

“De-Clutter” Your Life
Leader/Teacher Guide

Objectives:

- Help members determine if they have a problem with clutter in their homes.
- Identify ways for dealing with clutter.
- Motivate individuals to look at their homes and to eliminate some of their clutter.

Before the Lesson:

- 1) Obtain pencil or pen for each member.
- 2) Order the member handout “Internet Auctions: A Guide for Buyers and Sellers” (order from the Federal Trade Commission – bulk copies available free from: <http://bulkorder.ftc.gov:10937/index.php?intro=1> then click on “Computers and Internet” then click on “Online Shopping and E Payments.”

Member Handouts:

- 1) “De-Clutter” Your Life
- 2) “De-Clutter” Your Life Lesson Evaluation & Informed Consent Statement Letter
- 3) “Internet Auctions: A Guide for Buyers and Sellers”

Teaching Outline:	Activities
<p>Introduction - Clutter Facts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More than 3,000 documents can be found in the average home.• The average household purchases 13,000 bags of stuff in a year.• Average households have 25% more furniture and 75% more toys than they need.• Lack of space is not the cause of clutter. Disorganization results in 80% of the clutter in most homes.• In the average home, getting rid of clutter eliminates 40% of housework.• Americans waste more than 9 million hours looking for lost items.• Most Americans use 20% of what we own. The other 80% is made up of items we don't use, feel we should use or think we might use someday. <p>The popularity of today's reality TV shows how people's lives have gotten out of control and have been taken over by their “stuff.” Once too much “stuff” invades your space, you start feeling out-of-control.</p>	<p><i>Write these facts on index cards and distribute them to your members. Have individual members read them aloud.</i></p> <p><i>Summarize this information in your own words.</i></p>

<p>Objectives</p> <p>The objectives of this lesson are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help you determine if you have a problem with clutter in your home. • Identify ways for dealing with clutter. • Motivate you to look at your homes and to eliminate some of your clutter. 	<p><i>State objectives.</i></p>
<p>What is clutter?</p> <p>According to Webster's Dictionary, clutter is defined as a number of things scattered in disorder; jumble.</p> <p>Another definition might be "anything you own, possess or do that does not enhance your life on a regular basis."</p>	<p><i>Read this definition from Webster's New World Dictionary, Second College Edition.</i></p>
<p>When Is Clutter a Problem?</p> <p>Clutter can be a cause for concern if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety is an issue - clutter can cause problems with safety such as clutter on the floor that may be a tripping hazard or flammable items stacked next to a heating element that may be a fire hazard. • Cleanliness is an issue – clutter makes it harder to keep areas clean and can be a place for rodents and dirt to hide. 	<p><i>Ask this question. Brainstorm possible answers.</i></p>
<p>The Clutter Challenge</p> <p>The challenge is to take stock of what we have and to simplify and downsize to give ourselves peace of mind and to leave a clutter free legacy to our families.</p>	<p><i>Summarize this information in your own words.</i></p>

Why So Much Clutter?

Here are some of the reasons that clutter may be a problem.

1 – They feel guilty. Almost everyone has keepsakes from deceased relatives. Holding on to these items shows that we are paying our last respects to them by valuing and holding onto their stuff. You may feel guilty if you don't want a family keepsake. If so ask yourself a few questions:

- Is there another family member who might like an item you aren't using?
- Would your relative be using the item or throwing it out?
- Do you have other keepsakes to remember the deceased person by?

2 – You might need it. The minute you throw something out, you might need it. To help, get someone who is unbiased to help you decide.

3 –It's hard to let go. You may feel that you might make a mistake and throw away something, but very few things are irreplaceable. Some areas where you might start are your closet, files, warranties and instructions.

4 – There just hasn't been time or you just don't know where to start. Start small and focus on one area of your home. Walk in like you've never seen it before. What do you see? Piles of unread magazines? Newspapers? Just take a 15 minute approach so you're not overwhelmed.

5 – We're urged to buy things everyday. Every time we watch TV, listen to the radio or walk into a store we are urged to purchase more (and more, and more . . .).

