



# **CLUTTER FREE LIVING** *Made Simple*

The Practical Guide

JENNIFER ROSKAMP

# **Clutter Free Living Made Simple The Practical Guide**

**Jennifer Roskamp**

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## **Why I wrote this book:**

After learning to conquer the clutter in my own life, I began sharing the things I've learned with countless readers on my blog. After receiving so much positive feedback, I wanted to share my message with a broader audience, hoping to help even more people conquer the clutter in their own lives.

Conquering clutter doesn't have to be complicated. Living clutter free really can be simple.

## **Why you should read this book:**

Within the pages of this book you will find simple strategies that you can use to finally conquer the clutter in your life. With easy to follow, actionable, step-by-step concepts, you can start conquering your clutter today.

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# Introduction

There are all kinds of books out there that discuss the secrets to living clutter free. For this reason, I am honored that you've given this one a try.

The thing is, so often a clutter free life feels unattainable because clutter is one of those "gifts" that just keeps right on giving. We can gain control of our clutter, but without real changes that encompass and transform our entire lifestyle we are always going to be teetering on the brink of our clutter controlling us rather than the other way around.

This book is divided into three different parts.

The first part takes an overall look at clutter. It is a more generalized overview filled with strategies for dealing with clutter on a larger scale. There are so many amazing ideas in part one that even if you only implemented a few new concepts, you could really get a leg up on the clutter in your home.

Part two really gets into the nitty-gritty of more specialized areas of clutter that are common among the readers and clients I talk to every day. Some of the ideas there may be things you are already doing, but with so many strategies in each chapter, there are sure to be some hidden gems that might be the answer you've been looking for all along when it comes to conquering your clutter.

In part three I branch out into areas that have little to do with our homes but that have everything to do with our everyday lives. The truth is, there are so many things that can make us feel that we are overrun by clutter – including our minds!

In the final chapter you will find the amazing benefits that living a life free from clutter can bring. Maybe you will want to read this chapter first to be truly inspired to take care of the clutter in your life once and for all!

# Part One:

# Being Practical

In part one of Clutter Free Living Made Simple, we are going to really dissect more of the how and the why behind clutter.

Clutter is something that we all struggle with, but the reasons for that struggle are greatly important to understand.

We are also going to talk about some common methods and strategies that can be used to control clutter from a general standpoint.

A more focused approach will take place in parts two and three.

With that, let's begin our journey in intentionally and effectively managing clutter!

# Chapter One:

## Understanding Clutter

Commitment is a word that can seem heavy to some while it can be something that we learn to take rather lightly, especially if we are one who generally sees the word in a more passive light.

However, recognizing that in order to be successfully committed to anything, it is an active word.

Marriage is a commitment. You aren't just "sort of" married, for instance. You are either married, or you're not.

So, you're either committed or you're not. Which is it?

How do I feel about the word, "commitment?" Is it a heavy word or a light one to me?

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Discipline is often a learned skill. Some come by it more easily than others, but it is still a skill that everyone must make the choice to embrace.

How am I with discipline? Has it come easily for me in the past?

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Generally, we all have a different reason for our challenges with clutter. For some it can be a lack of storage, others can be clutter challenged because of an emotional attachment, and others can just lack the motivation to deal with it.

What is the reason for my clutter challenges? (there can be more than one). Knowing the reasons behind our challenges can help us overcome them more effectively.

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What are some ways that I can effectively stay on top of clutter?

Here are just a few ideas.

Scheduling regular de-cluttering times, working with a reward or an incentive, getting different storage systems in place, and limiting the amount of shopping done are all great solutions at times. Which one or ones will work best for me?

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Thinking about the biggest three clutter issues in my home right now, what are two short-term solutions that I can come up with to help me feel as though I am making progress?

Having a sense of forward movement can make all the difference when it comes to being motivated to dealing with anything, clutter included.



This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for handwriting practice. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## What are my three biggest plans of attack after completing this chapter?

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## Chapter Two:

# Five Different Methods For Tackling Clutter

Having different solutions to a problem can be very advantageous. Having to do the same things the same way all the time can be boring for anyone, especially those who lack motivation or desire.

Clutter is one of those things that not many people like. So, if this is you, know you're not alone in feeling bogged down and less than excited to even think about clutter.

**One great method for dealing with clutter is to work using time blocks.**

The thing I like about time blocks is that I know how long I'm going to have to endure whatever it is. This is especially helpful when it is something I don't like.

When it comes to clutter, what is an amount of time that feels doable to me? It needs to be long enough to make some solid headway, but short enough that I won't procrastinate or avoid it. With this in mind, what is a good amount of time for me to set as blocks of time for working on clutter?

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Would working in time blocks be an effective way for me to spend some time working with clutter?

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**Choosing one part of the clutter issue to work on at a time is a second way of dealing with clutter.**

This is really nothing more than taking something larger and breaking it down into smaller parts.

When applying this method, estimate the overall amount of time it will take to complete the project.

Next, determine how many different components this project can be broken down into in a logical way.

Third, choose one of these parts to start with. Then, start working on it, and keep at it until it's done.

