

Unlock the Power to Declutter



The Definitive Guide on How to Start

Confident Living
A LIFE ENRICHING
COMMUNITIES PROGRAM

The Choice in Wellness Lifestyle SM

Your home is your haven, but it might be getting a little cluttered lately. This happens to everyone, especially if you've lived in the same place for a long time. If you're here, you probably want to cut down on some of your stuff. But why is it so hard to just get rid of things?

Well, it turns out that for most people it's a little more complicated than just decluttering useless things. People don't usually hold onto things they think serve no purpose, it's just that this perception of purpose might be misleading.

Most of the stuff that takes up closets and corners in your home are things that are either sentimental or you are worried you will need later. The good news is you aren't alone. And as it turns out, psychologists will back you up in saying decluttering is a mental and emotional burden.

The Endowment Effect



The “endowment effect” is a theory that claims people place more value on items once we claim ownership of them. This is obvious with large and expensive items like your home or vehicle, but also extends to some surprisingly mundane items like pens and coffee mugs. This personal attachment can make it difficult to declutter your stuff because detaching from a piece of your identity creates anxiety.

It is this sense of self and its relation to the things we own that makes decluttering difficult. This effect extends to gifts as well, because we conceptualize the item as a representation of the gift giver.

The endowment effect is at the heart of understanding why decluttering your life is so hard. Letting go of certain items can feel like a type of abandonment. But the value is in your memory, not the item, and overcoming that initial hurdle is the first step to your decluttering strategy.

- STEP 1 -

Easy Steps for Getting Started

Identify Your Downsizing Personality



PROCRASTINATOR:

Sounds Like: When I retire I'll have plenty of time to sort through all of this stuff.
Your Strategy: You will have plenty of time but if you want to stop thinking about it it's best to begin now.

- One drawer or closet shelf a week is progress.
- Set a timer and stop after 30 minutes. No matter how much you've finished, you're done.
- Start with spaces in spare rooms because it's less stressful than tackling your most-used rooms.



SENTIMENTALIST:

Sounds Like: I can't get rid of my child's favorite blanket, or my grandmother's tea set, or my first wedding gift or...

Your Strategy: There's some real psychology behind why you can't get rid of anything. So you're not just being emotional. But there are ways to keep and showcase the things you love.

- Photographs and old letters can go digital so you'll always have them. Have them printed on a tea towel or throw pillow.
- Create shadow boxes with souvenirs from family vacations.
- Turn favorite baby clothing into throws or quilts for your home.



STUCK IN NEUTRAL:

Sounds Like: I don't know what, when or where my next move is so I'm stalled. But I know I don't want to leave it for my kids to clear out.

Your Strategy: You may move to a smaller home house, a patio home on a senior living campus or stay where you are. But getting rid of stuff is always good because you're not leaving it for family members to deal with.

- Gift items to family members who want them. Your generosity brings joy to the receiver meanwhile you can always visit the items if you want.
- Use the **Procrastinators** strategy of 'one drawer at a time' to get you moving.
- Consider an on-line resource if you find a new place to move and need to get rid of things quickly.



OVERWHELMED:

Sounds like: I don't know what to do with all my stuff so I'm doing nothing.

Your Strategy: It's common to want to pass things on and not just send everything to the landfill. The good news is there are lots of ways to find a new owner for some of your things.

- Donate unwanted items to local charities. Someone in the community needs and wants it and you'll give the item a new lease on life.
- Use the **Stuck in Neutral** strategy of 'gifting items to family members.' Especially if you have antiques and heirlooms that someone wants.
- Throw broken things away.

- STEP 2 - Lower Stress to Attack Your Mess

Now that you know your decluttering strategy and can execute it with as little stress as possible, its time to take a hard look at your mess.

List your problem areas: Go through your home and make note of areas that tend to gather clutter. This is usually an indication that those areas need an organizational plan.

Set your goals: This is pretty basic, but a lot of people tend to overlook this step. Before you start, deciding what you want your end result to be will help you determine what success looks like when you finish. This will become your template for the rest of your decluttering approach. Fortunately, we've created a checklist to help you narrow it down.

Identify your downsizing personality and identify barriers you will have to overcome.

Grade each space from one to five. One being a bit cluttered some times and five being always cluttered. This will help you develop a plan for which rooms need the most attention and also which areas might need better organization or storage in the long run.

Set deadlines for when to take care of each space. These should include days for smaller areas, weeks for whole rooms, and even a month to clear our large areas like basements, attics, and garages. Be honest with yourself about the time you have for each project. Some might really take months and that's perfectly OK!



