

# **CLEAR YOUR CLUTTER**

## **IN JUST 1 WEEKEND**

I just love those home makeover and house-swap shows. You know, those shows where a family spends the weekend organizing, cleaning out, and “making over” their home? It’s so exciting to see people get a fresh start. Wouldn’t it be nice to have the opportunity to work from a blank slate?

Decluttering your life can sometimes feel like a daunting process—and one that’s going to take longer than just one weekend of cleaning. Even so, there’s quite a lot to be said about getting a big chunk of purging and organizing done at once.

You might not be on a reality show, but you can certainly spend a weekend emulating the pros and making headway.

In my book, **Unstuffed: Decluttering Your Home, Mind & Soul**, I provide a detailed process to help you undergo a weekend of purging, decluttering and getting yourself organized. If you’re ready to get started, here are the basics of the weekend plan.

## PLAN & PREPARE TO PURGE

The first step is to harness your plan and get ready. You’ll want to start preparing at least a few days ahead. Schedule your clean-out for a weekend when you can dedicate the entire time to the process—no lessons, no games, no activities, no visitors.

Assemble a team of helpers, including your spouse and (depending on their ages) your children. By including the whole family, you ensure their buy-in and commitment to keeping your house unstuffed after the work is done. It’s so easy to slide into bad habits, but it’s more difficult when you’ve exerted such effort and had a hand in the process.

If your children are very young, you’re going to want to also consider child-care. If you have pets, you may want to arrange for a sitter or boarding for the weekend. Consider preparing freezer meals or easy-to-assemble make-ahead meals, because you aren’t going to want to focus on preparing food and cooking. Have items like granola bars and water bottles readily accessible, so your team isn’t slowed down by thirst or hunger.

Consider where you’ll be donating items and be sure you can drop items right off at the proper location **THAT** day. Don’t wait! Waiting means holding onto stuff, which can lead to changing your mind and undoing some of your hard work.

Compile the supplies you will need, such as: boxes, garbage bags, markers,

tape, storage containers and baskets. Consider assembling hangers for each closet. (40 hangers per family member works well.) If you have a label maker, shelf paper and other organizational tools on hand, you may also want to gather them together.

## **IT'S FRIDAY—TIME TO GET STARTED RIGHT AWAY!**

When the scheduled weekend arrives, you're going to want to get started right away! Don't wait for Saturday morning. Roll up your sleeves on Friday night and get to work!

Turn on some motivating music (something with a good beat) because for the first 90 minutes, you're going to blitz through your house. Have everyone go through each room in the house with a box or a bag. Start with surface organizing and remove anything clearly out of place. For this step, you're simply picking up and organizing your home.

Don't worry about putting every single thing right where it belongs—just get it close to the general location. After all, you're going to spend some time organizing closets and shelves, so right now it's just about getting items to their proper area.

Start with your bedroom closet. Remove each item and narrow it down to just the essentials. For each item ask yourself:

- Is this in good condition? (No stains, holes, or snags)
- Do I love this?
- Does it fit?
- Do I wear this regularly and does it go with other things in my closet?
- Does it make me feel good when I put it on?

It can be hard to let go of items you feel an emotional attachment to, or things you love but you just don't fit into. These feelings are totally normal. Give yourself permission to toss these items in a bag and let go. Set a limit on the number of items you can keep. I like to stick to 40—I get a nice variety of clothing, but setting this limit ensures I don't keep unnecessary items.

Load up your car with everything you'd like to sell or donate, and finish up for the evening.

## **SATURDAY MORNING**

Get started early! Today's going to be a big day. Start the morning by stripping the beds and washing the sheets. Then, take some time to drop off any items you decided to donate last night. If you've decided to sell any items online, take the time to post those as well (but give yourself a strict time limit). Enjoy a hearty breakfast and switch up the laundry.

By 9:00am, you should be ready to tackle the bathrooms. As these are typically small spaces, you may want to split up the tasks, especially if you have more than one bathroom. Each person should have instructions to throw out anything you no longer use, and anything expired or leaking.

Go through cabinets, drawers and shelves. Get rid of extra towels, those old magazines on the back of the toilet, and anything else cluttering up the space. Once you've cleaned it out and pared down, give your bathroom a good cleaning. Wipe down mirrors, counters, the shower, the sink and the toilet. Don't forget the floors.