Fourth, walk away.

If you've done a good job in breaking the job down into manageable projects or parts, you can walk away from each completed part with a sense of accomplishment.

**A third method for working with clutter is to do a small part of the project every time you walk past.**

I think this might really be my most commonly used method. This could be because I am so busy and forever being interrupted with eight kids around me, but I have really learned to make this one work.

Really, all you are doing is picking a small part of the project that takes no more than five minutes to do each time you walk past.

This method does take the most discipline of the five different methods. If this is the one you choose, you must force yourself to work for just a few minutes each time. If you don't, the clutter issue won't ever be solved!

**The fourth method for attacking clutter is to use a numbered list of the various parts needed to complete the clutter project and using a random draw to complete them.**

Sometimes thinking and overthinking about the things we have to do makes us too worn out to even think about getting started.

With the random draw, you've got no idea what you'll be doing ahead of time. This can be an advantage when dealing with clutter. If the number is drawn for the part you dread most, you just suck it up and do it.

**The fifth way to attack clutter is the one I think most of us is famous for trying to force ourselves to use. It is locking ourselves into the task until it's done.**

With this method, no matter what the project is, you are committed to doing it until it's done.

This is also the one that is the least practical since life is almost always full of interruptions, but it *is* nice to just do it and get it all done. There are times that I would love to just complete a project from start to finish.

For these reasons, this can be a nice option to try when dealing with clutter.

Out of all five of these options, which of these have I used in the past?

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Which method is a new concept for me? How do I feel about trying it?

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Being able to change things up is a great way to take a mundane task and make it just a bit more interesting.

**What are my three biggest plans of attack after completing this chapter?**

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## Chapter Three:

# Things Smart People Do To Control Clutter

Some people just seem to have it all together don't they? These are the people who make it seem as though they have to put little to no effort forth in order to do the same things that we seem to struggle, and struggle, and struggle with.

While dealing with clutter may or may not come easily for some, I have found that there are some things we can do to be proactive when it comes to keeping clutter at bay.

I refer to these as things that smart people do to control clutter.

Some of these might be things that make you think, "Hmmmm, that makes sense," while others might seem like they will take some effort to implement.

**First, only have one place to put things. And then, you have to put things there.**

Do I struggle with putting things where they belong as a general whole? What are the three things I am most guilty of not putting where they belong right away?

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**Second, the one-touch rule is a great one to implement.**

The one-touch rule basically means that you put things in the right place initially, rather than putting them nearly to the point of being put away, or, just setting them someplace for later.

A simple example would be taking off your dirty clothes and putting them near the laundry hamper. It's easier and less time consuming to just put them in the laundry hamper in the first place.

What is my experience in using the one-touch rule? If this is new to me, am I ready to really give this a solid try for at least a couple of weeks?

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**Third, they de-clutter every day.**

If I have to choose two of the best and most practical times in each day to focus on a basic de-clutter, when would they be? How can I set myself up for success at these times?

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**Fourth, revisit clutter systems that no longer work and revise them.**



What is a current clutter system that is just not working for me anymore? And, what can I do to try to fix this problem?

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**Be smart about where you store clutter.**

It really helps to control clutter when you store things right where you use them whenever you can. It's the reason why you keep your dishes in the kitchen. They are more convenient to get out and use, and they are more convenient to put away.

With this in mind, are there storage issues that need to be fixed in order to apply this principle? If so, what needs to be moved where?

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**Fifth, focus.**

There are some of us who are rather easily sidetracked in life. Maybe you know how it is...you're in the middle of doing something when you stumble upon something else that needs your attention or something else that seems interesting to investigate. So, you shift your attention to that new thing and whatever it is that you were initially doing becomes a thing of the past.

Am I the type of person who is easily distractible?

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If you answered yes, forcing yourself to focus on only one de-clutter mission at a time will be more of a learned skill for you.

One of the things smart people do is finish a de-cluttering project without starting something new until they have finished the first one.

**Sixth, label.**

Labeling is such an effective way of making sure things are put away before they become clutter.

Do I own a labeler and put it to good use? If not, why?

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Perhaps investing in a labeler and putting it to good use would be an excellent step toward controlling clutter in your home.

**Seventh, smart people purge regularly.**

Is purging on a regular basis something I am good at? Or, do I tend to just let unused things build up to take care of on a larger scale?

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How can I be more diligent in staying on top of things that need to leave my home because they are broken, have outlived their usefulness, or could bless others more?

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**Eight, they make lists.**

Am I a list-maker?

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Keeping a list is an effective way of keeping track of the things you own. This could apply to keeping an ongoing list of things to look for while shopping, a list of Christmas presents you've bought ahead of time, and what you keep inside larger storage containers among so many other things.

What things in my life could benefit from being organized with a list?

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**They maximize their space.**

Nearly everyone has areas in their home that offer additional space that can be used for storage. As my family has grown, I have had to maximize every bit of space in my home since there are 10 of us here!

As I think about my home, where do I have space that could be used for storage? This could be under beds, on the back or inside of closet doors, and even inside tall cupboards that aren't organized efficiently.

