

The Essential Guide to
Declutter & Organise your Home



Kerri Rodley

**The no-nonsense guide to curb your clutter
and optimise your organisation!**

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Why do we need to declutter?

Most people know they need to declutter, but many don't realise the benefits that will result when they finally do. You can do it on your own, or you can get a helping hand from a professional organiser, but whichever way you do it everyone in your life will benefit.

So in no particular order, here are my top four reasons why decluttering will improve your life - and the lives of those around you.

Improving your emotions and outlook on life:

- It is a well known fact that a cluttered home is a reflection on how you are feeling about life – decluttering helps to develop a positive frame of mind that naturally helps you to organise
- Decluttering helps to free your mind, to think clearer, to be less stressed and to concentrate on the “now” not the past or future.

Improving your finances:

- How many times have you bought the same thing twice because you couldn't find it the first time?
- How many times have you bought “bargains” only to find you don't need them and they then clutter up your house?
- How many times have you misplaced bills so you had to pay late fees? Or lost Lotto tickets? Or found gift cards that had not been redeemed and were out of date?



Now where did I leave the baby?



Why do we need to declutter?

Improving your health:

- No more articles around the home collecting dust
- Fresh air can circulate helping you to breath
- Being organised gives you more time for things you want to do – cooking, exercising, family time, taking a bath – *you* time.

Improving your social life:

- You can find your kitchen bench tops again so you can cook and entertain
- Your dining room table is clear so you can sit down to dinner with family
- You are no longer embarrassed to have visitors around for a get together
- Visitors can stay the night in your new guest room.



Eating at the dining room table – just like we used to.



The roots of clutter:

External, behavioral and internal

Before you begin to declutter, ask yourself what is the underlying cause. There are innumerable reasons people are plagued by clutter. You may see your clutter issues originating from more than one of these three categories. Clutter is a complex issue, but knowing why it is in your life can go a long way to helping you find a solution.

1. **External: Living with a cluttered person, physical disability, inherited clutter.**

Clutter rooted in external causes can be more challenging to overcome. Since you can't change other people, you may be continually plagued with clutter as long as you live in the same space as that person. If you're struggling with inherited clutter, the situation may be stressful as you take the time to sort through emotional issues.

Case study: Mismatched couples

Jane and Patrick, both in their late 30's have been married for two years. Jane is tidy and organised, Patrick is more casual in his cleanliness habits. Jane always feels she is nagging Patrick to pick up after himself which causes her stress. Patrick doesn't seem to notice and adds to the clutter by bringing home giveaways from trade shows and is annoyed if Jane attempts to throw any of his things out. After trying different tactics to get Patrick to help around the home, Jane has resigned herself to do all the decluttering and tidying herself.



Not seeing eye-to-eye with your partner?



The roots of clutter:

External, behavioral and internal

2. Behavioural: Challenges with decision making, lack of energy, organising skills.

Clutter resulting from behavioural causes can be more manageable than the other categories of clutter.

You can learn or improve skill, change habits, and find ways to increase energy levels. It can take time and commitment to overcome these behaviours, but it can be achieved within a reasonable amount of time.

Case study: New mothers and working mothers

Catherine is in her mid forties and works in the medical records field. She has to be extremely organised in her role and can find any record within seconds. Back in the home however, it is another story. Before she had children, Catherine was very organised and had time under control. But now with the kids in school, she back at work full time, husband working full time and with all of the extra curricular sports and activities, it barely leaves time for Catherine to get dinner on the table, let alone have friends over for a BBQ or declutter the junk/guest room for when mother-in-law comes to visit for Christmas.



Trying to juggle groceries, children, your life?



The roots of clutter:

External, behavioral and internal

3. Internal: Grief, depression, anxiety, distrust, overly sentimental

Internal clutter is similar to external clutter in that its solution varies greatly from person to person. Seeking professional assistance from an outside source is a good idea such as uncluttering assistance from a professional organiser or mental wellbeing from a psychologist.

Case study: Death of a parent and/or partner

John Henry, aged in his late 70's was my father. My mother had died ten years earlier and dad had had a hard time coming to terms with the death of his partner of over 40 years. Although he had done well in clearing out our mother's things, he had soon filled the gap by becoming a regular shopper at thrift shops such as St Vincent De Paul and Life Line. It didn't take long for the house to start filling up with second hand odds and ends: paintings, stuffed toys, kitchen items, clothing, tools etc. A brother who was still living at home had to move out due to the clutter and another brother who tried to help, soon realised Dad was happy to live amongst it all. After he died, it took the family almost 18 months to clear the house out ready for sale.