Schedule a short break in the middle of your morning to catch your breath, use the bathroom, have a drink, etc. Next, move on to the master bedroom. Set a timer for 90 minutes and go through the drawers and surfaces of your bedroom. Be sure to pull out anything stored under the bed and organize your drawers using the same guidelines as your closet. Finish up with a good dust and vacuum, and be sure to put any remaining items back into their proper homes.

## **SATURDAY AFTERNOON**

Take a lunch break and resume cleaning by 1:00pm. To make lunch easier, plan to have something simple, like sandwiches or another easy-to-clean-up item. You might even choose to use disposable plates or just napkins to keep cleaning up to a minimum.

After lunch, your next project is the kitchen and dining area. These can be tough spots to tackle, as clutter definitely tends to collect in these areas. Go through your fridge and food cupboards. Toss anything past its expiration date, anything you don't like, and anything you don't plan to use up. Be ruthless.

Go through your cupboards. Take everything out and place it on the counter. Ask yourself if you REALLY need two garlic presses (or even one), and get rid of any multiples or one-trick gadgets.

Take a 15-minute break after 90 minutes, then continue on with the process. Reassemble the cupboards after wiping out the shelves by putting away the

items you've decided to keep. Repeat this process with food shelves, the buffet, pantry, fridge and freezer. Wipe down every surface and be sure bottles, packages and dishes are clean when you return them to their homes. Finish the kitchen by wiping down the sink, counters and floor. Try to keep the counters as free from clutter as possible.

After taking a short break, it's time to start on the kids' rooms and closets. Similar to your own room and closet: get rid of anything no longer loved, used or serving your needs. Toss or donate any toys your kids have outgrown and clothing they no longer wear. Put things back in an orderly fashion, surface clean and make the beds.

By 6:00pm, you're probably going to be feeling pretty exhausted. Run any items to a donation location and take a nice dinner break. Over dinner, you can assess your progress and challenges you might have faced during the day's process. Give yourself some time to refresh and re-energize before you tackle the evening tasks. You can do it!

## **SATURDAY EVENING**

After dinner, it's time to give yourself another 90-minute task: cleaning the basement and the toy/playroom. Get rid of anything you don't use! Basements are major areas of clutter. It's where we store things we don't actually want, yet we can't bring ourselves to part with. If items have made the way down to this "zone," it's time to be tough and clean them out!

Give yourself until 9:00pm to finish, then take a few minutes for YOU. Relax with a hot bath or shower. Enjoy a cup of tea, and read a magazine or book, or zone out to your favorite show. Whatever it is, be sure to treat yourself a little. You deserve it after this challenge!

## **SUNDAY**

Spend the morning relaxing! Enjoy breakfast or brunch with your family, attend an early church service, go for a walk, or do some reading. Take a break and take care of your Sunday necessities.

Around noon, gear up to tackle the garage. For 90 minutes, go through all of the junk that's accumulated...and purge it. Get rid of old tools, cans of paint, pots and gardening equipment, sports items—whatever you've dumped in the garage for "storage."

When you've eliminated as much as possible, give yourself a chance to catch your breath and take a quick break. Then, set the timer for another 90 minutes

and start to reassemble the garage. Sweep, dust and wipe down surfaces, then put everything in its proper place. For every item you keep, ask: Do I really use this? Does it work? Do I really like it and want it? If the answer to any of those questions is no, get rid of it.

By 4:00pm, you're on the final stretch! Give yourself 90 more minutes to tackle any remaining areas in your house, and give everything a final sweep. This is a great opportunity to go through your craft area, your home office, exercise area, or other rooms specific to your living space. Use the same principles to assess each area, and finish up.

If you follow the plan, by 5:30pm or 6pm on Sunday, you should feel very accomplished! In a single weekend you've managed to purge what might be years of clutter and junk. You've gotten a handle on your space and you've started the organization process.

As you move forward, set up small milestones and markers so you can be sure you're not backsliding from the plan. Continue to keep only the things that bring you joy and those that are truly useful to your home and happiness. Unstuffing our lives is a long process, requiring a change of habits and mindsets. While it can't completely happen in one weekend, you've managed to get a healthy head start—and for that, you should feel very proud!