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What could I purchase to utilize these kinds of spaces in the most efficient way possible?

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**What are my three biggest plans of attack after completing this chapter?**

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## Chapter Four: Clutter and Your Family

When it comes to our homes, the truth of the matter is that people live there. For this reason, clutter is inevitable. With people comes clutter, plain and simple.

Since clutter will always exist to some extent, what are three to five areas that I want to remain free from clutter on a daily basis?

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What are some ways that I could make it easier to keep these areas clutter free? This could be scheduling frequent de-cluttering times, getting rid of much of the stuff in these areas, or changing how things are stored in these areas.

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It is useful to utilize the rule of ownership with kids, and here it is:

If your kids want their stuff to be theirs, they will need to keep it in the appropriate areas as you have taught them.

Am I a good example of the rule of ownership? If not, how can I do this better?

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Will the rule of ownership be effective in my family? Why or why not?

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When are the two or three best times of the day to schedule a de-clutter or tidy time?

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Do I tend to expect too much or too little from my family in controlling the clutter battle? How can I improve this?

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Is the balance between having a clean and tidy home and having a home where people still feel as though they can live life as I want it to be? If not, how can I improve this?

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**What are my three biggest plans of attack after completing this chapter?**

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## Chapter Five:

# My Secret Weapon For Dealing With Clutter

What is behind clutter?

Stuff.

The struggle you do or don't have with clutter is directly related to the stuff you have.

Do I have an unhealthy view of or relationship with stuff?

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Rotating much of the stuff in our home can be so good. It not only helps us keep a better handle on the clutter, but it also helps us keep a healthy perspective of "stuff" as well.

What is my experience with "stuff rotation?" If this is a new concept to me, how do I feel about packing up stuff on a temporary basis?

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What are some things that I simply have too much of on a daily basis?

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What are some things that others just have too much of in my home?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Thinking about packing stuff up, even temporarily can be difficult for some. Is this true for me? If so, why?

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What three things can I get excited about applying this rotation principle to?

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It might be hard to get others on board with this whole stuff rotation idea.

Will there be people in my home who have a hard time with stuff rotation? If so, how can I overcome their apprehension a bit?

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**What are my three biggest plans of attack after completing this chapter?**

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# Part Two:

## Being Productive

In part two of Clutter Free Living Made Simple, we are going to roll up our sleeves and get busy. While it takes work, managing clutter simply won't get done any other way.

Maybe moving through this section only one chapter at a time and then starting to put some of the ideas and methods shared here to good use will be the easiest way for you to work with what is presented here.

I am guessing that you purchased this book because you really want to tame the clutter in your life.

But, as with anything, including this book, you must be prepared to work!

With that in mind, let's get moving!

## **Chapter Six: Minimizing the Common Clutter Culprits In Your Home**

Everyone has different things that can clutter up their lives, but there are some commonalities that many people share – myself included.

Here are some things to think about when it comes to these common clutter struggles.

### **Paper**

Is paper clutter an issue in your life? I think this is the clutter type that I struggle with most.

What are my current strategies for dealing with the paper that comes into my home? Are they working?

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What is the best permanent solution for paper clutter in my home: A file cabinet? A box? Folders? Something else?

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How often do I realistically need to deal with the paper things that come in to my home to keep it from becoming clutter? What can I do to make these things happen?

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## **Clothes**

Are clothes something that causes clutter in your home?

What are my common strategies for dealing with clothing? Are these strategies working?

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Would more laundry hampers, different dressers or closet configurations, baskets, bins, or something else make a difference in staying on top of clothing clutter? Or, is it just a matter of discipline?

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## **Dishes**

Are dirty dishes a problem?

Try racing a timer to get them done, put on some great music, or reward yourself with an incentive when you get the dishes done in a timely way.

## **The garage**

Do I have a garage? Does it become a hot spot for clutter? If so, how can I better keep this from happening?

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## **The steps or stairways**

These can be a problem area if you have them in your home. It seems like an easy place to drop stuff or throw stuff, and then they quickly become cluttered.

I use small baskets at the edge of my steps to corral all the clutter that needs to be brought upstairs or downstairs throughout the day, and then we empty them at night.

Would this method work for you? If not, what would work better for controlling the clutter that collects on your steps?

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## **Shoes**

Shoes are a never-ending source of frustration for so many people. They seem to multiply, and somehow there is always one that is MIA when we least have time to look for it.

How could shoes keep from becoming clutter in my home?

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## **Toys**

Do you just have too many? That is the primary reason for toy clutter in the lives of many people.

Which of these methods would most help me stay on top of toy clutter?



This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on the right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

These can be another source of clutter, and since they are big, it doesn't take much to have them become a cluttered mess rather quickly.

But then, I realized that with kids they never stay that way and they only make a mess all over.

There are also some really clever ideas that incorporate a rustic ladder all over Pinterest.

There are numerous different methods that will work for blanket storage, it's just a matter of realizing that your solution isn't working (as in my couch method), and coming up with one that will.

