

## Decluttering

This list provides suggestions for clearing your physical space by identifying and releasing things that no longer benefit you. There is a bit of basic feng shui\* mixed in, as well. I hope you find at least a few of the ideas helpful, and please disregard those that don't feel right to you.

*From, Lexi*

1. Make **simple rules** that work for you. Keep them flexible. Follow your own guidance.
2. Set **intentions**, such as: Being kind and gentle with yourself as you make these changes; avoiding judgement or insults; listening to your body as you go.
3. Determine your criteria for **keeping or not keeping things**. For example:
  - a. I keep the things I **love**, really like, use frequently, use rarely but are crucial when needed (e.g., a special tool), that enhance my sense of peace, comfort, and enjoyment of my surroundings, etc.
  - b. I get rid of the things I **hate**, don't like, don't use, can't use, or that make my physical space feel uncomfortable, cramped, chaotic, unsafe, etc.
  - c. I don't have to keep everything that I like. Said another way, you can like (or even love) something and still decide to let it go.
4. Identify your preferred options for "**where things will go**" when you move them out of your physical space. For example:
  - a. Give Away
  - b. Donate
  - c. Recycle
  - d. Reuse/Repurpose (although this involves keeping things)
  - e. Throw Away
  - f. Store at an External Location (Last resort! See #35)
5. Decide "**where to start.**" It may help to identify areas, items or tasks:
  - a. That cause bad thoughts and bad feelings.
  - b. That cause bodily reactions such as a sick stomach, clenched jaw, tight chest, etc.
  - c. That literally make you trip, fall, or have to step over or walk around.
  - d. That have to be moved to get to the things you are looking for.
  - e. That don't have a clearly designated place to be put away.
  - f. That seem to frequently get lost or are difficult to find.
  - g. That are broken, damaged, soiled, dull, faded, threadbare, etc.
  - h. That are dangerous, such as cracked glass, sharp edges, splinters, rust, etc.
6. When it comes to making **choices** about what to do with our "stuff," Karen Rauch Carter\* (see below) stresses that what is going on in our **life** is being reflected in our

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physical space. She is an expert at pinpointing recommended changes by listening to people's exact **words**. For example, people who complain that "I'm always tired" may be keeping items that are old and worn out. People who describe feeling trapped, stuck or overwhelmed may have a cramped and cluttered home. Someone who comments about "slipping" in regards to a behavior may have a loose rug lying around. You may try listening to your own words to see what changes those words suggest.

7. Consider the **cumulative effects** of having things in your physical space that you don't like or that even cause feelings of hate, revulsion, or guilt. Seeing and interacting with such things on a regular basis wears on us and detracts from our quality of life. You don't even have to know or be able to explain "why" you don't like something. If it feels bad, it is harmful to you and makes a strong candidate for elimination. "I look at it, I hate it, it hurts me... It has no place in my life."
8. In starting, you may choose something that feels relatively **easy**.
9. If you still aren't sure where to start, **randomly selecting** a task or item may provide more clarity. If you begin working and have an immediate negative reaction, that could indicate a different starting place is in order.
10. **Break down** large projects into steps (e.g., focus on one shelf, organize half a drawer, sort the first 10 items from a bin, open one box, etc.).
11. **Sorting** things may help with decision-making by letting you see what you have to work with. For example, put the same or similar items together by size, type, color, weight, shape, etc. You could also set aside the definite "items to keep" as you go.
12. If a task **feels good**, easy, exciting, fun, fulfilling, satisfying, inspiring, joyful, invigorating, comforting, soothing, relaxing, meditative, etc. – Keep going!
13. If a task **feels bad**, stop. If a task feels too hard, stop. If you feel tired, stop. If you feel overwhelmed or confused, stop. If it involves forcing, stop. If it stirs up bad memories or other negative thoughts and feelings, stop. (etc.)
14. If a task feels bad, you can try to identify "**why**," which could provide insight for later. However, you can also choose just to restart or to transition to something else.
15. If you decide to stop in midstream, consider **revisiting** the project after a break, the next day, on a later date, or whenever you feel like starting again.
16. Evaluate how well you **tolerate** an unfinished task. Are you reasonably comfortable leaving something undone, even if it means seeing a temporary mess? For some people, seeing that something is unfinished causes increased anxiety or irritability. If your tolerance level is low or non-existent, that knowledge helps you plan tasks so that each one, or portion of one, is completed within the specified timeline. Otherwise, make sure your stuff is not blocking an exit, and return to it when you wish!

