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## About the Author

Pamela Parsons worked with a cleaning firm and saw the problems which clutter had caused for a wide variety of people.

Pamela said, "Until I worked for the cleaning company, I did not realize how many people's lives were affected by some sort of clutter crisis."

Pamela said the experience gave her the idea for her book.

She hopes that it will encourage readers to reduce their clutter problems and make their lives less stressful.

"It affects all sorts of people across our society. And it can make us feel depressed and frustrated. Then, we lose enthusiasm and enjoyment in our personal and business activities."

"I don't have a magic button which will wipe it all away in ten minutes. But, anyone can use these proven tactics to get their space and their life back more easily than you might have thought possible."

"This is possibly one of the most costly problems in many households. Because it's hidden and little talked about, we may not know how much damage clutter is doing to our lives."

"I want to help you beat your clutter problem, whether big or small. Then, you can enjoy every part of your life more and be confident that clutter will never take hold in your home or office ever again!"

## Introduction

**This book will show you how to remove clutter and help prevent it ever affecting your home, work or other parts of your life again!**

There is a plague of clutter which is causing serious harm in almost every country around the world.

It seems a minor concern, but the clutter problem has serious effects on our health and well-being and costs us much more than we realize.

Because of the slow increase of clutter in our homes and the pressure of our ever-busier lifestyle, we often don't realize how bad the problem is for us.

When we decide that things have got to a point where we have to deal with our clutter, the task can seem almost overwhelming.

I will help you to understand the causes of clutter and why so many people have a hard time trying to deal with it.

Then, you will be ready to deal with your clutter, using the tactics and tools which fit your situation.

There is no one perfect way to deal with everyone's clutter.

You will be successful, though you might not get perfect results with everything you try.

You will know how to deal with set-backs and keeping moving forward.

You will see how to make your life almost completely clutter-free in this book.

I've kept it all plain and simple. You will have everything you need for most of the suggestions I share with you.

No great expense is needed and anything you do have to pay out will be a small price for your new energy and the freedom you will gain.

## How Does it Start?

Everyone has the urge to collect in their genetic makeup.

Mankind has gathered food, tools and clothing since the Stone Age. Back then, they were limited in what they could store because they moved with the seasons and the herds, or when someone stronger took over their cave.



Since we started farming and then building communities, we have always stored food and materials for lean times which would inevitably come, and which would be useful some time in the future.

Now, there is more to gather and many of us have plenty of room to store our finds in.

We are encouraged by salespeople 24 hours a day. Our governments also encourage us to consume "for the sake of the economy". With so much temptation, most people are only too willing to give in to the urge.

The wide availability of plastic credit, and the fact that credit cards have many people thinking that they're not spending real money, makes impulse purchases more common than ever.

We all have pride to some degree.

That can make us want the latest, the best and, especially, something bigger than our neighbor. It used to be called "Keeping up with the Jones".

This is one of the reasons we are almost drowning in a world-wide clutter epidemic.

## **What's the Problem with Clutter?**

### ***Danger***

Clutter is dangerous. It is a fire hazard, attracts vermin, dust and worse.

Any clutter around your home is costing you money and time to maintain it, clean it and also pay for insurance on it.

It can be a hazard when people are just walking around your home. If you have young children, they could easily fall when playing.

If someone is injured or if the stuff is damaged, that could mean an insurance claim. You'd get some money but probably have some stress and perhaps not have that friend visit you again.

### ***The Cost***

Most people say that they don't have time to deal with the clutter as it accumulates. They don't realize that they and their family are paying every day for the privilege of storing and maintaining things which are often of no practical use or benefit to them.

### ***Your Health and Lifestyle***

Your stress level is higher whenever you see or stumble over some of the clutter you have.

It puts enormous pressure on everybody in your home and restricts the experience and enjoyment you share there.



## Timing

When we decide to tackle our clutter problem, we may feel that we don't have time to make a meaningful impact.

So, maybe we should wait until ....



It doesn't matter when we think will be a better time. The truth is the best time is a *firm date within the next seven days.*

We might not have time to conquer the whole problem.

But, just clearing a small section of the problem will increase our enthusiasm to continue.

Even a small success will help keep you focused on reducing the rate at which the problem is growing around us.

