

# ESSENTIALS OF DECLUTTERING



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# CHAPTER 1: WHY YOU SHOULD DECLUTTER YOUR HOME & COMMITMENTS

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**B**efore you can get started with actual physical decluttering of your possessions, as well as the decluttering of other aspects of your life, including relationships and commitments, it is essential to understand why you are doing it, and what the benefits will be for you personally. While the benefits differ somewhat depending on the individual, there are many exciting changes that happen in everyone's lives when they begin to get rid of their excess. If you are ready to start decluttering, the following benefits will ring true to you and will help to reinforce the decision you are making regarding the value of living with less.

## 1. LESS STRESS AND WORRY.

Most of us don't realize unless we stop to think about it intentionally, that material possessions cause us stress and worry. How many times have you sat down to take a rest or read a good book, but felt some guilt when looking around because the dishes should be put away, that load of laundry should be folded, the carpet is in need of cleaning, that chair still needs to be fixed and the stack of mail should be gone through today. Or maybe you see an old photo on the fridge that reminds you that you really should call Aunt Elaine today, it's been three months since you spoke to her last, or that invitation reminds you that you should RSVP for that party you really don't want to go to, but feel obligated to attend. Decluttering eliminates much of this type of stress.

## 2. NO MORE GUILT.

Many items we own were purchased because of who we think we should be, or who we were at one time. Whenever we look at them, we feel guilt because we spent money on the item to begin with and we aren't using it, and it also reminds us that we have failed at being that person we thought we should be. Examples from my personal experience: The do-it-yourself sushi kit sitting on top of the fridge, the yoga block and stretch bands out in the garage, the pressure cooker in the back of the cupboard and the collection of jeans for that blanket you were supposed to sew years ago. Decluttering lets you let go of those expectations and accept yourself for who you are currently, and make changes on a more intentional basis.

### 3. MORE TIME.

Believe it or not, the average person spends a lot of their time accumulating stuff, taking care of it, earning money to insure it, fix it, worry about it getting broken, or feeling bad that it isn't used. We spend a lot of time just thinking about things, let alone the time we spend working to purchase them to begin with! When you declutter the excess in your life and leave only those items that are meaningful and useful in your life, you are left with fewer items to think about, clean and care for. This also extends to relationship and commitment decluttering. As you cultivate only those relationships and commitments that bring value to your life, you will have more time personally to focus on what is truly important. Decluttering gives you your time back.

### 4. MORE SPACE.

One of the biggest benefits of decluttering is space. Have you ever noticed how nice it is to walk into a new hotel room, or tour a model home for sale, or walk through an art gallery? They all have something in common. They have minimal items displayed and out in the open. The space is a breath of fresh air to most of us who live in homes with wall to wall furniture, hardly an open space on the wall, or drawers in the kitchen that isn't jam packed full of utensils. Having so much excess affects how we feel in our homes, the space where we are supposed to be most comfortable. Imagine walking into your home and not feeling overwhelmed by anything that you see, no piles of things that need to be taken care of, not many pictures on the wall competing for your attention, and space to live, and breathe.

### 5. MORE INTENTIONAL LIVING.

Once you have rid yourself of all the extra stuff you have accumulated over the years that is not bringing any value to your life, you are naturally able to turn your focus to what really matters, because it's all that's left for you to concentrate on. When you don't have extra clutter around the house, it is much easier to see that painting you created when you were in college, and realize that you would truly enjoy painting again. Or, when you are able to easily reach all of your kitchen utensils and appliances that you use regularly, it makes cooking that much more enjoyable and more likely to happen on a regular basis. When you have stripped the relationships and commitments from your life that are taking up time and energy, you are able to intentionally focus on those that are the most important to you. Decluttering allows you to live intentionally and with focus.

Hopefully all of these benefits will appeal to you, the aspiring declutterer, and give you the motivation to get started. Take a few minutes and write down the first three benefits that come to your mind when you think about owning fewer things, or freeing yourself from relationships and commitments that are not benefiting you.

## CHAPTER 2: REMOVING PHYSICAL CLUTTER

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**I**t's time to take action and begin the process of removing the excess material possessions from your home that are taking up space, causing internal and external stress and contributing to overwhelm in your personal space.