**What are my three biggest plans of attack after completing this chapter?**

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## Chapter Seven: Is Your Kitchen a Cluttered Mess? This Could Be Why!

The kitchen is a common place to struggle with clutter. In my house, my kitchen is the busiest place, and it is also the walk-through from the door we come in to the rest of the house. This really makes it a place for clutter to collect like crazy.

The primary thing that can make a kitchen feel cluttered is the countertops. This is why it is essential to keep countertops clutter free as much as possible.

Taking an honest look at your kitchen, answer these questions:

Do I have too many things on my kitchen counters?

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Which of these things do I use at least once a week?

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Of the things I have left from the previous question, which three things **only** do I want to remain?

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When clutter does collect in my kitchen, it could very well be because I haven't given clutter a proper place to go. Is this the case?

If yes, where can I put the things that tend to collect on a daily basis to be taken care of at the end of the day?

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How many times a day have I been de-cluttering my kitchen? Has it been enough? What two times each day can I pay attention to doing a de-clutter in the kitchen?

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Have I been applying the one-touch rule in the kitchen? How can I start small with this if it is something new for me to do in the kitchen?

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Have I been multi-tasking in my kitchen? If not what are three ways that I can best multitask in the kitchen? With preparing meals? With cleaning it? Something else?

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Am I hanging on to things in my kitchen that I don't need? Why am I hanging on to them? Who could really use these items more than I can?

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Have I enlisted the help of my family in keeping the kitchen clean and clutter free? Have I properly trained them? How can I do this better?

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**What are my three biggest plans of attack after completing this chapter?**

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## Chapter Eight

### My 10 Commandments For Dealing With Toys

Toys.

If you have kids, I am guessing that you know the toy struggle to be real. Toys are great, but toys are often not so great from a clutter standpoint.

With eight kids, I have had to get super strict about toys because our entire house could be taken over by them.

As we've had more and more kids come along, I have come to realize how important it is to have a proactive strategy for dealing with toys. In fact, I even made it a bit stronger and created what I call my ten commandments for dealing with toys.

Here are some things to think about:

Which rooms in my home do I want to store toys in?

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Which rooms in my home do I **not** want to store toys in?

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Do I simply have too many toys in my home presently? If so, when can I make time to start going through them?

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If toys are a storage and clutter problem, now is the time to start getting rid of them.

When choosing which toys to keep and which toys to get rid of, pay attention to:

- Size, make sure the toys you keep are not too big for the amount of space you have.
- Condition, make sure the toys you have are in good working condition.
- Similar toys, do you have toys that do pretty much the same thing?
- Duplicates, do you have duplicates? If so, this is something easy to get rid of.
- Interest, are the toys you have still of interest to your kids?
- Challenge level, do they allow some creative play and challenge?
- Too babyish, are the toys you keep just too babyish for your kids now?
- Are you hanging on to toys for sentimental reasons?
- Pieces and parts, are there just too many?
- Too much adult supervision, are some toys just too complicated for kids? There are some that are this way.

I hope you don't rush through this process and that you really get honest when answering the above questions.

Next up would be to look at the storage options you currently have for toys.

A few years ago we decided that we really had no choice but to put a lot of shelving in our living room. I had been wanting to avoid it since I really didn't want to look at a bunch of big, bulky shelves, but with eight kids and homeschooling, it was just time.

And, you know what? It really was ok. I really don't mind it all that much, and the extra space for storage is amazing!

We keep the bulk of our toys in the basement, and for that reason all the books came up into the living room with the added shelves. This allowed there to be more room for toys downstairs.

Is the storage I have for toys adequate? Could I do something different if I am in need of more storage? What kinds of storage solutions would alleviate some of the toy clutter I deal with?

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Moving forward, the above suggestions I gave for possibly weeding out the toys you currently have is the same criteria you will want to use when determining what toys come into your home in the future.

When you only have clutter free toys in your home and are only allowing clutter free toys to come in, you will have much less toy clutter to deal with on a daily basis.

Makes sense, right?

Then there is toy rotation.

Toy rotation is such an awesome thing. It's really just packing up some of your toys for a few months and then hauling them back out. Then, you pack up some of your current toys and do the same thing all over again.



In this way, your kids are having a certain amount of “new” toys every few months. It avoids the overwhelm of too many toys so they don’t play with any of them. It certainly lessens the toy clutter that can collect in your home. And it is much easier for your kids to be independent in cleaning up their toys since they can handle a smaller amount more easily.

What is my current system with toy rotation? Is this a principle that I can implement or improve? If so, what do I need to do to really maximize the effectiveness of toy rotation?

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What is my current system for purging toys? Do I purge them at all? How often?

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How often should I purge toys in order to keep them from becoming a clutter problem? And, how can I make the time to make this happen? Could this perhaps be a beginning of the month project?

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What do I want to do with the toys I purge?

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Is purging toys something I can do with my kids or would it be something that is better done without them around?

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If getting rid of toys is difficult for your kids, it is something that they can learn to really enjoy depending on what you do with the toys.

If they struggle with this idea, try involving your kids in the process gradually, and make sure they see the outcome of getting rid of their toys as well.

