

# ORGANIZING

## Find a home for your homeless clutter

When it comes to my job, helping people deal with the clutter in their homes is my bread and butter. Clutter is defined as a collection of things lying about in an untidy mass. Clutter can accumulate anywhere in a home, but what I encounter most often is cluttered surfaces in the common areas of the home like the kitchen, living room and bedrooms.

Sometimes clutter piles up because we simply don't take the time to put items back in their proper place. Taking a few extra seconds to return items to their home instead of placing them somewhere else quickly solves that problem. But what if an item has never been assigned a proper location, or home? What do you do with it when you finish using it? More often than not, that item will end up on a kitchen counter, desk, coffee table, or some other surface. When that same outcome occurs frequently, before you know it, the surface is no longer visible or usable.

I heard the term "homeless clutter" on one of my favorite organizing podcasts recently. Cassie Aarsen, professional organizer, author and owner of ClutterBug in Ontario, Canada, coined the term, and I think it's a perfect name because it reminds me of the most fundamental principle of organization. Keeping your home organized is all about finding a suitable home for every item and keeping that item in its home.

Following is the list of items that frequently end up as homeless clutter, along with a description of where I keep them in my home and other sensible locations.

**KEYS**  
This is homeless clutter than can really wreak havoc. How



AUDRA STEADMAN

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many times have you or someone you know been running around in a panic, late for an important event and frustrated because you can't find your keys?

My husband, Eric, keeps his in his pocket or on his bedside table. I keep mine in a particular pocket of my purse. Occasionally if I need to quickly run to my car, I'll put them in my pocket temporarily, but I always try to put them right back in my purse when I return. Occasionally this doesn't happen; see above note about this situation wreaking havoc.

Hanging keys on a hook by the door is also a pretty good solution.

I have some friends who share keys to a car for some reason instead of each person having their own key. I have never thought this was a good idea, because invariably there will be some situation where someone needs a key but the other person has it. See above note about havoc. Get your own key, people. Seriously.

drawer," as I feel this would be unbecoming to a professional organizer.

It's not necessarily illegal to have a junk drawer. If you did choose to have a junk drawer and you can keep it semi-organized, these items would probably belong in it. They probably need to be in the common areas of your house. If you have an office, some will most likely need to be kept there as well.

### ITEMS TO BE REPAIRED/RETURNED TO SOMEONE/ETC.

This category is for anything that needs to go out the door for any reason. It ends up as homeless clutter because we are afraid that if we don't leave it out somewhere we can see it, we'll forget to take it with us. And if we go ahead and put it in the car, we might drive around with it for months but never get it to its destination.

I keep mine on the floor under my purse that's hanging on the doorknob. The idea is that I will see it when I get my purse and immediately pick it up and take it with me the next time I leave my house. This plan usually works.

The best home is probably close to the door closest to your car. Some type of surface is probably better than the floor. Putting the item into the car is also a good choice, but you may need some sort of reminder to actually take it to the appropriate place.

### MAIL AND OTHER ACTIVE PAPER

By active paper, I am referring to any paper that requires action (bills, forms to fill out, receipts, party invitations, etc.), not the kind of paper that needs to be stored long-term (like a birth certificate, old tax information, etc.).

Our active papers end up on the kitchen island temporarily until they have been put into their proper location. If the paper doesn't need to be dealt with quickly, I have a basket on the kitchen counter that I put it in until I get around to dealing

with it properly, which will always be less than a week.

Figuring out a system for dealing with paper is critical for preventing clutter and for managing a household. I highly recommend a system called The Sunday Basket, the brainchild of Cincinnati organizer Lisa Woodruff.

### ITEMS TO BE RECYCLED (PAPER, CARDBOARD, PLASTIC, GLASS, ETC.)

We have a small trash can in the floor of my pantry for ours. When this container fills up, we take it downstairs to put in the recycling bin.

If the recycling bin is on a different level than the kitchen, a stair basket might be another good option.

### LOOSE CHANGE

I keep mine in my billfold in my purse and just try to get rid of loose coins as I can to prevent them from building up. I have never gotten into the habit of collecting them like many people do.

If you keep them in a container of some sort, my only suggestion is to occasionally go and cash them in unless you are saving them for a particular reason.

### LOST SOCKS

I keep mine in the drawer where the rest of my socks are, and I keep them there for a little while until I have given up hope of the mate reappearing. Then I eventually assume that the mate has gone to that unknown land where all lost socks go.

A container in the laundry room for lost socks isn't a bad idea. But at some point if it gets too full, the odds that you will actually take the time to search through it when you find another random sock get pretty slim.

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