I'm not going to sugar coat it, this step is difficult, very difficult at times, but it is absolutely essential to reaping the benefits of a more minimalist lifestyle. You must be willing to ask yourself questions and answer them honestly within yourself, then take the action you need to take. The action is the hardest part, it is usually always easier to do nothing than something, or to drag out acting on the decision you know you should make. This post will help you with the initial steps of decluttering. There will be additional posts to help with the more difficult aspects.

### STEP 1: CHOOSE A ROOM THAT YOU WILL DECLUTTER.

Any room in your home works, although I would recommend starting with one of your main living areas so you can see the results immediately, which helps keep your motivation going to continue through the rest of your home. Your kitchen, living room or bedroom would be ideal.

### STEP 2: COLLECT THREE CONTAINERS; EITHER BINS, BOXES OR BAGS.

You will need one for donations or selling, one for items you will question and one for trash. When you have these ready, you will make a sweep of the room collecting all obvious items that will go in each of those three containers. The 'question' container is for those items that you feel like you should probably get rid of, but want to think about for a little while. You should do this only on all the items that are out in the open.

### STEP 3: GO THROUGH ALL DRAWERS, CUPBOARDS, UNDER BEDS & BEHIND COUCHES.

in the room, doing the same thing, making one general clean sweep and putting the items that are very obvious in their respective containers. You may have quite a few items in your 'question' container by now, that's okay. You should also be seeing the room looking a bit clearer with more space. You probably still have a lot of stuff still in the drawers and on top of furniture, that's okay too.

## STEP 4: DECLUTTER DIFFICULT ITEMS.

Now that you have removed all of the 'easy' items and placed them in their respective containers, it is time to get down to business really decluttering the difficult items, you know, the ones that evoke those pesky emotions of guilt, obligation, failure or one upsmanship. These items are by far the most difficult to get rid of, but the most essential to let go to reap the maximum benefits of decluttering. To help you with this part of decluttering, you will need to look at each possession individually and ask yourself the following questions:

What emotion do I feel when I see this item, picture, piece of clothing? (happiness, sadness, guilt, motivation, obligation)

### **Does the emotion contribute to my happiness in life on a regular basis?**

If the item is being kept out of guilt that you should be using it, or obligation because someone gifted it to you, or because you don't want to 'waste' the money you spent on it, recognize and acknowledge the emotion, then let the item go. It really is as simple as that. If you need more help, as these emotions can be difficult, keep reading this series and I'll cover how to get past them in more depth. In the mean time, if there is something you just CAN'T part with, but is causing negative emotions, put it in the 'question' container for now.

### **Do I use this item on a daily, weekly, monthly or seasonal basis?**

If your answer is no, this item MUST go in the donate or sell container, don't fool yourself into thinking you will start using it now, and don't hold onto the guilt any longer of having it in the back of your mind that you need to start using it, even though you obviously don't want to, or you would have already done so!

### **Is this item a 'What if' item or duplicate item?**

Duplicates and 'what if' items are so hard to get rid of as we usually think that we will use it if our other one breaks! Don't get sucked into this, it is very rare that you actually do need a backup for things, and the extra space you'll have is worth not keeping two of everything. A good rule of thumb is if it costs less than \$20 to replace, get rid of duplicates or 'what if' items.

Once you have gone through all items in your room and put them in their respective containers, and asked the difficult questions above, you should be left with ONLY those items that bring you joy and happiness in life, and those items that you use on a very regular basis. In truth, there should not really be much left. We tend to use 20% of our belongings 80% of the time.

## STEP 5: DECLUTTER YOUR WALLS AND FURNITURE.

At this point, you have most likely gone through all the smaller items and drawers as well as other hidden areas like shelves, baskets, boxes, under furniture and other nooks and crannies. Now it's time to take a good hard look at what you have on the walls, and your larger pieces of furniture. These items can also be difficult to declutter, depending on how much you originally paid for them, or at the thought of 'wasting money' by getting rid of them. Remember your goals, to have only what is useful and brings happiness. Owning fewer pieces of furniture will make room for your loved ones to have personal space and will also mean less to clean. Having only a very select few pictures on your walls will also draw your eye to those scenes that have the most meaning in your life. With pictures, you can also rotate them during the year to enjoy different genres during the various seasons and holidays.