Hoarding is specific type of behaviour characterised by acquiring and failing to throw out a large number of items that would appear to have little or no value to others (e.g., newspapers, plastic bags, rubbish) so that the home is no longer able to function as a viable living space. There are many different levels and causes of this condition and it is always recommended to seek professional helps in these cases.



Different levels of hoarding



How did I get here?

The hard questions you need to ask yourself *before* you start:
Why am I in this situation? (see the roots of clutter on previous pages)

What has prompted me to take action now?

How do I visualize this space to look and work for me?



How did I get here?

What is working for me in this space (if anything)?

What has prevented me from being organised in the past?

What sort of organisation style do I have? (see next pages)



What is your organising style?

In sight

The “in sight” organising style is where clients like to visualise what they have, from plates/glassware on shelves in the kitchen rather than behind cupboard doors and to books on shelves and files displayed on the desk where they can see them.

They tend to panic when things are hidden away. They are afraid that if they can't see it, they will forget about it (and if it's a to-do, forget to take care of it in time).

For developing organisational systems for this client I would use open storage options to make sure that they can view items – clear plastic containers and folder file boxes instead of drawers and shelves instead of closed cabinets, and toaster racks on desk tops rather than filing cabinets.

Labels should still to be used on files, folders and boxes so they can easily see what is what and grouped together in categories. Colour coding is another great tool for this style of organising.



For those who love to see their collections



What is your organising style?

Out of sight

Almost opposite to the above style – this client likes things to be hidden away behind doors and nothing left on counters or on desks; they like things stored in lidded solid boxes. Their houses may appear to have a very minimalist style.

They can't tolerate anything on display – the desk or countertop must be clear before they can concentrate.

For this client I would organise storage in opaque and enclosed storage solutions – like file wallets and pockets. A colour coded folder and colour label system for filing works well for this style also.

They should only have the one diary system for all aspects of life so their appointments don't get hidden away either as they don't like to have a calendar on view on the wall.



Everything is hidden with the minimalistic style



What is your organising style?

It's here somewhere

Yes this is an organising style. It is usually the sign of a creative brain. Ask this client where something is in what appears to be a mess and they will be able to put their finger right on it.

This client likes to collect things and doesn't like to throw things away. A common cry is "I'll need that one day" or "I am going to read all of these when I get time".

For those of us who have this type of organiser in their home or office, whatever you do don't tidy up for them! You will ruin their whole system and cause them great stress.

If it causes you stress, try to keep the door to their area closed but don't let their clutter intrude on the common areas of the home.



Is that my computer amongst all that clutter?



What is your organising style?

Everything in its place

This is a client who loves a label maker and tends to be a perfectionist. Everything is “just so” and they get quite annoyed if things are moved or not where they should be.

The organising solution for these clients is to keep in control and to develop systems for the people around them to keep in line with their high standards.

e.g. In the office, file cards for people to write their name/date when they borrow something and name labels in books, on pens, on clothing etc. so they will be returned.

They need easy access to everyday supplies so labelled boxes on labelled shelves are great as is a calendar or year planner on the wall with all appointment and return details marked on it.

They also love lists so make sure they have a big visual notebook/diary in the “control room” so they can tick off as they achieve tasks.



A place for everything....



The mechanics of decluttering

Enough already.

The first step is that *you* have to want to change – not someone else in your family or friends. If you are happy with the way you are and it is not affecting anyone else so be it. However, if your clutter is causing problems within the family or your lifestyle and you want to get rid of it, a decision must be made.

Why did it happen?

How did you get to point? Was it the death of a family member and you inherited their belongings? Are you time poor and just don't "get around to it"? Do you not like to throw things away such as children's artwork or things you think you may need "one day"? If the situation doesn't change, no amount of decluttering/organising will help.

Assess – and make a mess.

Sorry to say it, but to declutter you first need to make more clutter. The space you are working on needs to be stripped – everything taken out, then given a good clean before items are put back. So where does it all go? Assign a spot in the house that you can spread all the items out to be sorted and purged.

Sort - putting "like" with "like"

When items are removed from the space, make piles. Firstly a keep pile, a donate/sell pile and a garbage pile. Then start putting the same categories of items together ie. stationery, books, shoes etc. This makes it easier to see how many of each category you have - and no one needs three staplers!



Pass on your unwanted goods to those who will appreciate them



The mechanics of decluttering

Purge.

The fun (or not so fun) part. It's time to let go.