Waiting for winter, or until the dog has its puppies, will condition us to accept excuses and we'll accept more delays without realizing that the problem continues to get worse.

## Mind over Clutter

Henry Ford said something like, "Whether you think you can, or you think you cannot, you're probably right."

The point he made was that your thinking affects your ability and level of success.

People can mentally switch off from almost anything which they don't want to deal with.

Many people tend to ignore the growing tide of clutter around their own home, but still say they are disgusted when they see other people whose homes are no more disorganized than their own.

Some people who feel that they must start to tackle their clutter, quickly become stressed when they realize the size of the task which they have ahead of them.

There are many other tasks which compete for their attention, so they often put the clutter problem aside.

But, each time they think about the problem and put off taking action, they are creating and then re-enforcing a habit of delaying action.

Their subconscious starts to act on the message that this problem is really difficult and not as urgent or important as other interests they have.

It's not easy for everyone to overcome that convenient excuse which lets us off the hook.



We need to adjust our mindset and change the messages like, "I am not sure that I can handle this", which we feed our subconscious. We must focus on the harm which clutter can do to our relationships, our self-image and, eventually, our health.

The best way to start dealing with the problem is to set aside enough time to go through all parts of your home and see exactly what the clutter situation is.

When you have that clear in your mind, you will be able to focus on what really needs to be done and avoid unnecessary worry caused by lack of knowledge.

You can space out the various parts of the task to fit in with your other commitments.

You don't have to deal with the whole problem by yourself.

If you still feel overwhelmed, don't hesitate to ask for help from your family, relatives or even friends.

Until you actually start to take action, you will still be influenced by your mental image of perhaps being unable to handle the problem.

That will change when you know that a good plan and steady progress will make the mountain you see crumble much faster than you expect.

## **Benefits of being Clutter-free**

Can you make a mental image of how your home and your life will be better when there is no clutter?

Cleaning will be much quicker and require less energy.

You will get the benefits of a larger home without the cost and stress of moving!

You won't have to waste a lot of energy and time tidying up your home before you can entertain any guests. That will mean that everyone, especially you and your family will get much more enjoyment out of those social and business occasions.

You will be able to complete tasks faster instead of always needing to search for essential documents, tools or other important items before you can start each task.

Your children will learn that keeping clutter to a minimum is easy enough for anyone to do.

These lessons will stick better because they see you set a good example instead of just hearing you talk about it.

Encouraging them to keep their own possessions organized and their rooms clean will help them through the rest of their lives.

## Getting Started

When your rough plan is ready, look for something small which you can do which will make a noticeable difference in the home.

Do you have:

- ▶ A pile of magazines and newspapers in the family room?
- ▶ Tools spread around your workshop?
- ▶ An unfinished hobby project in everyone's way anywhere in the house?
- ▶ Paint tins taking over the garage?
- ▶ A wardrobe that can't be closed because it has too many clothes which you don't wear anymore?



There are definite benefits with starting small; you get a buzz from completing the first task successfully and you start developing the de-cluttering idea into a habit.

Your activity may also encourage more action from other members of the family.

It's important to not push them when you are first becoming serious about de-cluttering yourself.

Your best chance of gaining their cooperation is to finish your first project yourself. That will give you at least a little credibility which is likely to work better than just demanding they do their share.

## **Get Your Family Involved**

Getting the support of your immediate family members is really critical for success while getting your home uncluttered.

For us, the best way to do that was to start with our own bedroom and the study which we shared for work we brought home.

My idea was that we should try to set an example, have some small success, and then bring our children aboard the project.

This was better than just talking about something when they hadn't seen us do anything about it until that point.

Discuss the whole de-cluttering project with them and try to get their active support.

Ask them to take responsibility for their own possessions and any rubbish they produced directly, like discarded papers, old craft projects and trash.

That worked well.

We helped them when they asked for it and gave them encouragement and recognition for what they achieved.

My daughter was particularly interested in recycling, so she gave all of us pointers about how we could reasonably do more of that.

All good leaders know that setting an example is usually the most effective approach.

Don't push anyone else as hard as you work yourself.

Give yourself time to rest when needed and don't deny yourself time for your other interests.

