



From Chaos to Calm

Professional Organizing Tips for the Neurodiverse Brain

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DISCLAIMER

This presentation contains a LOT of information, rather than just talking points.

This is intentional and meant to be printed and/or referred to for support during your organization journey.

That said, while I have studied psychology and consider myself an emotional empath, I am NOT a medical professional.

If you feel you may need psychological or psychiatric guidance during your organization journey, please seek out the appropriate supports prior to beginning.

NOTE: The information contained herein is ADVICE. Not all advice applies to all situations and how different people apply the same advice will result in different results.

WHAT TO EXPECT

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- ★ Nature vs. Nurture
- ★ Where Do I Start?
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- ★ Questions to Ask Yourself
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About Me



ABOUT ME

- Redhead. Lover of chai, yoga and Dateline.
- Recovering perfectionist. Eternal realist. Empath.
- Hubby, two boys (Finn & Oliver), two rescue dogs (Violet & Lionel Richie).
- Psychology degree, graduate diploma
- 19 years senior people management experience
- Member of the Professional Organizers of Canada
- 2016 - everything changed; new diagnoses, baby, career
- 2017 - Simply SOS was born
- 2021 - my own 'refined' diagnosis



Nature vs. Nurture



NATURE VS. NURTURE

While various mental or physical health diagnoses can greatly influence our ability to get organized and stay that way, the environment in which we were raised equally impacts our abilities and decision-making process when deciding what stays and what goes.

Then:

- Were you raised in a home that was constantly cluttered or could you eat off the floor?
- Were you raised poor? Was there abuse?
- Did you learn to have 'unreasonable' attachments to inanimate objects?
- Were you taught to clean and/or organize?



NATURE VS. NURTURE (cont'd)

Now:

- Have you embraced or rejected the type of cleaning & organizing you witnessed as a child?
- Did you/do you 'self-soothe' through acquisition of stuff?
- Do you suffer from guilt when thinking of letting things go?
- Did you learn to clean and/or organize?

Most of us were never 'trained' in efficient ways to tidy and sort our space even though it's an incredibly important life skill! And even if you have the capability, you may not have the desire.



NATURE VS. NURTURE (cont'd)

3 types of clients:

- Those that don't know how to organize.
- Those that don't want to.
- Those that are both.

We aren't all good at all things. You have beautiful and unique qualities that make you, you. And that's ok.

It's never too late to learn something new. Let's do this!



Where Do I Start?



WHERE DO I START?

For people who feel overwhelmed by their space and desire for it to be organized, they often don't know where to begin; the kitchen, the office, the basement?

The place you start organizing isn't actually in your HOME; it's in your HEAD.

Before beginning any organizing journey, no matter how large or small, you need to first FORGIVE YOURSELF.

It's doesn't matter HOW or WHY your space is the way it is. We can't get back wasted time or wasted money, but we can forgive ourselves for our past choices and CHOOSE to move forward with compassion towards ourselves!



WHERE DO I START? (cont'd)

Once we have:

- Let go of guilt.
- Let go of failure.
- We can think about letting go of stuff!

- Make a list of your priorities.
 - ◆ Room by room vs. thing by thing (paper, crafting, books).

- Ensure any emotional triggers are saved for last.
 - ◆ Memorabilia, photos, gifts, clothing.



Sorting 101



SORTING 101

Tools:

- Garbage bags, recycling bags, clear bags (Kirkland brand).
 - ◆ Black = trash
 - ◆ Blue = recycling or shredding
 - ◆ Clear = donation and/or eco station
- Box cutter.
- Sharpie & roll of painter's tape or label maker.
- Try to use what containers/boxes/bags you have on hand for the initial organizing phase.
 - ◆ More economical to purchase bins & containers once you know what is staying vs. going and where it is going to live.



SORTING 101 (cont'd)

Once we know our priorities and have our tools on hand:

- Start to put 'like' with 'like'
 - ◆ Go throughout your home and bring 'like' things together.