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17. If you feel **resistance**, decide whether you would like to *gently* push through. Notice that I used the phrase “would like to” versus “can.” Just because I *can* push through something doesn’t mean it will be good for my health and well-being.
18. Pay attention to your **body**. Have you stopped to eat, drink, or use the bathroom? Are you tired? Could you benefit from some stretching or mindful breathing? Would it help to stand up or walk around for circulation? Ignoring or delaying needs can cause tension and make things feel more difficult. It can even be distracting as your body sends more and more cues to take care of it.
19. Give yourself the option to **change your mind** at any time. And/or to change it back. This applies to all actions and decisions. Understand that sometimes these choices will feel hard, and that is completely normal. Remember, if it feels good, continue.
20. **Visualizing** the outcome might help. When giving things away, some people feel happy imagining another person or family being thrilled to find and to welcome a new item into their home. Others find satisfaction in knowing that recycling an item prevents it from going into a landfill. Throwing away an item with a negative association may help promote healing and closure.
21. Consider that time, energy and inspiration may come in **waves** or “when the stars align.” So don’t be hard on yourself when there seem to be **dry spells**, even if that turns into weeks or months. I’ve found that momentum will return if you are determined to make these changes.
22. Speaking of **momentum**, often making decisions becomes quicker and easier as more tasks and projects are completed. That ease, combined with the satisfaction of seeing progress, creates positive reinforcement, meaning: “I did something that felt good, so I’m more likely to do it again.” Positive reinforcement can help you tap into more energy and inspiration that will keep you going despite discouragement, doubt, intimidation, fatigue, and other obstacles.
23. Acknowledge **ALL progress** along the way. Even the smallest step counts. Even clearing “one inch” of space counts. Even *thinking* about doing something counts.
24. **Trying** counts too! I have a hang-up about the word “try” because it implies that I attempted to do something but “failed...” Which leads to me insulting myself with words like stupid, incompetent, lazy, etc. I suggest that people **replace** the word “trying” with “doing,” because by trying, you took action. This all represents progress.
25. Beware of using the word **“should”** as a negative way to motivate yourself. For example: “I should know how to do this. I should have gotten it done last weekend. I should be doing more.” These types of thoughts just make you feel bad and deficient.

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26. Don't be **mad** at yourself for not starting or completing a task, even if you technically had the time and/or energy to do so. The timing may not have been right, maybe your energy level was lower than you realized, or some aspect of life got in the way.
27. I suggest describing any barriers and delays as **reasons** versus excuses. Thinking of yourself as "making excuses" can set off judgment and insults.
28. **Reward** yourself during and/or after tasks with words ("Great job!" "I'm getting the hang of this!" "It's starting to look better"), with a small treat, with something fun, relaxing, pampering, etc. Rewards feel good and create positive reinforcement which makes you more likely to continue your organizing and decluttering. As a bonus, this gives you a reason to do something nice for yourself, which many of us forget to do or don't allow unless we achieved something major or finished something in its entirety.
29. Notice when you place rules or conditions that make doing a task seem difficult or nearly **impossible**. For example, "I can only do it if I have at least four hours free on this day/weekend/vacation. I can't start it unless I can do the whole thing. I can't do it if so-and-so is in the house." Although these things can legitimately prevent us from action at times, there may also be opportunities to identify "loopholes and workarounds."
30. Notice **perfectionism** and unreasonable expectations of yourself. This can lead to tasks feeling extremely difficult, time consuming and stressful. As an alternative, consider *slightly* lowering your standards while ensuring results that are still very, very good.
31. Notice when you may be talking yourself out of a decision to let something go. Second-guessing and **doubting** decisions is common. It may help to look at what your hesitation is about.
  - a. If the item feels like a "**maybe**" instead of a "no," consider keeping it at least temporarily so that you can clarify your feelings. I think it's easy to get a little lost in this process and sometimes become so focused on clearing things out that we misinterpret our own guidance.
  - b. If you identify the item as a definite "no" but still hesitate, it could be due to **feelings** such as guilt, obligation, fear or embarrassment. I don't recommend keeping anything that doesn't feel right to you for your own reasons and on your own terms. Letting go of these types of items may take some emotional processing before you take action.
32. Regarding feelings such as **guilt**, people may negatively comment when they discover that something they gave you is now missing or is not in plain sight.
  - a. If you choose to provide an explanation (that's a choice, not a requirement), it can help to have some scripted **responses** ready in case you are questioned.