If you seem to become a fanatic about clearing the clutter, instead of someone who is getting on with the task and looking forward to the benefits, you will discourage the rest of your family very quickly.

If you become tired and your progress slows noticeably, the others are likely to become even more unenthusiastic.

They may regard your previous energetic action as a short-term idea, instead

of a serious desire.

Give them a hearing about how to do parts of the de-cluttering which they are involved in. Even if some of their suggestions are impractical, they are at least showing interest.

Recognize their efforts and successes, however small.

Be careful not to favor the same person’s efforts all the time, even if they make the biggest contribution.

If possible, suggest that each person deal with the clutter in areas which they use most often.

## One Step at a Time

When we recognize that we have a clutter problem, the first reaction is probably despair at the size of the task we have to deal with.

You know what probably took years to accumulate would be impossible to clear up in just one weekend.

Trying to do too much too quickly will tire us out and interfere with our ability to handle the other regular tasks.

But, many people take the all-or-nothing approach and almost always stop when they become too tired.

We could become so discouraged that we would find excuses that kept us from making further attempts to clear out the clutter.

I understand the desire to get through it and have it hauled away.

Just slow down, because you're looking at it without knowing the whole situation. You don't really know how much is there yet.

You need to review every section of your home so that you can plan your attack on the problem.

Planning ahead before you start to deal with any of the clutter will mean you avoid wasted effort and make best use of your energy and time.

Give yourself half an hour, or whatever time is needed, to review the state of clutter and how it's affecting your home.

Just write down anything you notice, good and bad, about your clutter situation.

Use any method you are comfortable with to set out the situation with each room or other area.

I'm a bit old-fashioned. I used a large sheet of blank paper with a box for each room.

I made a note of the points for each room in its box and then made more detailed notes, if needed, for all the rooms on a separate pad.

You could, of course, use a laptop or a tablet or similar device if you have



them.

Each area of clutter was marked as either:

- ▶ Urgent
- ▶ Major task (needs more than one hour or more than one person)
- ▶ Will provide space to move things to temporarily when it is cleared
- ▶ Will make daily life easier.

I also noted who owned the items which were in each cluttered area. It's important to give each person an appropriate level of responsibility for their stuff.

The next step was to give each person a couple of days to start sorting out their own rooms.

I was careful to find suitable areas where we could move gear to when we started clearing the junk from each of the rooms.

Work out how long it will probably take to clear a room?

You don't want to move stuff from the room you are doing to another room unless you believe that you will be able to put that stuff in its final location on the same day.

You need to have space where you can keep items which you are giving away or hoping to sell where they will not be in anyone's way and are unlikely to be damaged or mislaid.

## **The Storage Trap!**

One of the fastest-growing industries in America is providing secure storage for the overflow from people's homes. It is also a thriving business segment in most other developed countries.

This shows that more people are collecting more stuff than they can use. The problem, like the storage companies' profits continue to grow!

Some people will have furniture and other items which they cannot fit into their present home but plan to use in their next one.

But, I expect, a significant amount of this extra storage is just a costly way of moving people's clutter further out of sight.

If you don't have a good reason for keeping the extra "stuff" which you feel is adequate compensation for the cost, time and stress involved in storing it, consider getting rid of it.

You might have relatives or friends who would happy take it and make use of it. That could be extra money in your pocket or, at least, a weight off your mind.

Otherwise, you could offer it for sale or donate it to a charity which you support.

Although you might not get anything near what you think the item is worth, you will benefit by not having to look after it for years to come.

Whatever you buy with the money will be better and immediately useful to you.

## Piles of Paperwork

Most countries require that everyone keep paperwork related to their income and tax returns for a certain number of years.



Other personal records, including marriage and birth certificates and other papers with legal significance should be kept secure with a copy also stored at another location.

When you sort paper, put it where you want to keep it.

If you don't need it anymore, put it in a box where other family members can check

whether they want it or bin it if you are sure they won't.

You are on the right track when you buy a shredder. Apart from the slight possibility of cutting themselves, some of my colleagues worry about shredding the only copy of a document which they might need later.

But, my view is that having a shredder in their office will encourage them to keep their files up to date. That will reduce the amount of clutter we produce too!

