

Cut the Clutter and Get Organized

Denise Dias
Sedgwick County Agent
Family and Consumer Sciences

Fact Sheet

Is Clutter a Problem?

- Do you say, “This house is a mess” more than three times a week?
- Do you . . .
 - move something every time you want to sit down?
 - have piles of paper all over the house?
 - have closets and drawers that are brimming?
 - spend lots of time looking for things?
- Do you frequently hear family member say, “I can’t find it”?
- Do you tire of being the family’s chief picker-upper?

Does this sound like you?

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

Start with a positive attitude.

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

Clutter is a family affair.

Choose a convenient time for everyone to discuss plans for clutter control. It is unfair to expect one person to restore order. All family members share the responsibility for picking up after themselves.

Sources of Clutter

- Newspapers and magazines
- Mail
- Bills
- Books and papers
- Toys and games
- Hobby materials
- Cleaning supplies
- Tools and hardware
- Outerwear: Hats, mittens, boots and shoes
- Laundry and ironing

Make a Chart

Here is a sample chart to use:

Source of Clutter	When to Sort	Who is Responsible?
Newspapers, magazines	weekly	John
Mail, bills, books, papers	daily	Jane
Toys and games	daily	Susie and John Jr.
Hobby materials	weekly	Jane
Cleaning supplies and laundry	Daily, weekly, monthly, and annually	Jane, Susie and John Jr.
Tools and hardware	weekly	John and John Jr.
Clothing	Every 3 months	Everyone
Outerwear	daily	Everyone

Make Time

Set aside several Saturday mornings to work as a family on big cleanups. In each room, start at one spot and work clockwise around the room until you reach your starting point. Use the box approach to sort the clutter. Sort items into boxes labeled *Keep, Store, Give Away/Sell, Throw Away* and, if you are indecisive, you can use a fifth box labeled *Maybe*.

The Keep Box

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

The Storage Box

Store these items for use at another time.

The Give Away/Sell Box

These boxes could be the beginning of your next yard sale or be taken to a consignment shop to earn some money from your unwanted items. You could also give these items to a secondhand store or charity.

The Throw Away Box

Throw away anything that is broken, ripped, worn or stained. This box could also be a trash can or trash bag. A trip to the recycling center or landfill may also be in order.

The Maybe Box

Go through this box one more time and sort items into the other boxes.

Maintaining a Clutter-Free Home

- Everyone needs to do a little bit every day.
- It is everyone’s “job” to keep items picked up and put away.
- Tasks need to be appropriate for family members’ ages and abilities.

- Share your ideas and expectations of what is expected and acceptable. You may need to teach others simple and effective ways to do the tasks.

Everyone’s Plan for Success

- What are everyone’s daily and weekly responsibilities?
- What are the acceptable standards?
- What are the consequences if the jobs are not completed?

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

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

Organizing Your Closet: A Three-Step System for Wardrobe Storage

Step One: How much clothing do we need?

We often keep all of our clothes packed in a tight space. Clothes we don’t wear are clutter. Most clothing needs 2 to 3 inches of space for hanging, but this can vary depending on the length and width of the garment.

Step Two: Where is storage needed?

Ten percent of the space of a home is allocated for storage. Therefore, a 1,500 square-foot house should have 150 square feet of storage. Where is this space in your home? Is it used appropriately? Could some items be given away, tossed or sold to make room for items that are used regularly?

Ten things to get rid of NOW

Anything with a stain, hole or tear.
Clothing or accessories you like, but look funny on you.
Purses you no longer use.
Outdated clothing or accessories.
Ratty weekend clothes.
Clothing that does not fit.
Worn shoes.
Anything of a lower quality than your regular wardrobe.
Dead lingerie.
The good coat that will not fit over your other clothes.

Step Three: Organize with hooks, hangers, shelves or baskets.

Learn how to maximize your space by consulting a redesign expert, studying home design books or visiting home organization stores. Everything should be visible at a glance because you wear or use what you see.

Storage could include shoe shelves, sweater shelves, hanging racks, and a wall rack for jewelry and scarves. Fold and store items in transparent drawers in your closet, hang belts or scarves on a kitchen mug rack or hang over towel bars on the wall or door. Use a plastic mesh wall grid, a kitchen utensil divider, a hardware store nail organizer or a small plastic chest of mini drawers for small items. The ideas are endless.

Look for additional areas in other parts of your home to store out-of-season clothing – other closets, utility room, under the beds, or other places.

Author

Denise Dias, Sedgwick County Extension Agent, FCS
Sedgwick County Extension Office
7001 W 21st Street N
Wichita, KS 67205
316-660-0100
ddias@ksu.edu

Reviewers:

Shirley Niemeyer , Ph.D., Professor
Extension Specialist/Research, Housing & Environment
Room 205 HE Bldg. East Campus
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, NE 68583-0804

Jan McMahan, Sedgwick County Extension Agent, FCS,
EFNEP (Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program)

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