For instance, you can have them choose some toys to sell and then allow them to spend the money earned from the sale of the toys on something new. This is even good practice for us as adults.

One of the things I've implemented at times when money has been really tight is forcing myself to raise the money I needed to purchase something that I needed or wanted by selling something that I already owned.

I often do this with seasonal decorations. I once wrote a post that was featured on Money Saving Mom where I shared how I actually made money by redecorating because I made more money selling my old decorations than I spent in buying new ones.

In this way, this is a great skill for kids to have as well.

What are two ways that I can make purging toys something that my kids would enjoy?

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**What are my three biggest plans of attack after completing this chapter?**

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## Chapter Nine

### Controlling Clutter In Kids' Rooms

The clutter that can collect in kids' bedrooms is downright scary. This is especially true if you have kids sharing bedrooms. You can have one kid who is a neat freak while the other one is a clutter bug. Then, in addition to dealing with the clutter you are also dealing with the arguments about it.

With eight kids, we have three kids in one room, three kids in another, one in a room on his own, and another one in the room with my husband and I yet.

With three kids to a room, I have had to master skills that keep their bedrooms from becoming a clutter nightmare!

Here are some things to work through no matter how the dynamic works out with kids and bedrooms in your home.

Plain and simple, do my kids have too much stuff in their room? If yes, why?

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In my ideal home if space were not an issue anywhere, what would I prefer my kids keep in their rooms?

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When answering the next two questions, be sure to keep in mind the size of the things you are keeping in your kids' rooms, whether or not they will even want to use these things in their rooms, and whether these are things that make too big of a mess to have in a bedroom.

For example, I find that having my boys' Legos in their room is a nightmare. It is just too easy for them to be lazy in keeping them put away, which means that there can quickly become a Lego explosion.

In my home, things with lots of pieces and parts, especially lots of little pieces and parts, is an invitation to a clutter problem.

In my ideal world, what would I prefer my kids **not** keep in their rooms?

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In light of these two answers, what can I realistically remove from my kids' rooms that I don't want there anymore?

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Where will I put these things? Or, are these things that I should just get rid of?

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With only the things I would choose to have in my kids' rooms left, what are the best ways to store these things? Don't forget about prime space that is often wasted such as under the bed, on the back of doors, inside closet doors, and in closets that have proper shelving and/or storage.

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Have I trained my kids in properly taking care of the clutter in their rooms?

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If the answer to the above question is no, here are some things to try.

Kids as young as 18 months can do things like:

- Put their dirty clothes in the hamper
- Put their pajamas under their pillow
- "Make their bed" in a way that is age appropriate
- Put books and basic toys in a bin or on a shelf

What things are my kids good at when it comes to managing the clutter in their rooms?

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What are some things that my kids need to do better with when it comes to the clutter in their rooms?

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What are the two times each day when de-cluttering in my kids' rooms seems to make the most sense?

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What tools would make dealing with clutter in my kids' rooms easier?

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With the things that I am storing in my kids' rooms, how can I break these down into groups that are specific enough that things can easily be put in the right places?

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Once you've got the proper tools in place, it's a matter of teaching your kids what your expectations are.

Here's how I do it:

- Have them watch you take care of the things in their room as you want it done
- After a few times have them work alongside you
- Once they can adequately work alongside you, they are ready to clean up the clutter on their own while you supervise
- After completing these steps to your satisfaction, they are ready to clean up their clutter on their own
- Be sure to check their work
- As they become more competent at it you can check a little less frequently

Once you get a handle on the clutter in your kids' rooms, it is important to stay on top of it.

Going forward, here are some things to keep in mind:

- When something comes in, something goes out
- If it doesn't fit well, it belongs somewhere else
- If your kids aren't able to do an adequate job of maintaining the clutter in their own rooms, you need to determine why and address the issue

**What are my three biggest plans of attack after completing this chapter?**

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# Chapter 10

## Taming the Paper Monster

We need to explore paper more deeply.

Paper clutter can be deceptive, primarily because each piece of paper clutter is relatively small. This makes it very easy to ignore the paper that is starting to clutter for a while.

Then, it can all of a sudden be a huge problem that is very difficult to be motivated to deal with.

For this reason, paying attention to the paper in your home in a proactive way before it becomes clutter is key.

But what if you are already overcome with paper clutter?

Here are some great things to start with:

Try using one of the five methods we talked about in the beginning.

Which is the most effective method to use to get control of the paper clutter I've got: using time blocks, choosing only part of the project to take on at a time, attacking only a small part at a time, randomly choosing which part of the job to do each time, or just locking myself in with it until it's all done?

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When can I start using this technique to deal with my paper clutter, and when can I devote additional time to this?

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Even as you are working on dealing with any paper clutter, being proactive will further help you put an end to paper clutter once and for all.

Is there paperwork that comes into my house on a regular basis that I can eliminate? If so, what?

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What bills am I currently paying online, and what bills can I add to this list?

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What is my current bill paying system? Is it working?

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What is my preferred method for tracking bills? Electronically or using good old paper and pen?