One common problem when we start to clear our paper clutter is that you might start to read every piece of paper before considering whether or not you, or someone else, might want to keep it. You just need to read very little of most documents before you have a good idea of whether you really need to keep it.

The best strategy is to deal with each paper the first time you pick it up.

The 3-way test is usually effective and fast.

Decide whether:

1. You need to keep it (and where)?
2. Who needs it?
3. Does it have to be filed for legal reasons?

If it needs to be stored with other papers that you haven't found yet, you should put it in a special area with a sticker on it showing what needs to be done with it later.



Otherwise, discard it and get the next document.

Magazines are bulky and most are already partly out-of-date when you get them because of the time taken in publishing them.

So, be firm about those you keep for any length of time.

Clip or copy the pages you might need for reference and bin the rest.

Newspapers are also struggling to stay relevant with so many options for getting real up-to-the-minute news.

You might want to support your local newspaper and get an online subscription to others you want to keep reading.

If you find scraps of paper with unknown phone numbers, you might want to call the number to check. Be aware of time zones if it is a number in another country.

Otherwise, dump the note and wait for them to contact you again. They surely will if it was something important.

### ***Fix Your Files***



Filing cabinets are great for storing documents but they are also a haven for clutter.

Old documents are usually allowed to keep filling space in cabinets and folders. We buy more cabinets and folders but the major cost is the space which all the un-necessary files take up and the extra work in maintaining them.

Go through your files and dispose of papers which are no longer needed. Be careful about

the laws in your area, particularly regarding documents related to taxes and other legislation.

### *Electronic Copies*

Many documents can be stored as electronic files which can help to reduce the storage space and cleaning time required.

Be careful that all your important files are on quality media and that some of the data is checked regularly for quality.

The stability of some forms of electronic storage may not always be what you think. Tapes have a limited life and disk drives can become unreliable over time.

I was told the USB drives are currently one of the most reliable types of back-up media as there are no moving parts.

Make sure that you have copies of your important data in a separate, secure location where only you and people you trust have access.

## **Two Heads are Better than One**

If you don't have family members available to help you on some of your clutter clearing sessions, you might ask a reliable and understanding friend to help you occasionally, or for just one session.

You can repay them by helping them with any sort of task they need an extra pair of hands for, maybe even their own de-cluttering!

This works really well when you are clearing an area like a garage or anywhere that they would have in their own home.

My nephew helped my husband with our garage. The nephew was happy to do it because my husband helped him with his car at times.

I got my sister to help me go through my wardrobe and I helped her with hers a few weeks later.

We started on the wardrobe by setting up four large clean cartons labeled Keep, Go, Donate and Check.

Then, we just stacked everything on the bed, except for a few things which we could see immediately would have to "Go"!

We didn't push ourselves and actually finished more quickly than I'd expected.

I am sure that it would have been a lot harder to do the task alone. Her company made the time pass more quickly, and sharing the lifting obviously saved me a lot of effort.

Her suggestions about some of the items were valuable because she knew me so well.

The contents of the "Go" box will go to the same charity shop as the donated items. They will recycle the damaged stuff as cleaning cloths which gives them a little extra for their charity work.

## Your Clothes and Accessories

Most of us store clothes that we have not worn for a long time and will probably never wear in the future.



Some are kept because we believe that we will one day be able to fit into them again.

Others may be treasured souvenirs of special occasions or expensive outfits which we are just hoping we will have a reason

to wear again.

Because most materials deteriorate and fashions change, a better course might be to clear these items from our cupboards so we can add a few current items.

Then, we can get new gear in the current styles when we reach our desired weight or the invitations start to arrive.

Start with your shoes. While some women are well-known shoe-buyers, both men and women may be shoe-hoarders who don't bother to discard shoes which they don't wear.

Some even keep damaged ones with the idea that they will get them repaired. But, that doesn't happen often because we often find the repair cost could be more than the cost of that great new pair we saw in a shop yesterday!



Instead of just dumping layers of shoes at the bottom of your cupboard or on a high shelf, get some cheap plastic shoe bags or

racks which fit over the inside of the wardrobe door. Then, you can transfer those you want to wear to the new system and put the rest in the charity and dump boxes.

