

Introduction

American consumers have a fondness for purchasing a great deal of “stuff,” which has led to clutter-filled houses. In addition, families have less time to keep everything organized. This lack of organization causes stress for everyone in the household. Members in the home also feel unsettled by this lack of organization.

Is Clutter a Problem?

Do you say, “This house is a mess” more than several times a week?

Do you ...

- move something every time you want to sit down?
- have piles of paper all over the house?
- have closets and drawers that are brimming?
- spend lots of time looking for things?
- Do you frequently hear family member say, “I can’t find it”?
- Are you tired of being the family’s chief picker-upper?

Sources of Clutter

- *Mail, junk mail, bills, and important unfiled papers*
- *Books, catalogs, and magazines*
- *Toys and games*
- *Hobby materials*
- *Tools and hardware*
- *Outerwear: Hats, mittens, boots, shoes, bags, and backpacks*
- *Laundry and cleaning supplies*
- *Out-of-date prescriptions and cosmetics*

Does this sound like you?

If so, it is time to take control of the clutter at your house.



Start with a positive attitude.

Cleaning is a chore but taking a positive approach will encourage family members to become involved.

Clutter control is up to all.

Choose a convenient time for everyone to discuss plans for clutter control. It is unfair to expect one person to restore order to the entire house. Everyone shares the responsibility for picking up after themselves.

Getting Started

For bigger clean ups, set aside several days to work together on them. In each room, start at one spot and work clockwise around the room until you return to your starting point. Use the box approach to sort the clutter. Sort items into boxes labeled *Keep*, *Store*, *Give Away/Sell*, and *Throw Away*. If your clutter is mostly paper, you may want to use a garbage container or bag for recycling. This is the method that professional organizers use to eliminate clutter.

The Keep Box

- Return items to their proper places.
- Sort like items together.
- Create “centers” for work, such as cleaning, desk/office, cooking, baking, makeup, tools, studying, hobbies and games, etc.

The Storage Box

Store these items for use at another time. Be sure to label all bins and totes with the person's name that they belong to and if the contents are seasonal (for example, Sarah's Winter Clothes). Consider using storage bags that can be vacuum sealed to reduce bulk and increase storage capacity.

The Give Away/Sell Box

The items you choose to donate to a secondhand store or charity should be in good condition. Some places to consider donating to might include a school, church, library, women's shelter, or historical society. Call before you drop things off, so you are not leaving your clutter for someone else to deal with.

If your items are in good to new condition, consider taking them to a consignment shop to earn some money from your unwanted items. Consider selling your items on local social media sites (for example, Craigslist, ETSY, eBay, Next Door, or a Facebook Marketplace group). Books and textbooks can be sold online by using a book buyback service.

The Throw Away Box

Throw away anything that is broken, ripped, worn, or stained. This box could also be a trash can or trash bag. Depending on how much stuff you must dispose of, a trip to the recycling center or landfill may be in order.

Use the One Touch Rule

Try to touch items only one time. For example, when you bring the mail into your house, sort it into bills to pay or items that need attention, items to keep/file, and items to throw away. Try to only touch your mail once instead of allowing it to accumulate. It is difficult to sort when it has piled up and is not organized.

Maintaining a Clutter-Free Home

- Everyone needs to do a little bit every day.
- It is everyone's job to keep items picked up and put away.
- Tasks need to be appropriate for age and abilities.
- Share your ideas and expectations of what is expected and acceptable. You may need to teach others simple and effective ways to do the tasks.

A word of caution: Some members of your household may object. Stay firm and do not do their share of the work or you will end up getting it back! It will take at least 2 to 4 weeks until the jobs become routine. You will need to be patient. The reward is worth the work.

When youth and adults help with household work, they learn to carry out tasks, accept responsibility, and help others. They may develop a sense of "can do," which builds self-confidence.