What tools can I use to best accomplish tracking my bills in the way I prefer?

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Kids' papers are something that can so easily get out of control. I think this is especially true for moms who are notorious for being a bit sentimental.

But, our homes can only hold so much paper clutter, and this includes kids' papers.

This requires that we become practical in dealing with the precious kids' papers that come into our homes.

Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Kids' papers are generally more important to us than they are to our kids
- It's all about the memories, not the papers
- Getting rid of their papers does not communicate that we don't value our kids or their work in any way
- Once their papers are gone, you will almost never even miss them
- Once these papers are gone you will most likely have forgotten whatever it was you got rid of within a week
- Your kids won't be upset with you for getting rid of their papers a week from now, if at all
- There will always be more papers to replace the ones you get rid of

There are some really great ways to keep only a reasonable amount of kids' papers. Here are some ideas:

- A 3 ring binder with a limited number of clear plastic sleeves
- A small box

- Taking a picture of their work and keeping it in a special photo album
- Framing favorites in a fun way and rotating them regularly
- Displaying them on a wire across a wall with fun paper clips, regularly rotating

And there are so many more ideas as well.

Which systems seem like they would work for dealing with kids' papers?

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What is my current filing system for the paper items I need to keep?

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Do you even know what you need to keep and what you need to throw away?

No? I didn't either. So, I researched it and came up with what I feel comfortable in keeping and what I feel comfortable throwing out.

I primarily focus on what I need to keep for taxes.

Be sure you know what you need to keep, and then be sure you keep only those things.

Am I hanging on to way more papers than I need to? If so, when can I purge my paper files?

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How often will I need to devote time to filing papers based on the amount of paper items I need to keep? Once a month? More? Less?

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When can I set aside time to do this? How can I make this part of my routine?

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When I think about the papers that regularly come in to my home, what are some additional ways that I can lessen that amount further?

**What are my three biggest plans of attack after completing this chapter?**

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# **Part Three:**

## **Bringing in the Big Picture**

In part three of Clutter Free Living Made Simple, we are going to incorporate areas of your life that can overload your mind and soul with clutter. These are things that may not come to mind when thinking about taking on clutter. However, keeping these areas clutter free is integral when it comes to controlling the clutter in your life.

These are areas that will take time to get in order, at least if you're anything like me, but move as slowly as necessary to really get a good handle on them.

# Chapter 11

## Gaining Control Of Your Cluttered Calendar

When it comes to a clutter free life, a simple yet effective calendar is essential. And, it's not just about the method but about the filter we use to discern what we allow to be put on our calendar, even if it is only a calendar in our mind.

First off, let's start from the beginning.

A mission statement is an essential tool in having a clutter free calendar because it serves as a filter to decide what to say yes to and what to say no to.

Have I created a personal mission statement? If not, when can I set aside time to do this?

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If you are unsure of the how or why behind a personal mission statement, head to my website, The Intentional Mom, and look for a post called 10 Reasons You Want a Personal Mission Statement and then read How to Create a Personal Mission Statement. These will walk you through the process.

What are my most important roles right now? Who and what should I be focusing my time and attention on?

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Are there roles that I am fulfilling when I shouldn't be? If so, who should be handling these things instead?

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So often we don't take our season into account as we fill our calendars. We can be especially guilty of this if our season is forever changing.

A perfect example of this is if we have young children or elderly parents to care for. If these are roles that we are fulfilling, it will mean that we have less time to give to things like volunteering, going out with friends, and even things like taking part in a women's group.

These can all be really good things, but not if they don't take our season into account.

There are times when we have to say no to these kinds of things. However, it is important to remember that there could very well come a time when a different season will allow us to put these things on our calendar again.

Do I have current seasons that make my time more limited? What are they?

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Have I been taking these seasons into account? If not, what needs to change in order to be more realistic when it comes to the things I do and don't do?

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Overall, am I satisfied with how I am spending my time? Overall, am I feeling fulfilled at the end of the day? If not, what is it that I am unsatisfied with?

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What changes can I make in my calendar in order to be more satisfied at the end of the day?

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Of course there are many things that we cannot change. But, so often our own cluttered and overwhelmed schedule is brought on by the things we put on our calendar.

How do I feel about saying no to myself? What about saying no to others?

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If you struggle with saying no, here are some great things to incorporate when saying no:

- I'm sorry; I really wish I could do this. It's just not the right time.
- I would love to do this, but my plate is full right now, I'm sorry.
- I'm not able to take this on right now, but have you thought about (insert person's name)?
- I know this deserves someone who can give it his or her full attention. Because of an already full plate, I am not someone who can do that right now.
- I'm truly sorry, I wish I could help. Check with me in another few months if you've got a different project.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines, typical of notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

And, don't ever feel pressured into giving someone an answer right away when they make a request for your time. If it is something that requires an immediate answer, the answer should almost always be a no.

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One way I overcome this is to have babysitting requests for my girls come to me rather than to them.

My girls would say yes every single time, but there are times that this would run them absolutely ragged.

Kids have a hard time saying no to adults. This is why the babysitting requests are a great thing for you to take on. Of course kids need to learn to say no, but it is something that takes a lot of time.