- STEP 3 - Your Decision Options

The best way to decide what to do with your stuff is to start with whether or not you will keep it. To make that decision process easier, ask yourself these questions?

Does it work? If not, the decision should be simple. Don't worry, you'll have time later to decide what you want to do with it, but for now, it's just not going in the keep pile.

Does it have a use? And by this, we mean specifically, does it help make your life easier. In addition to this, does having it make you happy (not to be confused with being unhappy thinking about getting rid of it). It must give you positive feelings outside of a decluttering scenario.

Would it be easy to replace? If so, it might not be worth hanging onto.

Make sure everything has a place. Sometimes the only reason some areas of our homes get so cluttered is that we haven't been organizing things properly. If you are keeping things, make sure they have a place to go so they don't just pile up again. There are many reasonably priced storage options, from totes to cuddly shelves. Pick the best storage choice for your things.

Get rid of stuff ASAP. If it lingers around, it increases the likelihood that you might change your mind. This means doing your yard sale research before you start going through your stuff.

What to do if you just can't decide? Ok. We didn't want to put this in the original options list because it's something we don't really encourage people to do, but... Just put it out of sight. Either keep it in the closet for now or put it in a place you haven't decluttered yet. If you put it in a closet, put it on your check-list with a deadline decision date. Then set a reminder on your phone or computer for that date and stick to it. You should have a decision by the time that date comes around. If you still can't decide (but haven't used it since putting it off) it might be time to let that item go.



- STEP 4 -

If You Don't Want Your Stuff, Who Will?

Now that you've gone through a few areas, the next step is what to do with your stuff.

Here are your options:

Keep: Decide early on what items you know you want to keep and check them to see if the item is still functional before adding it to the keep pile (particularly with electronics). This will help keep you focused on the bigger task at hand, decluttering.

Pass to children: If you are parting with a few things and think someone else in your family might want them, offer them up now! The sooner you get the ball rolling on your cleaner life the sooner you will be able to enjoy the peace of mind that comes with it. Before you get started, you might want to talk with your family about items they might want, that way you aren't passing on a burden, but something they will cherish.

Gift: Just because your family doesn't want your collection of antique china, doesn't mean they don't know someone who might. Reach out to friends and encourage them to do the same within their social groups. Finding a good home for the things you care about but are no longer useful for you is a good feeling. Plus, you are helping someone else.

Donate: There are many places you can donate your goods, from online outlets to churches. A simple internet search is bound to yield positive results for whatever you are trying to rehome.

Sell: Though selling your stuff could turn a small profit, it is the one that will require the most organization and planning. Do some research to find local places that might buy your items. You could also organize a yard sale, which will take a little planning and promotion but won't require you to load up your car. You can also use online platforms like eBay or Amazon. It is best to plan to sell what you might buy in a similar situation. That way you don't spend too much time setting things up that no one will want. Again, do your research and see what items sell well.

Recycle: All those popsicle stick projects and papers in the attic can be recycled. Though that thought might make you a little sad at first, all you need to do is take pictures of them first. That way they will take up less space and they won't be gone.

Toss: When all else fails, it's time to plan a trip to the dump.



– STEP 5 – Where to Start

Not knowing where to start is a common reason to put off decluttering. But no longer!

Your excuses are going out with the clutter. This is what we think is the best strategy to prepare yourself for widespread decluttering.



Where to Start: Kitchen

Fridge: We recommend you start with your fridge because your decisions regarding what to do with food products are limited and easy to determine. You are either going to keep it or throw it away, and you use expiration dates to decide. Simple. This strategy eliminates the psychological pressure of making consecutive decisions and helps get you in a good state of mind for getting rid of things guilt-free.

Pantry: Next you will go to the pantry and use the same reasoning as you did with cleaning out your fridge. Only now we will add another variable to your decision making; donation. This slow introduction of decision variables will help psychologically prime you for making more difficult decisions later without feeling overwhelmed.

From here you can choose where to go next. You will be incorporating all of the decision options in Step 3 from here on out.

Once you've tackled the kitchen, you'll be prepared to take on other areas of your home. Just use the tools you've gathered and the strategies you've learned to unlock your own power to declutter!

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Confident Living is a continuing care at home program offered by Life Enriching Communities (LEC) designed to help people navigate their options so they can live independently in their own homes. For more information: call 513-719-3522 or visit www.confident-living.org

Life Enriching Communities also owns and operates three senior living communities (CCRCs)...

CINCINNATI AREA

- Twin Towers, College Hill: 513-853-2000
- Twin Lakes, Montgomery: 513-247-1300

CLEVELAND AREA

- Concord Reserve, Westlake: 440-871-0090

For additional resources you can visit us online at: www.lec.org



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