Things to Toss Out Now

- *Anything with a stain, hole, or tear.*
- *Clothing or accessories you like but look funny on you.*
- *Old, worn out purses and shoes.*
- *Outdated clothing or accessories.*
- *Ratty weekend clothes.*
- *Clothing and outerwear that does not fit.*
- *Anything of a lower quality than your regular wardrobe.*
- *Lifeless undergarments.*

Closet Organization Tips

How much clothing do you need?

People often keep all their clothes packed in a tight space. Compacted clothes and unused clothes you don't wear are clutter. One way to determine if the item hanging in your closet is still being worn is to take all the clothes hangers and turn them around so the hooks face towards you. As you wear the clothing, turn the hangers around to where they hook away from you. After several months, you can assess your closet and see which clothes are clutter and which ones you wear.

Most clothing needs 2 to 3 inches of space for hanging, but this can vary depending on the length and width of the garment. This space allows the clothing to "breathe" and not become funny smelling. It also allows air flow in and around clothing to prevent mold and mildew growth. Tightly packed clothing can be a buffet line to clothes moths and other fiber eating insects.

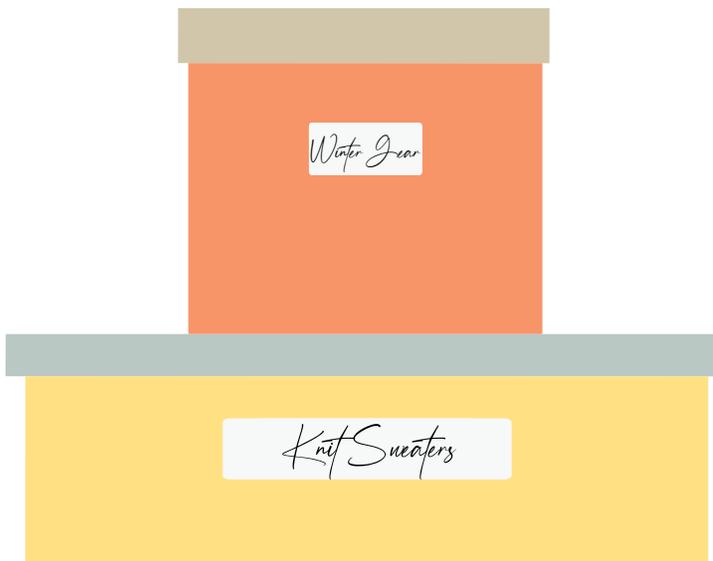
Learn to choose clothes in a unified color theme. Clothing that can be mixed and matched to be worn year-round saves you space and money. Choose dark, solid-colored bottoms to maximize your closet. Be a fit fanatic so that what you wear looks good on you! Organize your closet like a rainbow, to make clothes selection and organization more efficient. It is smart to buy quality classic pieces that will be timeless in one's wardrobe. Update these pieces with trendy accessories, which can be changed out more frequently and with less expense than replacing one's entire wardrobe.

Organize with hooks, hangers, shelves, or baskets.

Learn how to maximize your space by studying home design or visiting home organization stores and websites. Everything should be visible immediately because you wear or use what you see. Many professionals hang up everything they possibly can. Get items off the floor and hang everything; even a sweater can be folded and hung over a padded hanger.

Storage could include shoe and sweater shelves, hanging racks, and a wall organizer for jewelry and scarves. Fold and store items in transparent drawers in your closet. Fold items in a way to store it vertically in your drawers, so you can see each item when the drawer is opened. Look at hardware and craft stores for items that could be used for storage in a unique way. Try using shower curtain rings to store scarves and handbags in your closet. Be sure to measure your space and the items you want to store before purchasing an organization system.