Ask yourself 3 questions:

1. Do you love it?
2. Do you need it?
3. Is it useful?



If you can't answer yes to one of these questions out it goes. Only the "yes" items are returned to the space.

Note: This process becomes quite time consuming when there is emotional ties to items such as children's clothing, sentimental items, gifts etc.

Storage – remember your style?

When it comes to organising and storage you must take into consideration what type of organiser you are. Do you like things "out of sight and out of mind" behind cupboard doors, or do you like to see things in clear plastic boxes and on shelves otherwise you forget about them? This determines what storage items to buy and how you will design the room.



Note: first use containers you may already have around the house before you spend \$\$ on more.



Maintain - just 5 minutes a day

Now that you have decluttered and organised you must keep up the good work. Allocate five minutes a day to put things away. Make sure all the family pitch in and do their share.



How to whittle down the wardrobe

Space invaders

We only wear 20% of our wardrobe. Put your favourites aside then sort through the remaining 80% into piles: throw, donate, sell, repair/tailor.

Size matters

Don't put yourself through the torture of keeping clothes that you once fitted into – who wants to be reminded? Enjoy your size now.

Oldie but a goodie

Classic pieces last for years – as long as it hasn't dated, is in good condition and you still wear it.

What's it made of?

For staple pieces in your wardrobe, invest in items made with quality fabrics – not only do they feel better on, they will last longer as well

Money matters

What is your budget – do you crave variety and follow the current trends, or would you rather spend your money on timeless pieces that will last for years?



It's easy to get ready when your wardrobe looks like this



How to whittle down the wardrobe

If the shoe doesn't fit...

You don't want sore aching feet with blisters and bunions so unless they are your favourite Manolos that you only wear to special occasions sitting down – ditch them.



If it's broken – fix it

Mend your clothes as soon as they need fixing – pop them in a basket next to the lounge for easy access. Otherwise every time you go to wear them you can't.



For all seasons

Pack away your out of season clothes such as bulky jumpers in summer and bikinis in the winter and do the change over in spring/autumn

Pass on the hand-me-downs

Just because your sister gave it to you doesn't mean it's your style – if you don't want to offend, accept it then pass it on or donate it.

How do you dress?

Work clothes with work clothes, colour with colour, dresses all together – whatever works for *you* getting dressed in the morning is how you should organise your wardrobe.



How to control children's clutter

Give everything a home

Just like in the movie Toy Story, kids have vivid imaginations so give all their toys a place to go to sleep each night. Cars and trucks go into the “garage” cupboard, dolls go to sleep in their “apartment” boxes etc. Putting away needn't be the end of play.

Make storage see-through

If you can see what is in the box, it is easy to put things away. They are also great for mum to store clothing or toys waiting for younger children to grow into them. Make it easier still by labelling the outside and have them all the same size for easy stacking and storage.

Keep it off the floor

Create new storage space by using hooks and hanging storage such as baskets and bags. Great for stuffed toys, dolls and other lighter items. Also a perfect idea in the garage for keeping control of all the sports gear (so you don't trip over them).

Be creative with storage

Look around the room – where else do you see space that could be utilised for storage? How often does your luggage get used? Use a suitcase to stash your children's out of season clothes and hide under their bed.

Rewards & incentives

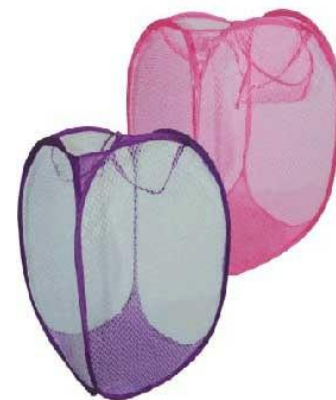
Rewards tend to work better than punishments so offer incentives for picking up after themselves and putting clothes away (a reward point system chart is a good idea). These good habits will stand them in good stead as they get older.



How to control children's clutter

Make organising fun...

...and easy. Put labels on everything or a coloured dot code on items that are placed in each drawer or storage container. If siblings argue over possessions give his or her own colour. Give each child their own coloured laundry basket to look after (right).



School schedules & such

For each child have a different coloured binder with clear pockets, and in each pocket have a topic such as school notes, timetables, sports schedules, doctors appointments etc. Match the colour of the binder to coloured dots to use on a large display calendar on the wall or fridge for appointments.

Never ending artwork.

Keep a folder for each child's artwork as it comes in the door. At the start of each school holidays, go through the folders with your child and let them choose their favourite two or three to keep. The "keepers" can then go into a yearly envelope and at the end of the year, make them into a scrapbook with other mementos (such as tickets to theme parks etc).