- Where is it going to live?
 - ◆ Group items initially in the space you intend them to end up.
 - ◆ Example: gather paper from throughout the house and bring it into whatever space you'd like paper to end up living.



SORTING 101 - DECISION FATIGUE

It is important to avoid DECISION FATIGUE.

- Decision fatigue occurs when you are dealing with multiple items from multiple categories and trying to decide what goes where for each and every different item.
- It takes forever to make any progress. You feel defeated and develop a disdain for sorting & tidying your home.
- When beginning, unless something is clearly destined for donation, recycling or trash, **DO NOT MAKE ANY DECISIONS** on what stays or goes just yet.
- It is **SO MUCH EASIER** to make decisions about **ONE SINGLE** category rather than multiple categories at the same time.



SORTING 101 - THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- It will get messier before it gets tidier.
- This process involves both physical & emotional labour.
- When more than one person lives in the home, do not make decisions for them (unless they are very small children). Instead, ask if they would like to participate and if not, where they would like their items put.
- Asking for or accepting help from friends/family can be tricky. If you pursue this, ensure clear rules & boundaries are set BEFORE you begin.
- ANY progress IS progress.



Debulking



DEBULKING

Because sorting makes things worse before they get better, make sure you are continuously taking out trash, recycling and making donations & eco-station drop offs. I call this 'debulking'.

- Original Boxes - DO NOT keep original boxes beyond the return window whenever possible.
 - ◆ They take up way too much space
 - ◆ If stored elsewhere, they are easily forgotten about.
- Other Cardboard - BEFORE sorting, break down all opened boxes from around your home & garage. This is the ultimate and often most impactful debulking exercise.

Remember to DEBULK throughout your organization journey.



Questions To Ask Yourself



DECISION MAKING TIME!

The sorting process shows us just how much stuff we have.

Example:

Prior to sorting your kitchen, you discover 2 frying pans and are unwilling to part with either. However, after gathering all kitchen items from throughout the home, you discover you actually own 5 frying pans.

It is much easier to decide to let one or more go when you understand just how many you have.



QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

When making decisions on sorted items, ask:

- Is it damaged or broken?
 - ◆ If you haven't yet fixed it, you're likely not going to; LET IT GO.

- Do you use it?
 - ◆ If you haven't used it, you're likely not going to; LET IT GO.

- Given the means and opportunity, would you acquire it again?
 - ◆ This applies to ALL items, especially expensive ones. If you're only holding onto something BECAUSE it was expensive, LET IT GO.

- Do you even like it?
 - ◆ If an item no longer serves you, LET IT GO.
 - ◆ If you're only keeping it because someone gave it to you, LET IT GO.



QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF (cont'd)

When making decisions on CLOTHING, ALSO ask:

- Does it fit? Could it reasonably fit in the near future?
 - ◆ If it doesn't fit or has never fit, LET IT GO.
 - ◆ Do not treat clothing as a safety net; if your body occupies more or less space in the future, acquire clothing that meets your needs at THAT time.

- Does it make you feel good?
 - ◆ If it is uncomfortable, has never fit correctly or makes you feel poorly about yourself, LET IT GO.

- Does it fit your life now or how you hope your life unfolds?
 - ◆ If you left the corporate world, you might not need all those suits.
 - ◆ If you can no longer wear heels, do you need that many pairs?
 - ◆ LET GO WHAT NO LONGER SERVES YOU.



QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF (cont'd)

If the SOLE reason you are keeping something is because of its original cost or its current value, remember:

The money has been spent, you cannot get it back!



QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF (cont'd)

Fun approach! Pretend 'all the things' have feelings!

Sweater Weather

If YOU are the sweater that is always left at the bottom of the drawer, unworn, and your sole purpose in your sweater life is to be worn - you are not fulfilling your purpose!

Would you want to be abandoned at the bottom of the drawer or given away & allowed to find someone else to wear you with pride?



QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF (cont'd)

Once you've eliminated items that are:

- Broken
- Unused
- Unneeded
- Unloved

You should be left with less.

The less stuff you have, the easier any organization system is to maintain.

Do you really need 17 baking sheets? 135 pairs of shoes?

When you have an excess of an item you can only use one or two of at a time, how many do you really need?

Try to cut any volume by at least half. Even one less is one less item taking up unnecessary space in your home.



*When it's Leaving,
Where Should It Go?*



WHEN IT'S LEAVING, WHERE SHOULD IT GO?

Just because it's leaving doesn't mean it's trash.

Options for Donation

- Goodwill, Find, other local non-profits (Value Village is a for-profit entity).
 - ◆ Confirm what items the non-profit is currently accepting.
 - ◆ For larger items, some non-profits will pick up.

Eco Station

- Chemicals, paint, batteries, light bulbs, electronics, small appliances, etc. are just some of the things that can be responsibly disposed of at your local eco-station for FREE.
 - ◆ Small fees for larger items (appliances, mattresses, etc.).



WHEN IT'S LEAVING, WHERE SHOULD IT GO? (cont'd)

IF looking to sell or consign an item rather than donating:

→ Research

- ◆ Determine a reasonable price range and then price to sell.
- ◆ Just because something COST a lot of money, doesn't mean it's retained its value.
- ◆ Avoiding holding onto something JUST because it's value MAY go up in the future. If doing so, limit volume.

→ Time Limit

- ◆ If it hasn't sold in a finite period of time (ie. one month), LET IT GO.

→ Garage Sales & Marketplace; what is your TIME worth?



WHEN IT'S LEAVING, WHERE IT SHOULD **NOT** GO

- Do NOT 'saddle' others with your stuff.
- Do NOT 'save' things for others unless you've been specifically asked to.
- IF so inclined, send out a group text/email announcing that you are decluttering.
 - ◆ Ask if there is anything anyone is specifically looking for?
 - ◆ Provide likely categories of items that will be purged.

Also remember, we can't take it with us when we go so consider what eventual downsizing might look like.

- Do not leave something to someone in your will unless you specifically know they want it.



When It's Staying



WHEN IT'S STAYING

Have you ever moved into a new space and by the time the move is completed, you're spent?

The idea of unpacking can be overwhelming; all of the sudden, you have to create an entirely new way of storing your belongings.

Approach your space(s) with a fresh set of eyes.

Think logically.

Think efficiency.

AND!

Just because you have the storage space, DOES NOT MEAN YOU NEED TO USE IT.



WHEN IT'S STAYING - Where should it ultimately live?

Where is it going to live? Does that still make sense?

It's ok to change your mind.

The space chosen to house each category **MUST** be large enough to contain it.

- You have 40 pairs of shoes, but only space for 25; what about the other 15?
- If the other 15 are going in a blue rubbermaid tote to be stored under the stairs in the basement, you are **VERY** likely to forget either its contents or whereabouts.
- If you **THEN** store other things in front of the bin under the stairs in the basement, you are **MUCH LESS** likely to access it - setting you up to **BUY MORE STUFF!**



Decanting



DECANTING

The less steps it takes to access an item:

- The easier it is to access.
- The more likely it is to return to its 'home'.
- The quicker you can determine what remains.

Sometimes this simply means removing and disposing of a lid (ie. dishwasher tabs).

Other times it makes more sense to DECANT.

Decanting is the process of taking items out of their original container and storing in a new/more efficient container.

We most often use decanting in bathrooms & kitchens!

PS - decanting is a HUGE thing on Pinterest; while pretty, functionality should be the primary goal.



Containers



CONTAINERS

Most of us acquire containers in the hope that they will help us get and stay better organized. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- MEASURE TWICE, PURCHASE ONCE.
- Not all containers are created equal.
- Do you need a container with a lid, or an open container (bin)?
- Can you label the container?
- The more steps it takes to access the container, the less likely you are to access it. For example - stacking containers can help save space, but also limits your ability to access what is below the top container.
- Not everything needs a container.