Your shoes will be protected so that you get more wear from them and can easily see them in the clear pockets. If they litter the floor of the wardrobe, they will get dusty and may even be damaged just when you need them.

My next step would be removing any clothes and accessories which need repair or are either out of fashion or just beyond help.

### *Memento Clothing*

If you have some clothing that you don't wear, but keep as a memento of some special social or sporting occasion, put it in a tight plastic bag and store it in a box, not in the wardrobe with the clothes you wear.

This protects it from accidental damage and lets you make better use of the extra wardrobe space.



## Protect Yourself

You may be very anxious to get started dealing with your clutter, so it is gone as soon as possible.

I understand how you feel, but I want to mention a problem we had when we were ready and eager to start our own clean-up.

Neither of us were regular exercisers (except for moving clutter around every day).

We were not prepared for the extra effort involved and tried to do too much too quickly.



We didn't understand the risks present in some of the clutter we were going to handle. That could have been an even more serious problem.

Even if you have been doing some sort of regular sport or exercise program, protect yourself by getting your doctor to give you a check before you start.

You will probably be using some muscles that have done little heavy work for years. You may also work in very confined spaces.

People hurt themselves by twisting or bending in ways which their bodies cannot cope with.

It's good insurance and certainly cheaper than the medical bills and other problems you might get if you don't take sufficient care.

Ask your doctor about information on how to lift things and bend over. We all do those things a lot and a lot of us get unexpected injuries from not doing them the right way.

Get any protective gear which you might need. If you are dealing with garden chemicals, paints or other things found in many garages, you might want to get a respirator, or at least a protective mask and glasses.

Dust of any kind can cause problems in our airways. Some of the dust from wood-turning and other hobbies can be dangerous.

Protective gloves are essential. You can get gloves designed for use near different substances. We don't re-use gloves and other light gear which has been covered with any substance. The cost of new gear is usually low and it's better to be that little bit safer.

Steel-capped boots can save you from serious injury if you are moving heavy equipment. Instead of boots, you might prefer steel-capped business shoes or even joggers if you would get more wear from them later on.

Get cloths or plastic sheets to protect areas where you are sorting liquids and powders which might spill. Make sure the sheets will stop the type of liquids you are dealing with.

## **Around Your Home**

### ***Dealing with Your Kitchen***

The kitchen is one of the busiest and most important rooms in most homes. It also can be the most cluttered. There can be problems because you have hot liquids, sharp knives, electric cookers and other devices and everyone is probably more interested in their food than being careful.

Start decluttering your kitchen when you will have at least a clear hour before someone wants to start preparing a meal.

Tell anyone that is around, they're needed to help and they can hardly refuse because everyone uses the kitchen a lot!

Have some boxes for sorting items into and some rubbish bags for the clutter. Make sure those bags are strong because you may be ditching sharp items like broken utensils and pieces of glass.

Recycle what you can.

Do one bench or shelf at a time. One person (you) should pick up the item, decide its fate and let someone else put it away or in a box or bag.

That will save time for both of you. If you each pick up items and take them to their spot, you will have to either sort something which is in that area or waste time going back to where you were before.

If you can't remember when you used an item or how to use it, it is a candidate for either the Donate or Go pile.

You will probably find some stuff which has been left in the kitchen instead of being returned to its owner's room. That's okay, but they may have wasted money buying a replacement or the item may have been damaged while in the kitchen.

Do you have more cutlery, plates, glassware or even electric equipment than you actually ever will use?

If you are unsure whether to keep or discard some items, put them away in a box in another part of your home for a couple of months.

If no-one has shown any desire to use the item (apart from stuff which is not needed during that part of the year), the only decision is whether to donate it or try to sell it and make a few dollars.

Many families use the kitchen tables and benches to do homework and other stuff. Try to ensure that each person takes everything they bring into the kitchen back to their own rooms when they finish so that the kitchen is always available for preparing and eating food.

Discard damaged dishes and other equipment unless it is expensive and you want to get it repaired. Crockery and cutlery which have chips or loose pieces may be difficult to keep clean and germ-free.

