

Too much clutter? The time to tackle it is today

I can't seem to keep clutter from overtaking my life. Any ideas?

For many people, clutter is a fact of life. But if you find yourself spending a lot of time looking for things you need but can't put your hands on, you know it's a problem that needs some attention. Another clue is the feeling that a lack of organization is causing you stress. If this sounds familiar, it's time to tackle the problem.

If it helps, know you're not alone. The 2006 Soap and Detergent Association's National Cleaning Survey found that 18 percent of respondents admitted "I generally keep things clean, but find that I always have a lot of clutter around the house." At the same time, nearly all respondents (98 percent) said they feel good about themselves when their home is clean.

Many organizational how-to books can help. Most have some general guiding principles that can get you started. They include:

- **Start small.** Many experts suggest starting with one room (the kitchen?), one location (the dining room table?) or even one continually occurring item (piled-up mail?), and beginning with that. Usually, items get piled up on any available surface because there is either no better place for them, or the place designated for them is inconveniently located or stuffed full. Using a critical eye, you need to determine the problem and design a solution that works for you.

- **Make decisions.** Almost always, clutter piles up because you (or someone else in your household) haven't yet made a decision on what to do with it. Nearly every family goes through this on a daily basis: Should we keep this catalog? Has everyone read today's



(or yesterday's or last Sunday's) newspaper? Will I wear this sweater next winter? Will we ever use mom's old fondue set? According to Georgene Lockwood, author of "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Simple Living," you can expect that "Stuff tends to stay where it lands" and "Stuff expands to fit the space available." Sometimes, it's only when the unexpected guest drops in, or the available space becomes filled to the brim, do we look around and realize that our "stuff" has become clutter. The secret is to continually make decisions on what to do with items.

- **Design organizing systems to work for you.** Kathy Waddill, owner of an organizing consulting firm and the author of "The Organizing Sourcebook," says that one of the strategies of "reasonably organized people" is that they adopt systems to fit their lives. Consider: Even if you have "a place for everything," if somehow it's too difficult to put everything in its place, it's not going to get to that place any time soon. So make sure you have workable storage spaces and a system that's easy for you and your family to adopt.

It's never easy to adopt new habits. But conquering clutter can have payoffs beside a nicer-looking home. You'll be able to find things more quickly, clean surfaces more easily, and you may even save money by not buying stuff today that can easily become clutter tomorrow.

Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Family Fundamentals, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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