Getting rid of large pieces of furniture like couches, beds or desks is one of the harder things for me to do, and may be so for most people. A good way to transition if you can't make the plunge immediately, is to move a piece of furniture to a different part of the house, and live without it for a while in the original area. You can then decide if you really need it, or if you are enjoying the extra space more. So move that extra end table or love seat to the basement for a couple weeks and see if you even miss it!

Now that you have gone through the entire contents of the room, you should have quite a bit more space and fewer belongings. You may have quite a bit in your 'question' container, and that is fine. Just store it out of site for a set period of time, I like 30 days, and if you need anything from it, take it out and put it back in the room. Most of the time you will find that you didn't need any of it after all, and will end up donating or selling the contents. Be sure to donate and sell the items in your donate/sell box quickly so they don't end up being stored in your garage. Take out the trash in the trash container.

If you need more detailed help decluttering on a room-by-room basis check out the following posts:

[Decluttering Your Wardrobe](#)

[Decluttering Your Pantry](#)



*Congratulations!* You've just decluttered your first room! You should feel an immediate sense of accomplishment, relief and much less stress when entering the room. If you are feeling especially motivated by the results, move on to the next room in the house. If you need a break, take one, decluttering can be both physically and emotionally draining. Go at your own pace, whether that is a room a day, a week or a month. The important thing is to keep going and don't lose your momentum.

## CHAPTER 3: KEEP FLAT SURFACES CLEAR

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Once you've gone through the first major round of decluttering, you'll probably find, like I did, that it becomes difficult to hold on to the simplicity due to what people term as 'clutter creep'. It's sneaky and likes to show up everywhere, but most especially on inviting, clear, flat surfaces like kitchen tables and bathroom counters, desks, end tables and side tables. You name it, if it's flat and clear, it invites you to put items on top.

I am a visual person, having a lot of items out in open view tends to distract me and cause a lot of inner emotions and thinking, some positive and some negative. I think everyone experiences this to some degree, whether they are aware of it or not. When you see a pile of papers on your desk, even if you are only glancing in that direction, your mind registers the pile and the pressure of the task that needs to be done. If you have dirty dishes on the counter, or even clean dishes, your brain knows there is unfinished cleanup waiting for you. Remote controls on the end table next to the couch send your brain the message that they are to be picked up and used. Likewise, leaving your purse and keys on the counter signals you to think about your next errand, or they can just be in the way as you are trying to make dinner. Having items out and about many times causes unnecessary 'brain clutter'. I find this especially true when those items are on the flat surfaces within my home.

Based on my own experience and personal ideas, let's look at the why's and how's of keeping your flat surfaces clear.

