.

PAPER

- FINANCIAL RECORDS. There seems to be a variety of retention guidelines. Examine each document to determine how long to keep it. Keeping income tax records for seven years seems to be the general guideline. Check this out with your financial advisor.

- BILLS. They come every month and many of us save them forever, scattered everywhere in the house. You might hold onto one year's bills to compare utility usage.

Remember you can always call the utility to find out more information about your bills and usage.

- BANK AND INSURANCE RECORDS. Again, keep some records for recent years and call them if you have specific questions. Ask their advice about what to keep.

- MAGAZINES. Do you have a huge collection of magazines? At first you might have kept them for the articles and pictures. As the years went by, you felt obligated to keep subscribing without reading them or discarding them.

Decide how many years to keep, say 5 years (plus a few older special issues). Then get rid of everything older as each new year begins. Consider donating older magazines to someone or a library.

- CATALOGS. Perhaps the 27 catalogs you received before last Christmas overwhelmed you? Here are some ideas.

Designate a certain space or part of a file drawer for all catalogs. Then when that space gets filled, get rid of old catalogs and unwanted ones. Remember only the new catalog has correct prices if you want to buy something.

Catalogs may be fun to look at, but collectively they take up a lot of space. Call

some catalog companies and ask they take you off their mailing list.

- NEWSPAPERS. For many of us, reading the morning paper with breakfast is a ritual we love. But what do we do about those stacks of papers that keep piling up. This is particularly true if you get the Wall Street Journal delivered along with your local paper, and then pick up another paper during the day.

An easy way to control this clutter is to find another container to put old papers in. Then, make sure they are regularly put out by the street to recycle.

Above all, don't save the paper hoping to read some article later. If the news item is important, there will be future articles on the topic.

Another solution is to subscribe to an electronic version of the paper. Then each morning, through your Kindle (from Amazon.com) or Nook (from Barnes and Noble), you will magically receive your paper rain or shine.

- BOOKS. Some people have a hard time getting rid of books. They feel their books are sacred and shouldn't be discarded. If you won't re-read the book or refer to it, give it to someone else to enjoy. Or give it to a thrift store or library.

CLOTHES

Most of us have quite a collection of clothes, particularly women. This may include clothes for various occasions, the four seasons, and even in different sizes. Paring down your clothes can be a challenge. Try these steps:

1. Take everything out of your closets and drawers.
2. Put back in the closet what you actually wear.
3. Now, look at what is left item by item. What is the reason for keeping each item? Put that suit back in the closet you wear for special occasions, but critically evaluate some other items and eliminate them.
4. Do other items not fit (too big or too small)? Get rid of most of them or box them up with their size marked on the box. Store them until you can fit into them or realize you should give them up.
5. Do you have some clothes that are out of style? Give them to a thrift shop that may sell them.
6. Do you have other items that you don't wear any more? Some of them may still be good, or have never been worn. You might do what Dottie, an older friend of ours did. She regularly gave good clothes away to her friends. When she

died, two people spoke at her funeral extolled her generosity and admitted they were wearing an outfit of hers. If you don't have anyone to give clothes to, there's always the thrift shop, Salvation Army, etc.

7. At this point, you should have dealt with most of your clothes. Use the same steps to get rid of extra shoes and accessories.

GETTING RID OF KNICK-KNACKS, CLUTTER, AND JUST PLAIN JUNK

Is your house overflowing with knick-knacks, collectables, and other things only you know what they are? Thin them out by category.

For example, if you enjoyed knitting for years but no longer do it, you might put all your old knitting equipment, yarn, pattern books, etc. in a box and give it to someone who might just be getting started. If not, the thrift shop will enjoy the box of knitting supplies. By going through your possessions systematically by category, you can clear out a lot of no longer used items.

Use the same technique with each closet, cupboard, or drawer. Take everything out and critically evaluate every item you put back in.

With honest answers to

tough questions of why you hold on to everything; you should be able to get rid of many unused things. If you can't bear to part with anything, watch a few episodes of "Hoarders" on TV and it may jolt you into action.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Here are a few ideas to conquer clutter.

- Start with something that is easy. It can build your confidence and may motivate you to keep going.
- Work on visible clutter. This helps you and others see the progress you're making.
- Declutter your work area, desk, or computer table. Without a clean space, you can't effectively open mail, pay bills, or write letters.
- Make progress on an area that bothers someone in your home. They may be very appreciative and become a supporter of your efforts.
- Limit your project to what you can get done in the time allotted. Set a kitchen timer for 15-20 minutes and you'll make progress if repeated for several days.
- Have a younger person help and give them discarded items they want.

- Turn over part of the job to your spouse to get rid of some of your clutter.
- Call 1-800-GOT-JUNK or contact a professional organizer for help.

GET RID OF THINGS A LITTLE AT A TIME

As you get started you need to set limits. How many issues of your favorite magazines are you going to keep? How many different dresses do you need to cram into your closet. Then stick to your limit and get rid of extra items.

You may find that you cannot start by being too strict. You may need to take it in stages. For example, rather than throwing out your entire childhood model train set, get rid of a major portion of it now and keep the most sentimental pieces. Then next year, look at it again to see if you can discard more.

A PLACE FOR EVERYTHING

What do you see when you're in someone's house that is picked up and organized? Chances are that person has followed the old saying: "A place for everything and everything in its place." Now that there is more room in your drawers, file cabinets and closets, it is time to des-

ignite a place for things and then make sure those items return to that place. With such organization, you will be able to find things quickly and have a good sense of what you actually have and where it is.

One favorite is the drawer organizer like the one shown in the accompanying picture. For years, this drawer was a 'junk drawer' until we put in



Putting the "junk drawer" in order by sections enabled us to find things quickly.

organizers (dividers) that keep items in their place, and threw out stuff that no one used.

Another trick is to roll sweaters in the sweater drawer rather than stacking them. This keeps them visible when the drawer is opened so they don't get buried in a pile.

DECLUTTER IDEAS TO LIVE BY

Here are some concluding ideas to think about and help you deal with clutter:

Keep it from taking roots in your house.

Open junk mail over a trash can and get rid of it right away. Don't purchase things just because they sound like a good deal. Make sure you need it. If the purchase is a replacement, discard the old item.

When you thin your possessions, **declutter in small chunks**. It can be exhausting as you force yourself to make so many difficult decisions, so tackle one job at a time.

Have a plan in place so you know what to keep and what to discard. It may be keeping only the clothes you actually wear or keeping magazines for a shorter time.

Since you can't make every decision at once, **create a "maybe box."** You can return to this box later when you are refreshed, and then sort through it.

Every object in your house should have a designated place. This will keep items off the counter or from getting piled in corners or behind closet doors.

Don't get distracted or tackle multiple projects all at once while never making much headway with any. You can also get distracted looking through your posses-

sions. Try to keep your plan in mind.

Keep a container available all the time for **donations of charitable items**.

Ask yourself "Do you need to own it" or can you get it from the library, electronically, or even borrow it?

Note, a future issue of Home Sweet Home News will be on Clutter: Part II after we first address some other topics.

REFERENCE BOOKS

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DISCLAIMER

Apply the ideas from this newsletter, but balance them with other ideas from your family and friends. Emphasize ideas from people you know who have conquered clutter themselves. Learn from people who have neat and well organized homes.

HERE'S HOME SWEET HOME TO YOU

Larry & Anne Alexander