6 – You don't know where to put something, so it's set aside. This may be due to lack of space or lack of an organizational system.

Summarize this information in your own words.

What's Your Clutter Quotient?

The first step in getting a handle on clutter is to find out your organization quotient.

Have members complete the self-evaluation of their clutter quotient. The scoring system is on the back.

Allow time for members to complete this self-evaluation, then ask if anyone wants to share their results.

Classify Your Clutter

If clutter is an issue for you, the first step might be to “Classify Your Clutter.” By thinking about where clutter is a problem, you can then identify where to start to deal with clutter. Here are some of the kinds of clutter that are common:

Travel Clutter – souvenirs you got on a special vacation and can't bear to throw away.

It Used to Be Important Clutter – keys that don't work, clothes that don't fit, toys no one plays with.

Phony Clutter – stuff posing as a bargain, such as things you got at a garage sale or 2 fers (2 for one).

Inheritance Clutter – anything someone gave you because they didn't know what to do with it, such as video collections or mom's old dishes.

Bequeathed Clutter – stuff you got as presents.

Rabbit Clutter – clutter that multiplies fast, such as Beanie Babies, fabric or needle work kits.

Imposter Clutter – clutter disguised as good stuff such as musical instruments no one plays, outdated cameras, video equipment and electronics.

Ambiance Clutter – household accessories that you put away after you changed your decorating scheme.

Get-to-it-someday Clutter – anything you need to fix, finish or get to someday.

Eclectic Clutter – miscellaneous clutter such as stuff in your drawers you don't know what to do with, clothes that still fit but don't match anything else, lone socks or gloves.

Car Clutter – fast food bags, empty water bottles, bits and pieces of handouts from programs, broken car scrapers or old maps.

Bob Hope Clutter – thanks for the memories – love letters, honeymoon matchbooks or babies first birthday cards.

Snob Clutter – crystal vases, silver platters, or silver tea service.

Refer members to their handout “Classify Your Clutter.” Have them write down items in their home that fit in each of these categories. Complete the handout as you talk about the various forms of clutter. You may want to give prizes for the most items, the least items, the most creative.

Mysterious Clutter – objects you find and don't know what they are, but they must go to something important.

Now that we've identified some of the types of clutter, you can get started eliminating some of the clutter that fills your life and home.

Organizational Strategies

- 1 – Make your system fit your own life.
- 2 – Sort and classify.
- 3 – Clean out constantly.
- 4 – Use storage devices to fit your system.
- 5 – Keep it simple.
- 6 – Decide to decide.
- 7 – Ask for help.
- 8 – Organize year round.

More specific suggestions for clutter control include:

- Focus on one room.
- Get tough when you consider objects.
- Go through your mail daily.
- Set a limit on saving bags, food containers, or boxes.
- Get rid of the old when you buy the new.
- Pare down mementos.
- Consider making a daily or biweekly uncluttering appointment.
- Use labeled boxes or bags and group items into categories.

Refer members to their handout. Summarize this information in your own words.

Ask members to share strategies that work for them to control their clutter. Then share these ideas if they don't come up in your discussion. Refer members to their handout.

What Can You Do with Your “Good Stuff?”

Now that you’ve identified your clutter and thought about what to eliminate – where does your clutter go?

If it’s hard to let go, ask yourself, “wouldn’t you prefer to surround yourself with things you love and use?” If you don’t love it - think of someone you know who might enjoy having what you no longer want – it could be a family member or it might mean giving it away or selling it to someone else who will cherish the item.

The primary outlets for secondhand items are consignment shops, classified advertising, internet auction sites, and, of course, yard and garage sales.

Here are some suggestions:

- Donate items to a local charitable organization
- Sell larger items directly by placing a classified advertisement.
- Look for stores that specialize in buying and selling valuable items.
- Look into vintage resale/consignment shops.
- List your item on an internet swap/giveaway site.
- Try an online auction.

Summarize this information in your own words.