### FIRST, THE WHY'S-

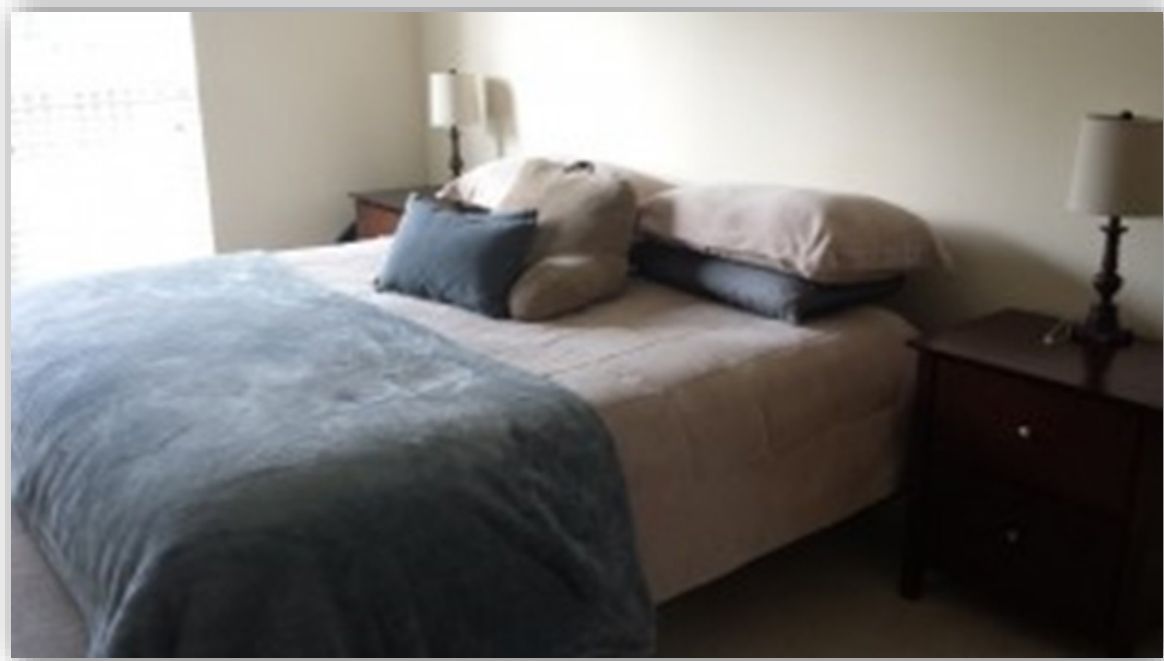
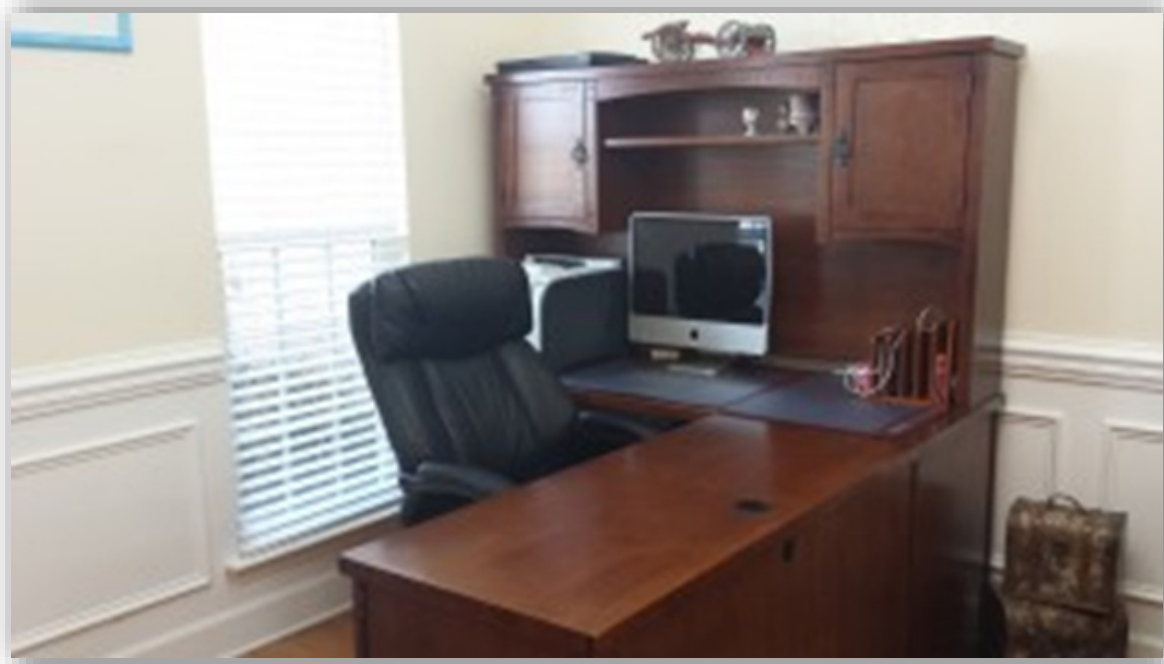
- *Clear areas produce calm.* At this point in our decluttering, I hope this is easy for you to see, that when you have more space in your home, it allows you to feel calmer, more in control and reduces the amount of stress in your life. Not only do clear, flat surfaces provide more space, they also create an atmosphere of quiet and stillness.
- *Clear, flat surfaces invite creativity.* I don't know about you, but when my kitchen is clean and the counters are clear, it almost begs me to cook or bake something fantastic!
- The same can be said for my desk. When surfaces are cleared off, I actually feel excited to go sit down and do something, write or finish a project or even go through some files!