CONTAINERS (cont'd)

Endeavour to, whenever possible:

- Store 'like' with 'like', all in one place.
 - ◆ If it doesn't easily fit where you've chosen to store it - you need to find a different place to store it OR reduce the amount to fit the chosen space.
- Acquire CLEAR, latched containers that stack easily.
- Purchase containers that have as close to a 90 degree bottom angle as possible.
- Out of sight, out of mind. Putting something into a container and then housing it elsewhere means you're more likely to forget about its contents.
 - ◆ Basements & garages are where things go to be forgotten.
 - ◆ Storage Units - only use temporarily if at all possible.



CONTAINERS (cont'd)

We get most of our containers from:

- Dollarama
- Canadian Tire
- Amazon
- Costco

Other places to explore:

- Home Depot, Home Hardware, etc.
- Superstore
- Walmart



Labels



LABELS

EVERY TIME something goes into a container, ensure you LABEL IT.

EVERY TIME you use a previously used container for something new, RE-LABEL IT - especially if the container isn't clear.

If it's a challenge to return a container to its home because you're unsure of what goes where - label the container AND its home.

Item doesn't live in a container? Labelling drawers, cupboards or closets with what's in it & where it goes helps ensure things return to their rightful home.

Labelling can look like:

- Painter's tape & a sharpie
- Label maker
 - ◆ Favourite base model: Brother PT-D210; we use Brother PT-D450



Memories & Momentos



MEMORIES & MOMENTOS

Kid(s) Artwork & Memories

- Each child gets one clear file box for artwork, one for memories.
- When they have something special they want to save, it goes in either box.
- Limit 'sentimental' art & momentos to these two boxes. If the box is full, more can only be added once something is chosen to be discarded. This helps kids better identify what is truly special to them, without holding onto too much.
- Mark your calendar to go through the boxes once every year, discarding anything that no longer holds special meaning.
- When the kids fly the coop, their stuff goes with them!



MEMORIES & MOMENTOS (cont'd)

Your Own Momentos

- Follow the guidelines outlined in 'Kid(s) Artwork and Memories'.
- Try to limit yourself to one (1) clear file box for your momentos & keepsakes.
 - ◆ If just starting to limit keepsakes, one file box for childhood memories and one for adulthood is reasonable.
- REMEMBER: Letting go of a physical momento does not mean it doesn't or didn't hold memory/value. It simply means it no longer holds as MUCH memory/value as something else you've decided to keep.
 - ◆ Take a picture, save it to 'favourites' & LET IT GO.



MEMORIES & MOMENTOS (cont'd)

Baby Clothes & Momentos

- The PARENT has the emotional attachment, the CHILD does not. If you are saving them for your child, you are saving them for the wrong person.

Printed Photos

- Immediately discard doubles/triples.
- Just because you printed them, doesn't mean you need to keep them.
- Negatives - what is the likelihood you will ever look at them (again)?
- Do you remember the time/place/person/memory? If no, LET IT GO.

Electronic Photos

- Easiest to sort by date.
- Treat multiple shots of the same moment as doubles/triples above.
- BACK UP! Computer, cloud, external hard drive.



MEMORIES & MOMENTOS (cont'd)

Inherited Photos

- Debulk upon receipt, only keeping those pics that are of loved ones or memories you were a part of.

Other Inherited Items

- Do not hold onto things simply because they were given to you.
- Hold onto things that remind you of positive memories.
- Do not hold onto anything that evokes NEGATIVE emotions.
- Again, do not hold onto something simply because it held or holds significant monetary value.



Quick Tips & Tricks



QUICK TIPS & TRICKS

Always remember; the less steps it takes to access an item and/or put it away, the more organized your space will be!