If you have expensive dinnerware which is rarely used, think about selling it or giving it to a relative who will actually use it. It might be nice to look at but do you need the bother of keeping it polished or protected every month to be able to show it off maybe once a year?

Do you keep disposable items like margarine containers or soda bottles because they might be handy one day?



My dad used those plastic containers for screws and other small items in his workshop. But, I rarely saw him get anything out of those containers. He always had new packets of screws and nails because he said it took too long to find the right-sized one in the old containers.

### ***Food Cupboard or Pantry***

Have you checked all the items in your food cupboard lately?

Some items like some Christmas puddings may actually taste better a year after they were made but many other items should be discarded or used in less than twelve months.

Even canned goods and preserves have a use-by date. I know an elderly couple that love their preserves. But, they eat less of them each year and fewer neighbors and relatives want them because they also use less than previously.

They now provide some to a couple of charities in the area who prepare meals for housebound people. But, they are still filling up their pantry with more preserves every year!

A large pantry, or a large refrigerator, can encourage you to buy and store more of some items than you or even your whole family will consume.

Even if you get a bulk discount, that can be false economy. If you can't use it, the money you spent is wasted along with the space needed to store the items.

Always label the containers with the expiry or “best before” dates. Those dates should be kept to for safety sake but also because fresher supplies are likely to be tastier and more nutritious. Many food items lose some of their benefits over time.

## Your Bathroom



This is probably the other high-traffic area which is also a prime clutter-creation zone.

Your bathroom is a storage center for personal stuff and cleaning products as well as medicines and make-up.

We use electric shavers, heaters and other items often without enough regard for the possibility of getting them wet with disastrous results! Always dry them well, wrap them and store them away from the possibility of becoming wet.

All medicines have a shelf-life, even those supplied without prescription. When you stop taking a medicine of any kind, don't discard it down the toilet or in the bin. Some seem to escape and be picked up by children or even curious adults. Always take them to your druggist for proper disposal.

There are often containers with no more than two drops of the original contents, plugs which don't fit and baths or basins produced in the last fifty years and make-up that is a distinctly different color to the original. Dump the junk with appropriate care.

Make-up which is even slightly past its use-by date can be as dangerous as



expired medicines. The containers of all types of make-up should be labeled with the date you got it if it does not have a use-by date from the producer on it.

Check with your supplier for the maximum time which each type of make-up should be used. The damage which might be caused to your skin by old make-up is quite serious.

Anything which hasn't been used after you first tried it should be dumped.

You can get various wire racks which suspend from your shower to hold the shampoo etc.

They are worthwhile because everything is where you can reach it when your eyes are full of shampoo and you get more space available on the shelves.

## **Your Garage**

If you have a garage which has more space than you need for your car and its accessories, you probably have clutter rampant in that space.

This section will give you ideas and motivation for reclaiming the space and making better use of it in the future.

The garage is a high-risk area because we often keep garden supplies as well as materials for our car there. Spills and leaks are common.

Sports equipment and kids' large toys are also dumped here. Many people only start to realize they have a problem when they have difficulty edging their car into the garage.

Do a review of the stuff which has accumulated in your garage at least a couple of days before you want to start the clean-out.

What sort of junk can you see? If there are a number of large items, make sure that you have a helper available, even if they aren't in the garage all the time.

You may need to arrange an area where you can put material which you take from your garage until you are ready to sort it and move it to its final destination.

### ***Do you need a Dumpster?***

If you have a very large quantity, you may need a dumpster.

These can be hired for a couple of days, a week or longer in most areas. Be realistic about your ability to move the trash into the dumpster when you decide the hire period. Most companies will extend the hire period for an additional fee.

Make the arrangements at least a week before you want to use the dumpster. If possible, have space available on your property for the dumpster to be set down on.

If you need to put the dumpster on the street, you'll need approval from your local authorities and probably have to pay a fee for a license.



You may need to allow a couple of extra days notice so that you have a copy of the approval when the dumpster is delivered.

The different suppliers will all have their own terms and restrictions. Check what materials you must **not** put into the dumpster when you hire it. That information is usually printed on the hire contract.

Don't rely on earlier experience because the regulations change and the hire companies have to amend their rules so everyone is in compliance. Dumping the wrong stuff can cause legal problems.