- *Clear surfaces give focus to one idea.* Most flat surfaces in our home can be 95% clear, but to be functional, they will still have a couple of items on them. Having only one or two items on any flat surfaces gives immediate order and focus to what the purpose is of that area of the home. For instance, a kitchen counter with just a set of knives on top invites you to chop and cook. A living room side table with one interesting book on top invites you to read, whereas if it was piled with 5 books, remote controls and coasters, your brain might be overwhelmed with amount of items and 'choices'. Likewise, a bedside table with just a journal and pen on it places the focus on writing your thoughts before you go to sleep, instead of containing your phone, Kindle, work papers and a plethora of other items. Consider what the purpose of your flat surface is and what you would like the focus to be when using that surface in your home.

## CLEARING A FLAT SURFACE

- The first step to clearing a flat surface, is to clear it! Grab a box or bin and take EVERY SINGLE ITEM off of the surface. Even if you think it will end up back on it anyway, remove it all for now.
- Now that your surface is clear, stand back from it, maybe across the room, and take a good look. Notice how inviting the empty surface is and calming.
- Determine what the area around the surface should be used for. Is this area in your home a place that should be relaxing and restful? Or is it a place that should invite movement and creativity? Maybe you want to use the area for something new altogether, like studying or sewing? Once you've determined what the focus is for the surrounding area, you can start thinking about what should, or shouldn't go back on the surface.
- As a general rule, I like to have only one to two items on top of any surface. I find that anything more than two starts to distract my mind and take away from the calm effect I'm striving for. Always declutter first and get rid of those things that aren't serving any real purpose in your home or life. Only you can decide what will then go back on your surfaces. I've included some photos of some of the flat surfaces in my own home so you can get an idea of what I like to do, and maybe it will help you as well.





Once you've cleared your surfaces, and replaced them only with those one or two intentional items that compliment the area and are used on a regular basis, how do you keep it clear? Surfaces are natural places we like to throw things, especially as we walk in the door.

Purses, keys, mail, backpacks, hats, sunglasses and more all tend to end up on the nearest flat surface that is available when you walk through the door. Below are some things that work for me and my family to help us keep our home looking neat and surfaces clear.

- *Put your items on the floor when you get home.* Yes, you read that right! When we come in the door, we have gotten into the habit of putting those things we are carrying on the floor in the entryway, even my purse and keys! Sure, instinctively I would put them on my nice, cleared off desk that is only a few feet away, however, then they will sit there for hours and possibly days because I won't feel the need to get them off the floor and out of the way. This may seem a bit extreme, but trust me, once you get used to the idea and try it, you will see that you end up putting your things away within a few minutes of getting home, and you won't clutter up your surfaces just to have to clear them off later.
- *Cultivate the 'leave no trace' habit.* I know, I talk about this A LOT. But, it really is the key to my success in keeping flat surfaces clear and inviting. Getting into the habit of putting every single thing you use away as soon as you are done using it can take some time, but is more than well worth it. I can't say enough about how valuable this is for yourself, and to teach your children.
- *Don't accumulate more stuff.* When I first went through our home and cleared our surfaces, a lot of what I cleared were little ornaments and décor that really had no meaning to me, but were just purchased at local chain stores because I thought they were pretty, or fun to look at or display at the time. Once I cleared all those items out, I realized I felt much better internally with more space and less visual clutter, then I ever did with a bunch of little knick knacks around the house. Once in a while I am still tempted to bring home a new vase or some little whimsical looking decoration, but I resist and I know my life is better for it. Be very intentional with what you bring into your home, and you'll find your surfaces stay clear as you don't accumulate nearly as many items.

*Enjoy.*

## CHAPTER 4: REMOVE ESSENTIALS TO FIND THE EXCESS

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**S**ometimes clutter isn't so easy for me to see. Even before my shift to simple living, I was an organized person with not really any stacks of papers or lots of knickknacks decorating the house. For me, clutter came in the form of items that were carefully filed, stored in clear, orderly bins, or stacked neatly in whatever closet they were filling. *Out of sight, out of mind.* But, also out of use, and that means one thing to me: clutter.

In some cases where the clutter isn't obvious, I find myself working backwards. Instead of removing items I don't use or need first, I remove everything I DO use and need out of the space, leaving me only with the actual clutter.

