

EAP Newsletter – July 2026

Cleaning House: The Benefits of Decluttering

Thanks to greater purchasing power, an abundance of mass-produced items, and a culture that promotes consumption, we have more things than ever before. While these items can be a source of joy, pride, and usefulness, they can also be a source of stress. This is particularly the case as you get older and realize how much you've accumulated over time.

Why should I downsize?

Decluttering can be a difficult process, but it's a worthwhile one. In the future, you may need to move to a smaller home or move in with a relative or into an assisted living facility. In any of those scenarios, it's unlikely you'll have space to bring all your belongings. Paring them down now will help—especially because this kind of move may be quick and unexpected.

Even if you remain in your home, decluttering keeps your house more manageable. It's safer for you, too. Having many things collecting dust can reduce the indoor air quality and lead to pest infestations that are hard to treat. Clutter can also become a tripping hazard.

The process of decluttering

As you're going through your items, separate them into three categories: keep, pass along, toss.

- **Keep:** Keep anything that you regularly use.
- **Pass along:** Items that you no longer need and are in good condition can be donated or sold. Maybe you have five pots and you only use one—the other four can find a good home. There are some items you'll likely want to give to loved ones, such as family heirlooms. Be sure to set these aside from the general donation pile.
- **Toss:** Anything that's worn out, stained, or broken can be discarded. If you have a lot to toss, it might be worth using a junk-removal service to haul everything away.

How to deal with sentimental items

As you're sifting through your belongings, you'll undoubtedly come across items that have sentimental value. These are the trinkets filled with meaning that connect you to different chapters of your life. Use these strategies as you make decisions about these beloved keepsakes:

- Have photographs and videos digitized so that you can keep them without the clutter.
- Create guidelines around what you'll keep, like one physical item per memory. You might, for example, keep a vial of sand from that fun family trip to the beach but let go of everything else you still have from that time.
- Turn favorite photos into a collage for your wall, or have special T-shirts sewn into a quilt.
- Snap photos of things you're parting with but would like to remember.
- Take your time. It's emotionally taxing to go through a lifetime of memories. You don't have to do it all at once.

Getting help

Overwhelmed by the idea of downsizing? There are experts who can help, such as professional organizers and movers. For specialized expertise, the [National Association of Senior & Specialty Move Managers](#) is an organization whose members focus on helping older adults simplify their homes.

Don't feel like you have to do this alone. Whether you turn to an expert or friends, you'll want some support. It's mentally, emotionally, and physically challenging, so it's normal to need some assistance. Once you've started to make progress, though, you'll feel the benefits of a lighter, decluttered life.



Deep Cleaning Your Life

Every so often a deep cleaning may be warranted and can improve not only your physical living space, but your mental space as well. A cluttered, messy physical space can contribute to anxiety, stress, and an overall feeling of disarray. If you feel like your emotional space could use a cleanup, start with your physical space. Notice how your emotional state also becomes less cluttered. Here are some tips to help you in the process.

Donate Items You No Longer Use

Regularly take stock of all the possessions in your home. Items you don't use contribute to clutter and collect dust, but they could be useful to someone else. If you no longer need or use something, it's time to pass it on. You could keep a designated box for items you are ready to part with. Then drop off to a local charity or thrift store once a month or whenever the box gets full. Many charities also have convenient drop-off locations. Decluttering your physical space not only makes it easier to keep clean but notice the impact on your mental state as well.

Clean Out Your Closet on a Regular Basis

At least once or twice a year, go through your closet and donate any clothes that you haven't worn in a while. This frees up space and creates less indecision about what to wear. When our closets get too full, it's hard to keep track of clothes and things tend to get pushed out of sight. You might notice clothing items you had forgotten about and can make better use of your wardrobe. A good time to do this is at the end of winter and at the end of summer, so you can easily pick out what you haven't used.

Develop a Cleaning Routine

Keep track of household chores that need to be done on a regular basis, such as dishes, laundry, vacuuming, mopping, and dusting. Develop a daily, weekly, monthly, and even yearly routine. Assign jobs to roommates or family members so everyone pitches in. At times, we all get behind on chores due to a busy schedule or life circumstances. When this happens, don't feel like you have to tackle everything in one day. Prioritize what needs to get done, such as doing the dishes and a load of laundry.

Clean Up Your Emotional Space

Tidying up your physical space can also help you to evaluate the state of your emotional space. Take the opportunity to declutter your mind as well. For example, make an effort to focus more on the positive aspects of a situation rather than dwelling on the negative. Both meditation and exercise are effective tools to help clear your mind and make room for more positive mental energy. Don't let your mind become like a browser with too many tabs open. By prioritizing, learning to let things go, and realizing you can only control so much, you can lighten your mental load and enjoy each day more thoroughly.