You can also get smaller dumpsters for green waste from some companies. If you have a choice, favor companies which recycle these materials over those which just dump it in general landfill.

If you have, or can rent or borrow a trailer, you can set that up outside the garage and put larger items into it as you work through the garage. You will be ready to move those items into the garage or to the charity of your choice when you finish. You and any helpers will not have them in your way while you are doing the cleanup.

When you have all the material out of the garage, you may want to clean and seal the floor to improve appearance and safety in the future.

Then, you need to plan where you will put the material which is going back into the garage. Take your time on this, because you will probably not want to make changes for a few months at least.

## **De-cluttering Children's Rooms**

Older children need to be responsible for keeping clutter to a minimum themselves.

Give them some suggestions about how to sort out their rooms and then give them reasonable time to do it.

If they don't cooperate, point out that it will mean more work for you. If that continues, consider whether there should be some penalty.

But, keep in mind the best result for them to start to deal with their own clutter.

Always make younger children part of the de-cluttering process in their rooms. Be patient and generous with your time.

Get them to help pack up seasonal gear and then put it in another part of your home if you have it available. Having the extra storage space in their room will be a sort of reward for their cooperation.

You might make it a game with young children. Even put on some music while you drop trash in the box.

Have special sessions before important days like birthdays and Christmas.

At these times, you might want to put in a box for items they want to donate to charity for other kids who don't have many toys or clothes.

These steps will help them develop habits that will help them through the rest of their lives.

## **Making your Bedroom Peaceful again**

With the fast pace of modern living, having a peaceful refuge to relax and sleep is most important.

But, the bedrooms in many homes often become extensions of our family rooms or even our offices!

The negative effects can be serious.

All of us need at least seven hours of sleep a night. If it's interrupted or too light, our ability to handle our daily tasks can be much less.

Cat-naps during the day are helpful but they won't replace what we lose from missing out on the main sleep session each night.

Many efficiency experts recommend preparing a to-do list last thing before we go to sleep so we are ready to move on it first thing in the morning.

It's probably much better to empty our conscious mind of work matters and any other concerns so that we get the best sleep possible. Then, we can expect to be in a better frame of mind to start quickly in the morning.

If you are not getting enough quality rest, try these suggestions. I know that everyone has different needs, but they have helped me and people I know improve their sleep and other parts of their lives have benefited as a consequence.

When you start to de-clutter your bedroom, remove any stereos, televisions etc. They almost guarantee that we will be in an excited frame of mind when we try to sleep. Our sleep pattern will be interrupted as we won't settle properly.

Yes, keep a clock radio to help you wake at the right time but please don't listen to it just before you go to sleep.

Avoid having any snacks or drink-making gear in the bedroom. These will cause your digestive system to keep working during the night which will reduce the amount and quality of the restorative work which your body will be able to do in that time.

That will have negative consequences for you during the day. It will also

mean that you will wake more frequently to use the toilet, so your sleep patterns will be interrupted.

The biggest clutter dumping area in many bedrooms is under the bed. We put things there to get them out of sight and to avoid falling over them, but we forget to retrieve them and put them in a more appropriate storage space.

That area also is often less clean than areas we can see more easily.

Make clearing that area a priority.

Put the stuff on top of the bed until you have gone through the cupboards and shelves. Being in plain sight will ensure that you deal with them speedily.

There are probably too many books and magazines in the bedroom. Move them to other rooms where you will see them each day and throw out or donate any you don't need any more.

Don't keep any work materials in your bedroom.

Your bedroom closet probably has many items you don't know are there. An afternoon spent cleaning out your closet will probably answer a few "has anybody seen my ..." questions as well as producing many items which you no longer have any realistic use for.

Try to decide whether to keep or discard items the first time you do a clean-up. Leaving them until next time, just increases the residual clutter and delays better use of your limited storage space.

Please don't add more cupboards or fit extra shelves in the ones you have unless you need all the items which you stack there. A full closet is not efficient. You need to have some space so that you can see what you want to and easily pull it out and put it back later.

Put a hamper in your bedroom for used clothing but don't make it so big that you accumulate stuff in it for days.

When you take clothes out of the closet and remove the hangers, put the hangers on the handle of the closet so you can quickly find them when you return the clothes to the closet later.