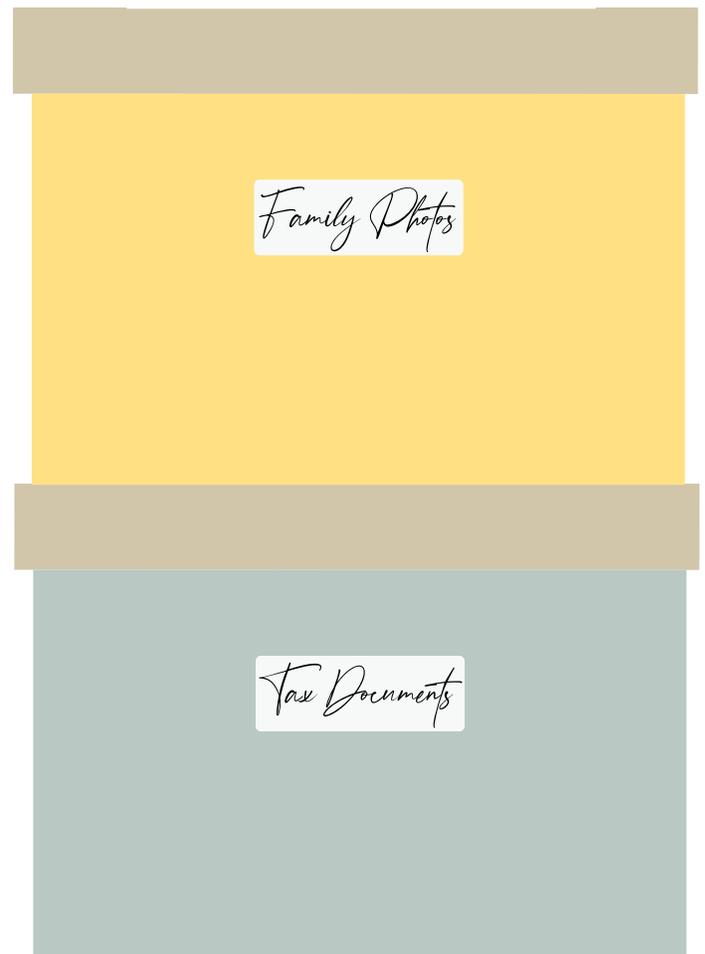
Look for additional areas in other parts of your home to store out-of-season clothing – other closets, utility room, under the beds, or other places. Can you add shelves in unused areas that you may not have considered for storage? Above a garage or closet door may be a creative way to gain more storage space.



Downsizing

Many older adults who are looking to “downsize” their belongings can benefit from using this sorting method to reduce clutter. Ask adult children to take their belongings so that you are not being a “warehouse” for their stuff. This process will take some time, especially if you have years of stuff to go through.

One thing to understand is that not everyone has the same values for keeping and passing along heirlooms. If you and your family members do not want an item, take a photo to preserve your memory and then let the item go. If you are concerned that the item is valuable, it may be wise to enlist the help of an appraiser to determine the value and best process for selling it.



Author

*Denise Dias, Extension Agent, Family and Consumer Sciences,
K-State Research and Extension, Johnson County
11811 S Sunset Drive, Suite 1500, Olathe, KS 66061
913-715-7000, ddias@k-state.edu*

Reviewers

*Elizabeth Kiss, Ph.D, CFP, AFCPE, Associate Extension Professor,
Kansas State University, Extension Specialist
343L Justin Hall, Manhattan, KS 66506-1403
785-532-1480, dekiss@k-state.edu*

*Rachael Clews, MA, MS, CFLE, Extension Specialist, Family and Consumer Sciences,
K-State Research and Extension Southwest Research-Extension Center
4500 E Mary Street, Garden City, KS 67846
620-275-9164 extension 226, rclews@k-state.edu*

*Karen Richel, M.S., AFC®, Certified Money Coach (CMC)®, Associate Extension Professor
University of Idaho Extension - Latah County
200 S. Almon Street, Suite 201, Moscow, ID 83843
208-883-2241*

*Cindy Williams, Meadowlark Extension District, FCS Agent
K-State Research and Extension, Meadowlark Extension District
Oskaloosa Office, PO Box 326, 100 E. Washington
Oskaloosa, KS 66066-0326
785-863-2212, csw@k-state.edu*

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