Do your best to keep 'like with like' throughout the home so as to avoid forgetting just what you have!

Drawers

- Spring loaded dividers (measure first!).
- Individual plastic containers.
- Use sticky tabs or museum gel to hold in place.



QUICK TIPS & TRICKS - CLOTHING

- Hang or fold? Using your preferred method whenever possible increases the likelihood of clothes being put away.
- Dressers vs. closets vs. open shelving & bins.
- Hanger Method
 - ◆ After purging your closets, turn all hangers in the opposite direction.
 - ◆ As you wear things & put them away, place hangers the correct way.
 - ◆ Set a date in the near future (3, 6, 12 months) to go back into your closet and see what items are still hung backwards. Those are the items you have not worn and need to LET GO.
- Hand-Me Downs: Store by type (and child) not by size.



QUICK TIPS & TRICKS - KITCHEN

- Create stations
 - ◆ put coffee maker on counter above/below mugs & coffee supplies.
- Avoid separate overflow locations; unless you access regularly, it's likely you won't always know just how much you have.
- Dishes by the dishwasher/sink; makes it easier to unload!
- Think outside the box; cupboards vs. drawers.
- Food with food. If in multiple cupboards, keep in same area.
- Pay attention to best before dates vs. expiry dates.
- Decant snacks and smaller items into labelled bins for easy access.



QUICK TIPS & TRICKS - PAPER

- We don't need most of the paper we keep.
- If once you pay a bill, you never look it again; you likely don't need to waste your time finding a home for it.
- CRA = 6 years plus current.
- Online vs. Paper.
- Wills/Important docs in freezer!



QUICK TIPS & TRICKS - KIDS

- TEACH your kids HOW to organize; the earlier the better.
- Labelling doesn't JUST have to be words; use pictures too!
 - ◆ Labelling both the container and its home location can help kids remember just where everything goes.
- When they are done with one type of toy, it goes back to it's home before another is taken out.
- Kids tend to have 'collector' mentalities. Avoid threatening their 'stuff' or suggesting it's 'junk'; just makes things worse.
- Set aside things they aren't quite ready to let go of for review at a later time; out of sight, out of mind.



QUICK TIPS & TRICKS - KIDS (cont'd)

- When purging, involve the kids (if age or cognitively appropriate).
 - ◆ Instead of suggesting they get 'rid' of stuff, encourage them to pass along items they no longer use to another child who doesn't have as much (ie. donation or to someone who's asked for hand-me downs).

- Before something new comes into the home, something needs to leave. Do this for birthdays, holidays, etc. This can apply to adults too!



QUICK TIPS & TRICKS - OTHER NUGGETS OF WISDOM

First Pass

- It's ok to review your stuff multiple times before deciding whether something stays or goes.
- First pass can be to get rid of broken, unused, unneeded, unloved.
- Subsequent passes can be used to whittle down the volume.
- Build up your confidence with these first passes of like items; you'll gain momentum!

QUICK TIPS & TRICKS - OTHER NUGGETS OF WISDOM (cont'd)

Boundaries

- Inform friends & family that you're embarking on a decluttering & organizing journey.
- Ask them to refrain from purchasing & gifting items you do not specifically NEED.
- Kids: Define needs vs. wants. Institute \$5 birthdays, experience gifts.
- Don't be afraid to regift or resell.





QUICK TIPS & TRICKS - OTHER NUGGETS OF WISDOM (cont'd)

Go Vertical!

- Tight on space? Look up!
- Prime real estate is the space between your knees and shoulders; put less used lighter items up high, heavier down low.
- Take into consideration height of person(s) accessing the most.

Limit Incoming Items

- Now that you have decluttered & organized your space, you will have a much better idea of what you DO have.
- Going forward, limit what you bring into the house.
 - ◆ Check what you DO have first before acquiring something similar.
 - ◆ Make lists BEFORE shopping by reviewing the appropriate space(s).
 - ◆ LABEL!



Questions!