Keeping clutter under control...

...or learn how to shut the door!

Now that the kids are clutter free and organised, how do you keep it that way? Just like adults, kids have their own organising styles. Some will love the colour coding system and putting things away, others love the "everything on the floor" system. The important thing here is: *don't stress*. It is their own space so as long as they can find the important items such as their school clothes/homework and the clutter doesn't come out into the main living areas, learn to shut the door (or resign yourself to be picking up after them until they leave home).



13 top tips to make the job easier...

1. Avoid overwhelm - break the job down into smaller goals. Remember the saying “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.”
2. Take regular breaks for a cup of tea and quick sit down – but not for too long, keep that motivation going
3. Ask for an extra pair of hands from family and friends. Make it a game and get the children involved
4. Tell someone what you are doing & have them call to check on your progress – make yourself accountable
5. Be clear from the beginning what your goals are and what you plan to achieve
6. Set a time limit each day: 5 mins minimum - 4 hours maximum
7. Play energetic music and keep hydrated
8. List rewards you will have when you complete a task (space to cook, a lovely place to read, a rug you haven't seen for a while, the family sitting around the dining table etc) ...or list the cost or consequences if you *don't* (*late fees, having take-out again, embarrassment if a neighbour pops in*)



13 top tips to make the job easier...

9. Ask yourself: “Where am I organised in the home?” You may have a great system for keeping track of kids schedules, storage for your photos or memorabilia, or the linen cupboard may be a work of art. What organising strategies do you use in these areas that you could apply to other areas of your home or life? Can you use this motivation to keep decluttering/organising the whole home?
10. Take a day off – remember Rome wasn’t built in a day and you don’t want to get discouraged
11. Make an agreement with yourself to set a day/time when you will start again and put it on your calendar
12. Watch an organising show on TV to get inspired or find magazine articles or search the web for other tips you can use
13. Enlist the services of a Professional Organiser to give you a hand and keep you motivated (read more on the following page).



Most of all make it fun - and enjoy your new uncluttered & organised home!



What does a professional organiser do?

Professional Organisers assist their clients on a personal and/or business level to help with clutter, productivity, time management and organising spaces and systems. Clutter doesn't have to be physical — you can have time clutter or mental clutter or even bad processes that qualify as clutter.



The work can either be conducted as a personal advisory service, hands-on or virtually online, depending on the needs and location of the client.

A Professional Organiser can help you declutter and streamline your home and your office, design a new filing system, coordinate paperwork management, maximise your space with creative storage and archiving solutions, organise time management, co-ordinate repairs and maintenance and much more.

Most importantly, a good professional organiser will develop a personalised system so clients can maintain a clutter free and well organised home or office after the sessions are completed. Professional Organisers do not tell you what to do; their role is to offer guidance in how to make decisions that are best for you whilst respecting the things that are most important to you.

Getting organised is not all about throwing things away - the focus is assisting clients to organise and manage their possessions and surroundings, not the other way around.

A typical session with a professional organiser lasts for four hours and focuses on the areas that the client has the highest priority. After the session, a report is usually produced on how to stay organised, clutter free and utilising space and is followed up with support calls or emails if preferred.

It's a central part of a professional Organiser's philosophy to ensure they impart the skills, tools and motivation their clients need to maintain their new environment.



About the author...

If anyone knows the despair of having too much clutter, it is me. Being the youngest of nine children with a father who was a hoarder, I grew up with much clutter and as my husband David is in the defence force, we moved 17 times over 29 years.

After packing, unpacking, purging and organising all our possessions so many times, I certainly understand how stressful it can be however this is the important part: I have developed many decluttering and organisational strategies along the way to make it easier.

And this is how my first business Domestic Downsizing - Declutter & Design was born.

I have over 22 years experience in decluttering & organising, a Diploma in Interior Design, was as trained as a professional organiser by Australia's first accredited Expert Professional Organiser, was a Feng Shui Consultant having trained with Australia's leading Real World Feng Shui Practitioner, was a member of both the Australasian Association of Professional Organisers, the National Association of Professional Organisers (USA) and a member of the Association of Feng Shui Consultants International.

Don't feel overwhelmed any longer – remember each mountain is conquered starting with one small step. I look forward to helping you and your family on your way to domestic bliss.



Kerri Rodley

Positive Psychology & Wellbeing Practitioner
Wellbeing Workshop Facilitator
Professional Organiser
Speaker/Author



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Best of luck in your decluttering & organising endeavours! Kerri xx