*Ask members for their suggestions on getting rid of the “good stuff” in your local area such as old computers, clothing, recyclables, etc.
Review suggestions in member handout.*

Distribute the FTC booklet “Internet Auctions a Guide for Buyers and Sellers.”

Take Control of Your Clutter Activity

As you think about your own clutter situation try to identify areas of clutter in your own home and what you need to attack these cluttered areas. Use the handout “Take Control of Your Clutter” to help you identify these areas.

The next step will be to start with one cluttered area and make a more specific plan to accomplish your goal of clutter control. Use the handout “Tackling the Clutter” at home to assist you with a more complete clutter control plan. Writing down your goal and the steps to achieve the goal, along with a completion date will make it more likely that you will accomplish your clutter control goals.

Refer members to their handout “Take Control of Your Clutter.” Have members take a few minutes to start their list.

Refer members to the handout “Tackling the Clutter” and encourage them to identify one area at home and to make a more complete plan and then to get started.

<p>Summary</p> <p>Remember the 10 Laws of Stuff as you take control of clutter:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The more you have, the more you need. 2. Useless stuff crowds out the good stuff. 3. Dirt and bugs love stuff. 4. Stuff stays where you put it. 5. Stuff multiplies to fill the spaces you have. 6. Over time, you don't see your stuff. 7. When you have a lot of stuff, you pay over and over for it. 8. Stuff affects your mental health. 9. Stuff is valuable only if you use it. 10. Stuff can't buy happiness. <p>As Albert Einstein wrote, "Out of clutter, find simplicity."</p>	<p><i>Refer members to "The 10 Laws of Stuff" in their handout. Have each member read one of the laws.</i></p> <p><i>Have members share one thing they plan to do to take control of their clutter</i></p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p>Distribute the "Informed Consent Statement" and evaluation form. Read aloud the "Informed Consent Statement" and give participants time to complete the evaluation. Collect the evaluations and return them to your county Extension Office.</p>	<p><i>Ask members to complete the evaluation.</i></p>

References:

Aslett, Don. (2005). Clutter's Last Stand – It's Time to De-Junk Your Life! Avon, MA: Adams Media.

Dean, S. (2002, May), Clutter and Chaos. *Reader's Digest*, 90-97.

Lockwood, Georgene. The 10 Laws of Stuff. The Oaks, Menomonie, Wisconsin.

Recker, Nancy, Ohio State University Extension FCS Educator, Associate Professor and Clark, Lois, Ohio State University Extension FCS Educator, Associate Professor. Getting Rid of Your Clutter Power Point.

Smallin, Donna (2002). Organizing Plain and Simple. Banta Book Group.

Waddill, K. (2001). The Organizing Source Book. Chicago, IL: Contemporary Books.

Flylady website, <http://www.flylady.com/index.asp> (daily tips on de-cluttering your home filled with advice and humor).

Paauwerfully Organized website, <http://orgcoach.net/> (tips on controlling clutter including a free monthly newsletter).

Developed by Nancy Kershaw, OSU Extension Family and Community Development/4-H faculty member, Tillamook county.

De-Clutter Your Life Member Handout

The popularity of today's reality TV shows how people's lives have gotten out of control and have been taken over by their "stuff." Once too much "stuff" invades your space, you start feeling out-of control.

According to Webster's Dictionary, clutter is defined as a number of things scattered in disorder; jumble. Another definition might be "anything you own, possess or do that does not enhance your life on a regular basis."

The challenge is to take stock of what we have and to simplify and downsize to give ourselves peace of mind and to leave a clutter free legacy to our families.

Organizational Strategies

1 – Make your system fit your own life. You need to examine your own lifestyle and choose a system that fits. There are lots of books and websites available that can help you.

2 – Sort and classify. Things that are used together belong together. Store them in one place.

3 – Clean out constantly. When you keep things you don't use, they get in the way and create more work. Keep on top of things. Get rid of the old as soon as you get new.

4 – Use storage devices to fit your system. Bad containers make things harder to manage. Label everything. Something left unlabeled causes frustration and is likely to disappear.

5 – Keep it simple. Take on only what you can handle and do no more.