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For example, you could say: “I noticed we only used it every once in a while, so I decided to donate it.”

- b. You could come up with a creative fabrication (No judgement here, it can work!), or for those who find it hard to shake guilt, an explanation may make sense. This is another area in which building **tolerance** might help, meaning you can learn to minimize your discomfort when someone (especially a family member) is upset. Often, the person will surprise you by not caring, will not be as angry or offended as you feared, or will forget about it soon after. Worst case scenarios, of course, involve forever being reminded. You can choose what hurts the least: Keeping an negatively charged item or getting rid of it despite others' feelings. No offense to others, but I vote for choosing you.
- c. Family heirlooms can feel **trickier**; you might consider returning it to the giver or asking if another family member wants it. Another idea is to donate it to someone who will appreciate its uniqueness or value (e.g., antique shop, library, collector, historical society).

**33.** In my experience, keeping something “**against your will**” to avoid someone from being unhappy can be emotionally harmful (as well as that item taking up space you could use or leave empty). I encourage you to consider setting a healthy boundary whenever possible. You may let the giver know that you intend to give away or dispose of the object, and you want to give them a chance to accept it back, if they wish. You can do this kindly but firmly. Or perhaps ask someone else to communicate the boundary for or with you.

**34.** For the “**maybe**” items, one criterion you could use is to ask yourself, “Where will this go if I keep it?” There’s an old saying: “A place for everything and everything in its place.” Please don’t interpret that as a judgement about clutter... The intended message is that when items have an assigned spot, it’s easier to clean up. Putting such items away becomes automatic without having to figure out where to put it each time (e.g., the scissors go in the left kitchen drawer). If you can’t think of somewhere to put an item that makes sense and that doesn’t involve precarious stacking, shoving or hiding, you might decide that “out it goes.”

**35.** Regarding moving something into **storage** (e.g., garage/shed, community storage unit, family or friend’s home), consider that those physical items are still being “held onto” mentally, emotionally, and energetically. Karen Rauch Carter\* describes a process of storing things away and out of sight (e.g., sealed box in garage) for one year before having someone else view what’s in the box to ask if you remember anything that you need or want from it. You don’t look in the box, and the other person does not divulge any information about the contents. You keep anything you can name as still wanted or

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needed, and you (or the other person, at your designation) decide how to dispose of the remaining contents, again without looking at it yourself. Please note, this is a summary and may not precisely reflect Karen's instructions. I recommend seeking out her material for more details (see below).

**36. Ask for help.** You may consider asking a trusted person to help with decision-making by choosing what to do first since they are (theoretically, depending on who it is) less emotionally attached to the item and situation. You could have a conversation about why you want to keep certain things; talking out loud can provide clarity versus exploring everything in your mind. When asking my daughter about potential donations, I hold up each item and ask her to say, "Yes, no, or maybe" for each. It can feel a little cumbersome sometimes, but it works for us.

There is no right or wrong way to declutter and organize your space. But *if* I were to suggest a "right" approach, it would be to do this in your own way, on your own terms, in your own timing, lead by good feelings, with kindness and acceptance always.

**Most importantly, don't beat yourself up about any of this. Ever.** 

\*Ideas for basic feng shui are adapted from the book, "Move Your Stuff, Change Your Life" by professional feng shui consultant, healthy-lifestyle designer, educator, and best-selling author Karen Rauch Carter. I highly recommend her and encourage anyone interested to check out her books, recordings and website at: [www.karenrauchcarter.com](http://www.karenrauchcarter.com)

\*\*A shorter version of this list is available on my website: [fromlexi.com](http://fromlexi.com)

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