It is very easy as parents to overload our own children. Not only do we need to keep a close eye on this, but our kids also depend on us to make sure that others aren't able to put too much on their plate either.

Are there ways in which I need to be a better gatekeeper for others in my family? If so, how, and for whom?

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**What are my three biggest plans of attack after completing this chapter?**

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## Chapter 12

### A Clutter Free Schedule

A written daily schedule or daily to do list is an essential ingredient in a clutter free life.

Is a lack of a daily schedule to blame for your cluttered, unorganized days?

Let's see how you answer these questions.

Is putting a daily schedule in writing something I do? If not, why?

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If I have been unsuccessful with schedules in the past, am I able to try again with an open mind?

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When is the best time for me to plan my daily schedule or my daily to do list every day and how long will it take?

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Can I commit to this time each day?

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Am I notorious for biting off more than I can chew every day? If so, why do I do this?

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Hopefully you were able to thoroughly answer the above question. Common answers would be things like not taking into account your current season, trying to be like someone else, feeling pressured by others, not being realistic in what can actually get done in a day and so on.

If you need a bit more room to answer the above question, do so here. But, do take the time to really think this one through. It is often the key to really understanding why our days are so cluttered; yet we feel like we get nothing done.

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Every good daily schedule has plenty of white space. In fact, make it a habit to leave more white space than you think you need. You can always find things to fill your schedule with if needed, but it is easy to feel like a failure when your schedule is forever left with many things undone.

Do I commonly leave white space in my day? Is this a major factor in my cluttered and overwhelmed days?

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How proficient am I at prioritizing?

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The most effective way I find to prioritize is to prioritize first thing in the morning. I like to ask myself these questions:

- What are the tasks that I must get done today?
- What are the tasks I should get done today?
- What are the tasks I'd like to get done today?
- What are some extra tasks I could do?

As I answer these questions, the tasks pretty much just prioritize themselves.

Some also like to use this method. I even do this at times just for something different.

- A-these things must get done today
- B-these things should get done today
- C-these things should get done sometime



Even the best list makers can overschedule themselves without even realizing it. For this reason, I suggest taking two things off the list you make every day.

Your list really should have no more than 3-5 tasks on it each day. Again, you can always add more in later.

So, how exactly should you define a task?

For our purposes here, making a normal dinner wouldn't really be a task, but if you were doubling up the recipe and putting one in the freezer, I would consider that to be more of a task rather than something that is just routine.

Doing one load of laundry would be more of a routine item, but doing three loads would be more of a task.

Making a phone call or two would be more routine in nature, but devoting a half hour to making phone calls would be more of a task.

Hopefully this gives you a pretty good handle on what a task is and what is just a more routine and simple thing.

Put simply, a task would be something that would take at least 20-30 minutes to complete and wouldn't be something that you do every day.

Do I have a regular place in which I write my schedule? If not, can I create or purchase one?

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What sorts of things are important to me to have when it comes to a place where I write my schedule?

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I love writing things like my schedule in my planner. If you are wondering more about planners, head to [The Intentional Mom](#) and look up a post called [How to Choose the Right Planner For You](#).

This post tells you how to effectively choose a planner that you will likely love, but it also gives you a peek at my planner.

Am I consistent in keeping my schedule with me so it is handy? How can I best do this?

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**What are my three biggest plans of attack after completing this chapter?**

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## Chapter 13

### A Clutter Free Mind

In many ways, I think a cluttered mind is the thing that we should focus on first and foremost. With a cluttered mind, nearly everything we do will be affected in a negative way.

At the same time, it is also one of the things that we can feel most guilty about devoting time and effort to, but if we don't, everything and everyone pays the price.

Having a clutter free mind takes diligence on a daily basis. It takes time, it takes effort, and it takes focus. It will not happen on its own.

A cluttered mind, just like a cluttered calendar and a cluttered schedule, is almost always something we do to ourselves. A cluttered mind is most often a result of the choices we make in our daily lives.

Therefore, it really is only you and I that can unclutter it.

With this in mind, let's move forward in complete and total honesty.

Do I have a couple of times when I do nothing figured into my day? If not, what two times each day can I devote to taking a 10-minute break?

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Where would the ideal place be for me to have this alone time?

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What five things would I most love to do during these times?

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Am I really getting enough rest on a regular basis? If not, how can I improve this?

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Am I more of a morning person or more of a night owl?

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What things inspire me? Have I been doing things that inspire me?

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What sorts of things have I always wanted to learn?

Finding the answers to the above questions are all ways that we can be intentional in having down time or “pockets of calm” in each day. I cannot tell you how much I look forward to reading a chapter in a book during my down time each day. This is often how I choose to spend my time.

And, it is truly amazing how uncluttered my mind is when I am done. It is such a good and productive thing to have down time scheduled into each day.

The following question could be a difficult one, but it is one that must be answered honestly in order to have a clutter free mind.

Am I too plugged in to different devices? Do I have a planned time to be unplugged on a regular basis?

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If this is an area I can improve in, what am I most guilty of being too plugged into?