6 – Decide to decide. Make a decision and follow-through.

7 – Ask for help. Delegate tasks or hire someone to do the things you can't do yourself.

8 – Organize year round. For example in January mail in warranties for products you received as holiday gifts and purge your files as you prepare your taxes.



Suggestions for clutter control

- Focus on one room – maybe the room where you spend the most time or alternatively the room that contains the most clutter. Start small – go through one drawer, one shelf or one counter per session.
- Get tough – dump the contents on the floor and consider each object.
- Go through your mail daily – toss what you'll never read, file bills for payment, recycle newspapers, magazines and catalogs.
- Set a limit on saving bags, food containers, or boxes.
- Get rid of two old garments every time you buy a new one. This rule also works for kitchen gadgets, shoes, books, videos or CD's, and toys.
- Pare down mementos – keep the Girl Scout badges instead of the whole uniform, the year books instead of everybody's school photos.
- Consider making a daily or biweekly uncluttering appointment. Set a specific date and time. Just 15 minutes a day can help, an hour a day is even better. Set a timer.
- Use labeled boxes or bags and group items into categories. Possible categories might include:
 1. Things you love and/or use – keepers
 2. Things you can give to someone else
 3. Trash
 4. Things you could sell
 5. Things that belong somewhere else

What Can You Do with Your “Good Stuff?”

Now that you've identified your clutter and thought about what to eliminate – where does your clutter go?

If it's hard to let go, ask yourself, “wouldn't you prefer to surround yourself with things you love and use?” If you don't love it - think of someone you know who might enjoy having what you no longer want – it could be a family member or it might mean giving it away or selling it to someone else who will cherish the item.

The primary outlets for secondhand items are consignment shops, classified advertising, internet auction sites, and, of course, yard and garage sales.

Here are some specific suggestions:

- Donate items to a local charitable organization for their rummage sale or to a local non-profit thrift shop. You can deduct this donation from your income taxes as a charitable donation. If you plan to use the donation as a tax deduction then you need to keep a record of the items donated and the value of each item. Make sure you obtain a receipt from the charitable organization for your donation.
- You can sell larger items directly by placing a classified advertisement in one of your local newspapers or through the internet. Items to consider advertising include furniture sets, large appliances or power equipment.
- To sell valuable items, such as jewelry, antiques, coin collections and musical instruments, look for stores that specialize in buying and selling these items. Check your local telephone directory or <http://www.yellowpages.com>. You may want to get more than one estimate to ensure that you are offered a fair price.
- Look into vintage resale/consignment shops to sell items that are more valuable. Check your local telephone directory or <http://www.yellowpages.com>. Use these possible key words – antiques, auction houses, consignment service, resale shops, or second hand dealers. To maximize your earnings, check out a few stores before choosing one and compare their stock and policies. Consignment shops accept all kinds of things, but some specialize in specific items, such as household furnishings, clothing, or sports equipment. Make sure that you check references for any business before you decide to use their services. You may also want to check with the Better Business Bureau, <http://search.bbb.org> or the Oregon Attorney General's Consumer Hotline, 1-877- 877-9392 (toll free) or by email consumer.hotline@doj.state.or.us to find out if a business is reputable.
- List your item on an internet swap/giveaway site.
- Try an online auction through one of the auction sites. There are probably individuals in your community who know how to participate in an online auction and can give you advice or help you set up an auction and an account for receiving the money. There are also businesses that will put your items up for auction on consignment. Again, check your local yellow pages or yellow pages on-line and make sure that you check references before making any business arrangements. You can also check with the Better Business Bureau and Oregon Attorney General to see if any complaints have been filed about a business.



Whether you're a buyer or a seller, understanding how internet auctions work can help you avoid problems. Check out "Tips for Online Auctions" from the Internet Fraud Watch, <http://www.fraud.org/tips/internet/onlineauctions.htm>. For more information on both the risks and how to protect yourself when either buying or selling through an internet auction, the Federal Trade Commission has published the booklet "Internet Auctions: A Guide for Buyers and Sellers." This booklet can be ordered free through the Federal Trade Commission website <http://www.ftc.gov>.

