



## Getting Started Organizing

A big organizing job is a lot like untangling a giant knot. The key is to focus on one small area first and work from there. Here are a few helpful strategies to keep you focused long enough to see progress and build momentum:

• **Start small** - Avoid burnout by limiting your sessions until you know what you can do comfortably (2-4 hours is about the max for most people). Know that great progress can be made in as little as 15-20 minutes if that is all you have. Think one drawer...one shelf...one closet...rather than an entire room.

• **Finish what you start** - Don't leave piles of items that belong somewhere else stacked up in the middle of the room awaiting delivery at some future point when you have more energy. Put away your tools. Allow yourself to relish in that satisfaction that only comes from completion. You don't have to finish the whole closet, but finish the shelf or the drawer.

• **Don't be afraid to "dump"** - Remove anything that doesn't belong in the space you are organizing. If it already has a designated home, put it there. If not, it's okay to *temporarily* stash it in a space you plan to organize later. Do *not* dump in areas you've already organized and do *not* switch gears and start organizing in a different area until you've finished the one you've already started (see rule #2).

• **Value your space** - Space is like money...it is limited, can be used for only one thing, and should be spent wisely. Remember that while you *might* be able to use that item someday, you *will* be able to use the space it occupies right now, either for storing something else or for making what you do use more easily accessible.

• **Use what you have** - Resist the urge to go out and purchase organizing tools until you've had an opportunity to test drive your system first. Sometimes a trip to the store when you don't know exactly what you need can be overwhelming and scare you off the idea of getting started at all. Use items from your recycle bin until you confirm that the space you've devoted to that item is adequate and in the right spot. Then you can go out and buy something fancy or invest time and energy into creating something that matches your style and decor. Organizing does not have to be expensive to work and a lack of funds should never be a reason not to do it. When you eventually do buy those bins or baskets, don't overlook yard sales and dollar stores for some exceptional values!

## Steps to Organizing Your Space

- **Determine your goals**—How will this space be used, who will use it, what will you store in here? Answering these questions at the beginning will make decisions easier as you go.
- **Remove what doesn't belong**—There are three categories of items to remove from this space:
  1. No longer needed/wanted—Donate, recycle or trash them.
  2. Doesn't belong in this space—If it already has a designated home elsewhere, put it there; If not, remove it to a "deferred" area, where you will deal with it later. (This *may not* be an area you have already organized!) If possible, group like items together as you stash them to make life easier later.
  3. Not sure—Put it in a specially-marked box, bag or bin in the deferred area. You will decide what to do with it later. (Keep this category to a *bare minimum!*)
- **Group remaining like items together**—This gives you an idea of how much space that category requires and makes duplicates easier to identify.
- **Decide where to keep everything**—How accessible does it need to be? (more frequent use = more accessible); Where will it fit best? Where within this space will you be using it? What type/size receptacle do you need for it?
- **Choose receptacles**—Make do with what you have on hand for now, but take note of what features you like/don't like about the current receptacle. This will help you determine what to look for if you need to buy something else later.
- **Repeat these steps in the next space**—Continue as above until all that is left is the "deferred area". By now you will have established homes for many of the deferred items. If not, it will be easier to create one because you already have other areas organized and know where they will best fit and belong. Revisit your "unsure" box and make final decisions on what to do with those items.
- **Evaluate your system**—Think carefully about what's working/not working and *why*. Is there anything here that would be better stored elsewhere? Can you make changes that would make it easier to use or put items away? Don't dismiss even tiny idiosyncrasies that are preventing you from maintaining organization. It is easier to fix them than to live with a system that isn't working.