## **Don't Use these Excuses for Clutter!**

The reasons below are commonly used to hold on to clutter. They make be reasonable in a few rare instances but they are mostly thin excuses for lack of action.

**It will be useful one day:** The number one excuse for storing everything from empty margarine containers to that anvil you couldn't resist at the country auction.

The truth is that your anvil will cost you more in chiropractic fees than you will ever get from using it. Collecting odd screws and such things in cleaned disposable containers is counter-productive anyway, because it will take you too long to find the right screw for the job. For each item that does get used, you'll probably provide storage space for a thousand that just collect dust and rust.

Use your storage space for stuff you know you will use. Then, you will be able to organize your home so you get more enjoyment from it and you'll be more efficient!

**It belongs to a family member:** I understand that each member of the family will have items which they value more than other people do. The best answer is to make them responsible for maintaining the item(s).

If they were gifts to your very young children who cannot be expected to look after them, put them in a storage area and explain that they will have to ask for you to get them when they want to use them.

**Gifts or Bequests:** We all naturally feel that we should respect the generosity of others who give or leave things for us. But, many of these items become a sort of albatross which needs to be cared for, protected and even insured while providing no benefit to any member of our family.

If they were from non-relatives, I believe that they will understand if you dispose of the item. Discuss your idea with them where it is possible.

Otherwise, make your decision based on what you believe is best for you.

After all, they surely wanted you to get the most benefit possible from their

gift.

After all, a real gift is given without conditions, and you should be free to give it to someone else when it is a burden rather than useful.

Where items from family members are concerned, we usually feel a bit constrained.

But, if the presence of the item or the time and cost of its upkeep is a burden, offer it to other members of your wider family provided they will maintain it as you have done.

If no-one wants it, make a decision whether you want to donate it to some institution, where appropriate, sell or donate it.

**It holds Memories for Me:** Sentiment will keep us looking after the mementos your parents gave you all those years ago. But, when space is too limited, you could photograph the item and store the photo on a USB stick. Then, if it is clean and usable, you might pass it on to someone that will use it. That's not dishonoring the giver; it actually increases the benefits their gift provides.

**It cost me a LOT of Money:** The cost is not as important as the value you get from it now. If it is causing you worry or financial stress, the total cost you are paying is increasing every day.

Unless you want to keep punishing yourself, put it up for sale or (where possible) donate it and get a tax write-off.

Then, you can use the money to buy something you will benefit from now!

**This could be worth a fortune one day:** Are you an expert on the value of that sort of item? If not, you should get an expert to advise you. Don't bother with people that knock on your door wanting to buy junk or antiques.

Go online and look for similar items which have been auctioned. That can be a good start.

If you don't know what the item should be called, take a picture of it and use Google's Picture Search to look for photos of similar items online.

The prices which items are offered at are not always a reliable guide. They

may be low because the seller doesn't know the true value. Or, they may be overvalued because the seller is hoping to find clueless buyers who will pay his inflated price.

Holding onto something in the vague hope of making a lot of money some time in the future is high-risk.

You need to be as sure as possible that the item will still be highly valued when you want to sell and that you will find eager buyers prepared to pay your price.

A major factor in the value of anything is the condition of your particular item. Unless books or magazines are in "just printed" condition and securely wrapped to prevent insect or other damage, you won't get top price.

It might be better to see what you can get now and decide if that would enable you to do something you want which will give you immediate benefits.

I might need it and they're hard to get: We use this excuse for everything from extra cutlery to that fur wrap which was old when your mom was young.

In your decluttering action, take out any excess clothing or kitchen items and other rarely used items.

Pack them up and store them for about six months. If you find a need, unwrap and use them.

But, do another review after that six months to see what you never even thought about.

Then, decide if you want to keep storing and maintaining those items or pass them on to people who can use them now?

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## **My Secret**

Okay, I confess that I put the "excuses" section here at the end of my book so that it would help you to be firmer in your commitment to winning your personal campaign on clutter for your sake and your future.

And, you might also find the responses to those excuses useful with other members of your family.

I wish you more happiness and a healthier and more successful future in your new clutter-free world.

***Pamela Parsons***



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