*Spaces this works well in for me include-*

### KITCHEN DRAWERS

Kitchen drawers that hold all of the spatulas, graters, random meat tenderizers and lots of wooden spoons. Also, this includes my dishtowel and hot pad drawer, for some reason we always have so many more than we use in there!

If my husband is around, I will also try to get him involved with what kitchen appliances we have that are essential. This can be difficult as we don't always agree. I am still trying to get him to agree to getting rid of the pressure cooker and food processor, but he's not ready, yet.

### PAPER FILE CONTAINERS

I keep two small plastic paper file containers in which I file away documents I consider to be 'essential to keep' at the time. I try to go through it at least once a year, taking out the hard copy paperwork that is a must to keep. I almost always come away with a large stack of instruction books, expired return receipts, and a large amount of papers that need to be scanned then shredded.

At this point, most of what is in the file containers, or at least my goal, is that they will contain just copies of vital documents and current receipts for larger items, which doesn't take up much space.

## UNDER THE BATHROOM SINK.

My bathroom cupboard is generally organized, with nicely lined rows of bottles and extras that stretch to the back of the cupboard. The problem is I usually only use what is in the front of the row. The other items are 'just in case'. Just in case what? I guess if I feel like putting that specific type of heat protector on my hair that day, or adding a special finishing serum?

I find that I really only use 2-3 products everyday on my hair, as well as very specific products on my face as well. Removing just those essentials that you use will make it easy to see the 'hidden' clutter you are keeping.

## THE GARAGE

This is my family's dumping ground for 'to-do' stuff. Muddy shoes that need to be cleaned, our donation piles; the broken lawnmower that needs to be fixed and extra soil after planting some herbs. Aside from being a dumping ground for procrastination, the garage also tends to collect non-essential items that we won't even remember in a week. Off the top of my head, I have at least six bottles of interior car cleaner on one of the shelves that I purchased at a charity event, almost two years ago!

My mind can also see a rather large pile of old towels that haven't been used for anything in who knows how long. If we remove the things we actually use out there, our camping equipment, Christmas décor and my husband's tools, we could probably just hold a garage sale and get rid of the rest, and maybe even park both of the cars inside!

Those are a few of the [hotspots](#) for me, where it seems to be easier to work backwards and remove all of our essentials first, then discard or donate what is left. You may have different areas in your home that attract hidden clutter. Once you locate them, you can start identifying what is essential and what isn't.

## HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY THE ESSENTIALS?

I think we have the tendency to make a lot of items *feel* essential. Maybe you have been meaning to use something, or perhaps you forgot you had it, but now that you see it again, you just *know* you'll use it. To get past the 'feelings' of decluttering, I ask myself a couple of specific questions, and depending on my *HONEST* answers, I keep as essential, or [declutter](#).



Depending on the type of item, whether it is meant for seasonal or everyday use, my questions will look like this-

*Have I used this in the past two weeks?* (I only have two weeks of clothing, so this works for my closet also) If yes, I keep it as essential, or used. If no, it's clutter to me.

*Did I use this or display it during the last appropriate season?* If yes, it's a keeper, if no, it's clutter.

For paperwork specifically, I ask myself if the paper is such that to benefit from it, I *must* have a hard copy. If the answer is no, I scan and shred.

Working backwards can be a refreshing change from the usual methods of decluttering the nonessentials first. It is also nice to see just how little you really need and use on a regular basis, increasing your motivation to be more intentional about new things brought into your home or kept long-term.

## CHAPTER 5: LETTING GO OF EMOTIONALLY BASED POSSESSIONS

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**H**umans are emotional creatures. We like to relive the feelings associated with past experiences and relationships, some good, some bad. We hold onto things like old yearbooks, letters from past relationships, mementos from trips we've been on, keepsakes of family members who have passed on, wedding dresses, prom dresses, class rings, you get the idea. Keeping these things isn't wrong, but it is one of the main ways many of us clutter our homes. We are trying to hold on to the memories, people and experiences of our past through physical items. What many people don't realize is that it doesn't matter how many of grandma's doilies you have around the house, it won't bring her back to knit another one. Or keeping your old flame's love letters in a box in the attic doesn't make you the same person you were when you were 18.