References

There are numerous websites and books available at your local book store on de-cluttering. Here are a few that were used to develop this lesson.

Aslett, Don. (2005). *Clutter's Last Stand – It's Time to De-Junk Your Life!* Avon, MA: Adams Media.

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WHAT'S YOUR CLUTTER QUOTIENT?

Choose the number that best describes your response to each statement.

1 = rarely/never 2 = sometimes 3 = quite often 4 = almost always

- I get tired just thinking of what it would take to get me organized.
- My friends and family think I'm disorganized.
- I don't have enough time or space to get organized.
- I wish I could be more organized.
- I spend a lot of time looking for things every day.
- I am disorganized.
- I let mail pile up until I have time to deal with it.
- I save things I think I might need someday.
- I feel guilty about throwing away things.
- I have no time for myself.
- I can't bear the thought of parting with anything I own.
- I dread opening one or more closets in my home.
- When it comes to clutter, I think, "Why bother? It will just get cluttered again."
- When the clutter in my home gets to me, I go out.
- If someone stops by unexpectedly, I try to avoid letting them in.

-OVER-

**Add up your score and look below
to see how you handle clutter.**

Scoring

- 48 – 60** Make a commitment to deal with clutter today! Dealing with your clutter will decrease your high level of stress and frustration and free up time and energy.
- 36 – 47** Clutter has been building up for sometime. You can turn things around with the right combination of organizing systems and strategies.
- 24 – 35** You may not consider clutter to be a problem, but dealing with clutter now will keep it under control.
- 15 – 23** You stay on top of things and you derive pleasure from keeping clutter under control. Keep it up.



CLASSIFY YOUR CLUTTER

Travel Clutter: _____

It Used to be Important Clutter: _____

Phony Clutter: _____

Inheritance Clutter: _____

Bequeathed Clutter: _____

Rabbit Clutter: _____

Imposter Clutter: _____

Ambiance Clutter: _____

Get-to-it-someday Clutter: _____

Eclectic Clutter: _____

Car Clutter: _____

Bob Hope Clutter: _____

Snob Clutter: _____

Mysterious Clutter: _____



TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR CLUTTER

Make a list of the cluttered areas around your home.
List everything that drives you crazy.



Cluttered Areas	Supplies Needed to Remedy Situation	Deadline to Conquer Clutter
Ex: Cleaning supplies under kitchen sink	Baskets to keep bottles organized	March 15

Tackling the Clutter

What mess bothers you the most?

Why does it bother you?

What prevents you from tackling the problem?

List those things about this mess that bother you the most.

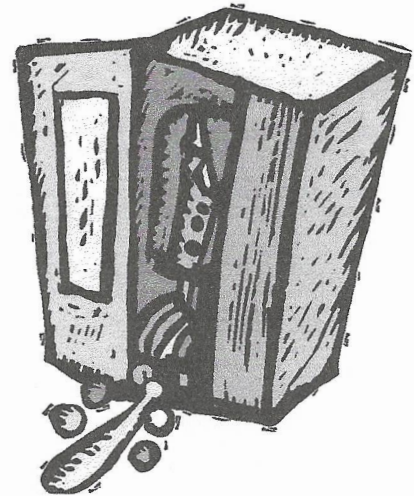
What would it take to fix it (includes resources such as time, money, space, another person, etc.)?

Timeline (list dates for accomplishing each task).

How would you reward yourself for a job well done?

The "10" Laws of Stuff

1. The more you have, the more you need.
2. Useless stuff crowds out the good stuff.
3. Dirt and bugs love stuff.
4. Stuff stays where you put it.
5. Stuff multiplies to fill the spaces you have.
6. Over time, you don't see your stuff.
7. When you have a lot of stuff, you pay over and over for it.
8. Stuff affects your mental health.
9. Stuff is valuable only if you use it.
10. Stuff can't buy happiness.



Adapted from: Georgene Lockwood, 10 Laws of Stuff,
The Oaks, Menomonie, Wisconsin