

Clear out the clutter, turn down the stress

By Karen Rudolph Durrie

To paraphrase Big Daddy Pollitt, played by Burl Ives in the classic 1958 movie *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, “The reason why the human animal buys everything he can is because of a crazy hope that one of the things he buys will be life everlasting.”

Does your home look like you're trying to purchase immortality — to fill some kind of void with stuff?

Cleaning up and scaling back is not only good for the pocketbook, it creates peace of mind, says professional organizer Shannon Grams, who runs *A Place For Everything*.

“Think about all the negative energy that comes along with too much stuff, piles and chaos,” Grams says.

When you tackle organizing your home one project at a time, the stuff that weighed you down before gives way to more breathing space.

The best approach is to bust clutter as a series of small jobs, rather than look at it as one overwhelming task.

Work on the most public spaces first.



“So often, people feel badly about how disorganized they are, they are embarrassed to have people over and they make apologies for the mess,” Grams says.

Other priority spaces include the ones the family uses most — including the kitchen. Kitchens are magnets for stuff because they're used so much, and they are where stuff brought into the home — mail, cellphones, keys — is most likely to land.

It's one thing to get rid of the clutter — but then you need a plan to prevent it.

Solutions may include shelving, baskets and filing boxes, binders and folders.

They can also involve a change in habits

— grocery shopping, for example.

“Our generation, we just go grocery shopping, buy a bunch of stuff and try and fit it in, whereas the previous generation was ‘Monday is soup, Tuesday it's stew....’”

“But we have all this stuff and come home and say ‘What's for dinner?’”

It's typical, Grams says, to find six or eight cans of tomatoes in a pantry, each bought at a different time, because people forget what they already have. Weekly meal planning and list-making can help.

A mistake people make when tackling home organization is looking at the big picture and being overwhelmed by the amount of work involved, Grams says.

And people just have way too much stuff, and don't see that these things are a burden to them.

“They have a really hard time parting with their things. They perceive value to be in them, as in they paid good money for them. But your money is long gone, whether you still have the item or not.”

Items that are still useful needn't go to waste — they should be donated to somebody who can use them. **NYNY**

Tips for a tidier '09

1. Organize for 15 minutes a day.

Always have a donation box on the go — if you spend 15 minutes pulling outgrown clothes out of your kids' closet, they go into the box.

2. Break it down to small jobs.

Do the top shelf in the closet. Tidy the shoes and boots in the hall cupboard.

3. Home offices are paper traps.

Shred and recycle bills and bank statements. Unless you're self-employed and require them for taxes, you don't need them.

4. Get the kids involved

with putting away their toys and organizing their clutter daily. Kids' stuff need not live in every room of the house.

5. Don't buy things just for the sake of buying.

So you see a \$4 T-shirt for your son. A screaming deal, right? Not if he already has enough T-shirts at home.

6. Share.

There plenty of people who are have-nots. So if you're a have — share, and keep on sharing.

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