Take a moment and look around your house at how many things you can see that serve to remind you of past memories and people. Now think about what you might have in storage that you can't even see on a daily basis, that is just there for 'IF' you want to relive those days.

*Why do we hold on to things when the joy and feelings are not contained in the item, but in your own mind and internal memories?*

I think the answer is that we enjoy having tangible objects to remind us of days gone by, but we don't think about how that affects our present as well. While it is wonderful to have a few very sentimental items displayed in prominent places throughout our homes, when we have items stored up in boxes, or that are contained in rooms and areas that aren't used or seen, we are really just holding on to the past through clutter that we aren't using or even enjoying. Some items we may keep because we feel like getting rid of them would betray the loved one who gave it to us, but has since passed away; even though we don't use the item or even particularly enjoy it. Or, we may keep things because we think we are expected to, like wedding dresses, family heirlooms like china sets, silverware or antique furniture.

A close co-worker gifted my husband and myself a food processor when we got married, she then unexpectedly passed away within 6 months. I carried around that food processor for ten years, and my husband used it maybe 2-3 times total, before I finally gave it away. As I think about that now, looking back, and remembering my co-worker and her personality, she would probably think it hilarious that I held onto a kitchen item to remember her by, especially since she didn't care for cooking all that much.

If we stop and think about it, sentimental items that should have a place in our life, probably already do. They are the pictures and keepsakes that we have hanging on our walls, displayed on our shelves out where we can see it on a regular, if not daily basis. This is where it should be. These are kinds of things that you display as you live an intentional life. Everything else, while it may still be special, doesn't contain enough of a memory to continue to hold onto it, to allow it to keep taking up space in your life. Your goal should be to keep just those things on display that really have the most personal meaning to you, that represent your most valued memories. The number of those items should be limited to few enough that you can enjoy each of them separately and without distraction by a bunch of other objects on the same shelf, or hanging on the same wall space.

Ideas for letting go of sentimental, emotionally based items

### FAMILY HEIRLOOMS

- Talk to other family members and find out if they would like to take the item. They may have stronger feelings and memories associated with the item than you do, and enjoy it more. If they don't, then they shouldn't mind if you gift it to some place that specializes in antiques, or to someone who will use it.
- Use the china and silverware. If you have a beautiful set of china and/or silverware, then use them! Don't just display them in a cabinet, use them on a regular basis, or at least for all special occasions like birthdays, anniversaries, graduations and holidays. Or, if you have too many settings that you won't use, don't be afraid to keep only one complete place setting to display if you really love it, and gift the rest of the set to someone else, or share a complete place setting with other family members who love it as well.
- If you love your wedding dress or baptismal dress, you can use a shadow box to display and preserve different pieces of it a long with a complete picture. The same can be done for doilies, afghans and other larger sentimental pieces.

### CHILDHOOD AND COLLEGE MEMORIES

- I would suggest the use of a hat or shirt box of some sort that you can keep old letters, school work, pictures, etc. in, then stack them up in a corner of your home, (on display), so you can actually go through them and enjoy them on a regular basis. If you find that you don't look at them even then, it's time to relinquish those days and let them go. If you have children, they will love going through those boxes on a regular basis as well, and will help them develop a love for your past as well, and maybe a desire to keep a couple of those items to display as their own when you are gone.

*Go digital to preserve your memories.* One of the great things about our age of technology, is that we have opportunity to scan any documents or photos and view them at any time. If you are having a hard time parting with things, take pictures of all of it, and upload them to your computer. You can pull them up at any given time to reminisce or print out to display. This is one of the best ways to declutter while still 'keeping' memories. I received a digital photo frame that I love to use display pictures of our family experiences and travels together, instead of purchasing mementos on each of our trips.

This step in decluttering is what slows a lot of people down, and it will take several rounds of decluttering before you can comfortably let go of some items you know deep down probably should go. That's okay, just keep working on it. I still have my wedding dress in a huge box in my closet, and two boxes of childhood mementos, although I am going to take my own advice and use the hat boxes to keep them out where my children can look at them.

Remembering that our memories are contained inside of us, and can't be taken away by letting go of the physical objects associated with them is a big step in the decluttering process. Once you've mastered it, you are well on your way to being a true minimalist!

