

# The many faces of clutter

Clutter is a much broader concept than just piles of stuff

**A**s a professional organizer, you're probably not surprised to learn that I spend a great deal of time occupied with clutter. I help people deal with clutter, take pictures of clutter, write about clutter, and talk about clutter. You might say it's the bane of my existence. I have a love-hate relationship with clutter. I despise clutter, but I LOVE taking a cluttered space and transforming it into an ordered one.

You might have an image in your mind right now that symbolizes your definition of clutter.



Angie Hyche

But clutter is a much broader concept than just piles of stuff. I love Peter Walsh's definition of clutter. Walsh, a well-known organizer and author, constantly challenges people to think differently about not only their possessions, but their lives. He defines clutter as "anything that gets between you and the life you want to be living." According to Walsh, "If you focus on the stuff, you will never get organized because clutter is never about the stuff."

So if the problem isn't the stuff, what is it? How do we get in this predicament in the first place? Why do we hold onto things we don't need? There is so much psychology and emotion behind what we decide to keep and how we deal with our stuff. Fellow organizer and member of the National Association of Productivity and Organizing Professionals Yvonne Boyes of Sweetly Simplified Home Organizing constructed this list of different types of clutter:

**Sentimental clutter.** I would describe this as items that remind us of a special person or significant event in our lives.



AUDRA STEADMAN

Clutter doesn't always involve stuff. One very common type of clutter that you may not have even considered is **schedule clutter.** If your calendar is so crammed full of activities that you can't find the time to devote to your closest friends and family, it's time to let something (or a few somethings) go.

**Examples** might include your grown child's baby clothes, trophies from your former days of competitive sports, or a love letter from a middle school sweetheart.

**Situational clutter.** This could be defined as clutter that results because of a change in life events like a new baby or a home remodel.

**Paper clutter.** Those piles of junk mail, magazines, bills and other stray papers can accumulate quickly.

**Seasonal/life stage clutter.** Examples could include a weight bench you haven't used in years, old and outdated electronics, or items left behind by grown children who have moved out of the house.

**Obligation clutter.** How about that decorative lamp that Aunt Rosalind gave you that you've never liked but are afraid to get rid of in case she comes to visit?

**Aspiration clutter.** Have you ever bought a bunch of supplies for a craft that you never even started?

**Marketing/cultural influenced clutter.** If you can't bring yourself to get rid of those Precious Moments figurines you used to be really into, you understand this category.

**Practical clutter.** Do you keep a lone sock or earring in case the mate magically appears? Or how about purchasing multiples of the same thing just in case you lose the first one or need an extra?

**Impulse clutter.** This could be

any item that you bring home on a whim without fully considering whether you really need it or where it will "live" in your house.

I mentioned earlier that clutter doesn't always involve stuff. One very common type of clutter that you may not have even considered is schedule clutter. Take a look at the photo accompanying this article for an illustration of this type of clutter. If your calendar is so crammed full of activities that you can't find the time to devote to your closest friends and family, it's time to let something (or a few somethings) go.

No one has time for everything, and even if you did, you couldn't do each of them justice. I love this quote from Forbes magazine: "When you say 'Yes' to one thing, you're saying 'No' to something else. Time is a limited commodity, and each of us has only 24 hours per day." Clearly defining your priorities will help you decide what you might need to give up.

The New Year is a great time for reflection. Take an honest look at your possessions and how you spend your time. Compare them against your priorities and life goals. Do they match up? Or is there a lot of excess that you need to trim? Decluttering efforts are well worth the time and energy spent. In my next article, I will present a list of decluttering steps that you will be able to use in any area of the house as well as a simple 10-minute daily activity that can make a world of difference.

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