

IT IS TIME TO DECLUTTER INSIDE AND OUT

The subject of cluttering and hoarding has been of growing interest to the public. Television shows about hoarding, hundreds of websites about decluttering and the recent popularity of professional organizers suggest that cluttering is of concern to people.

Clutter is defined as the accumulation of objects that are of no use to us, are disorganized and take up needed space. Clutter creates a health and fire hazard and interferes into our physical, psychological and interpersonal space. The seriousness of cluttering behavior is on a continuum from having an overstuffed desk or drawer to the most pathological behavior of hoarding animals and garbage.

The most common types of clutterers are the following:

The "thrifty collector" whose pantry and closets are overflowing with expired or outgrown bargain items.

The "I may need it some day collector" who is afraid to part with anything that may be of use in the future.

The "procrastinator" who intends to get rid of things but never gets around to it.

The "sentimentalist" for whom objects represent memories and connections to significant people or experiences. .

Sorting, organizing and getting rid of clutter can be overwhelming and anxiety provoking. The first step is to acknowledge this is a problem and that it effects your physical and mental functioning. All cluttering has a psychological reason whether it is poor time management, organization difficulties, insecurity, trauma or loss.

When you have an understanding of why its hard for you to give up unneeded things you can move forward with the physical task of decluttering.

Expert organizers offer the following tips: Prepare the materials you will need such as boxes, large trash bags, files, cameras, scanners, shredders. Create categories such as "keep", "throw away", "and give away". Break the task into time and space segments to avoid feeling overwhelmed. Reward small successes. (each completed step is important and counts!) Enlist the help of a friend or family member. You can outsource only after you have done the psychological work.

For the sentimentalist the task of decluttering is more complicated. The objects have emotional meaning and discarding them may trigger anxiety or depression. In this situation pain created by loss or trauma needs to be dealt with. The project should be done gradually. The sentimentalist needs to talk about the experiences and people the objects represent so they can be internalized as memories. Taking pictures of meaningful objects and saving one or two from each collection helps ease the process.

With spring around the corner, what better time to clear up the emotional and physical space around and inside of us. Happy decluttering