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In our home, we have periods of time each day that we are unplugged. We never have electronics during mealtimes, my kids are not allowed to have electronics on during school hours (unless they are for school), and they are all shut down by 10 p.m. at night.

I am somewhat of an exception to these times since my work requires electronics, but I still have “office hours” when I am working and when I am not. Outside of these hours, I am unplugged.

It is amazing how much time I used to mindlessly waste being plugged in.

Life happens right in front of us, but we have to be unplugged in order to see it.

Have you ever been to a restaurant or something where you see people all sitting at the same table paying more attention to their devices than to each other?

Being unplugged from electronics at times on a regular basis does so much to quiet my mind.

A quiet mind is an uncluttered one.

How can I plan unplugged times into my daily life?

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If this seems overwhelming to you, start small. Train yourself to spend less time plugged in gradually. When we take on things too much at a time, we are often doomed to fail.

Change doesn't have to happen overnight. It's okay to make changes for the better gradually.

**What are my three biggest plans of attack after completing this chapter?**

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## Chapter 14

### Clutter Free Friendships

Friends bring such good things to our lives, don't they? Friends can encourage us when we are down, friends can help us see things we don't, friends can make things happen when we can't, and so much more.

But, friends can also be a stumbling block at times. There are times that friends can bring undue demands and stress into our lives, influence us in a negative way, make us feel inadequate or unworthy, and so many more things that aren't helpful to us.

With this in mind, let's spend a little time examining the friendships we have to ensure that they are a blessing rather than a hindrance in our lives.

What kind of friend am I? Is my focus on being a good friend to those I call friends?

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How can I improve the way in which I treat my friends?

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Am I the kind of friend who keeps score? Is the amount of giving I am willing to do where friends are concerned dependent on how much I feel my friends are giving to me?

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Sometimes, we can be friends with people who make us feel depressed. They may not be doing anything intentionally, yet just being around them makes us feel down.

It could be because they are primarily negative, it could be because they make demands of us that we aren't interested in fulfilling, and it could be because we struggle keeping our own envy in check.

Are there friends who make me feel negative in some way? Who are they?

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Are there things I can do to remedy the issues with these friends?

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At times things just are the way they are, people are just who they are, and things just can't be fixed. Are there relationships that bring clutter to my life rather than adding things of value?

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If there are people I now know aren't the ideal friends for me, how can I pour myself into the people who I know are?

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Are there certain friends who I know don't have my best interests at heart? If so, these might be friendships to closely examine.

It could also be that being friends with certain people during different seasons is just too hard.

For instance, if getting pregnant has been an ongoing and long struggle for you, it might be difficult or painful to pour into a pregnant friend right now.

In a different season, things could be completely different.

Over the next month, what is one way that I can bless each one of the friends who enriches my life right now?

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**What are my three biggest plans of attack after completing this chapter?**

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# **Chapter 15**

## **The Hidden Benefits To Living Clutter Free**

Living a more streamlined and disciplined life starts with a mindset, a new perspective, and a fresh start.

Living clutter free does include our homes and the way we deal with our “stuff,” but being clutter free is really an all-encompassing lifestyle.

When you are able to master this lifestyle, there are some amazing benefits.

Here are the benefits I’ve discovered in living clutter free.

- 1. We don’t need nearly as much as we think we do**
- 2. If we look to money and the things it can buy for our identity we are looking in all the wrong places**
- 3. When we are focused on material things, we miss the really good things**
- 4. Experiences trump stuff every time**
- 5. It’s not the stuff that we treasure in most cases; it’s the memories surrounding that stuff**
- 6. Oftentimes we don’t have to look any further than our own homes to find what we are looking for**
- 7. Dealing with clutter or even just stuff is a major time stealer**
- 8. Choosing to live a more simple life can be difficult at first, but it becomes much easier with time**

Of these eight benefits, which ones have I seen in my own life?

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Which of these benefits have been the most difficult for me to see?

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As I have been putting forth the work in being clutter free, what additional benefits have I seen in my own life?

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What do I most look forward to in living a life that is clutter free?

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**What am I most challenged by from this entire guide?**

You have reached the end of this guide, but a clutter free life will always be an ongoing thing.

Ideally, you will be able to return to the ideas and answers you gave here, revisiting them as necessary.

Jennifer Roskamp is a child of God, a wife, homeschooling mom of eight children from teen to infant, a daughter, a sister, and friend who is passionate about living a healthy life on a tight budget while being focused on the people around her.

Jennifer enjoys teaching others about the things she's learned in her own life as she has been called to walk a unique path.

As an author, blogger, speaker, and entrepreneur, Jennifer has been incredibly blessed in her own life. She works with people just like you every day, helping them achieve their own goals and dreams as well.

In addition to spending time with her family, writing, and sweating it out at the gym, she also enjoys reading, scrapbooking, and tackling her next organization project.

Jennifer lives just outside of Grand Rapids, Michigan, with her ever-growing family.

You can connect with Jennifer where she blogs every day, at [TheIntentionalMom.com](http://TheIntentionalMom.com)