## CHAPTER 6: STAYING MOTIVATED TO DECLUTTER

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**S**taying motivated once you've finished the initial major decluttering of your home can be difficult. The old habits of accumulation start to creep back in over time, many times without us even noticing. Once you have gone through decluttering, it is important to continue to make it a regular part of your life. As you intentionally think about every new item that comes into your home, you will want to make sure it will add value to your life and be used or enjoyed on a regular basis.

Decluttering is an ongoing process. Because our needs in life are always changing, just because you may use something now, doesn't mean you will next month, or next year. This also applies to the things you keep for enjoyment and sentimental reasons as well. Over time, things change, our memories change, and we can let items go, replacing them with new sentimental items.

If you have gone through the whole Decluttering 101 series, hopefully you've seen a lot of progress and personal benefits from the process of purging your home of items that are no longer needed or useful to you. Throughout the process, you may have noticed how much more space you have, the mental satisfaction and peace decluttering brings as well as less cleaning and upkeep. These factors should be motivation to continue the decluttering in your home, but sometimes after seeing the initial results, we are inclined to take a break and just enjoy what we have completed. While a break is nice, if it is too long you will start to see 'clutter creep' start moving back in. To avoid this happening, I've implemented some habits in my daily life to keep items moving through our house and out the door to avoid having to start all over with deep decluttering.

### HABIT 1:

I keep a donation box right inside my garage where I can just open our door and toss the items into it as I am going throughout my days. Little things add up, and I'll find some days I toss in a kitchen spatula we haven't used in six months, or a hand towel stuffed so far back in a drawer I didn't even know we still had it. Over time, our box gets full and it is time for another trip to the thrift store to empty it.

## HABIT 2:

I instituted the 'one in one out' rule for myself when making purchases, especially clothing, kitchen items, hair accessories, jewelry and shoes. Whenever I am tempted to purchase a duplicate of any item I already own, I take a moment to think about which item back at home it will be replacing. Many times I decide I am actually satisfied with what I have and don't really need the new item.

## HABIT 3:

I still enjoy having longer decluttering sessions even though my home is fairly purged at this point with unnecessary items. Once a month I will go through a closet, the garage shelves or under my bathroom sinks to make sure I haven't lost track of what is tucked away. I also take the opportunity as the seasons change to do a deeper decluttering of my seasonal wardrobe pieces.

## HABIT 4:

Another habit I have cultivated is reading on a regular basis about intentional living, simple living, essentialism, minimalism, mindfulness and other topics that promote living a simpler life and support the 'less is more' idea. Reading others writings about the subject helps to reinforce my own feelings and keep the ideas at the front of my mind. Let's face it, decluttering and owning less is going against the grain in our society, so reading about others helps us find that extra motivation and support when we know we aren't alone.

As you continually purge items you don't use, or stopped using, and at the same time be very intentional about new items you bring into your home, you will continue to see the benefits of decluttering, and feel the motivation that comes as a result.

## CONCLUSION

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When you embrace a lifestyle of less, one habit you need to pick up is that of regular decluttering. It seems no matter how intentional you are with letting new 'stuff' into your home, somehow items end up inside that don't meet the criteria as essential, useful or loved. Another scenario for recognizing new clutter is that you finally accept that you really are not going to use an older item, or that you are not as attached as you once were to something. These items then become clutter.

Developing the habit of decluttering on a regular basis can help you avoid those time-consuming, go through everything you own, once a year decluttering sessions.

We've probably all heard about the scientific study of habits, whatever the habit is we are trying to create, the process usually takes around 21-30 days to ingrain in our minds and become habitual. There is actually not a lot of real data to back that up. I have found personally, that something really becomes a habit for me after 3 to 4 months of continually working at adding it to my life.

The reason I say this, is that I don't want you to get down when you have setbacks as you are developing the decluttering habit. There will be times when you purchase or are given items that you bring into your home that you didn't really want. There will also be possessions that you know deep down you could declutter, but you just can't say goodbye, yet.

That's okay; continue to work towards making decluttering a regular part of your life.

If you enjoyed this book, please visit [SimplyClearly.com](https://SimplyClearly.com) for more help with decluttering and living an intentional, simpler life.