

I.L. Skills workshop: Organization Solutions

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Guest Speaker:

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Organization can help to reduce stress, and can be really helpful for people who tend to forget things.

Organization is very personal! Systems should work for your own lifestyle and needs. The same things will not work for everyone, so you can try lots of different ideas and see what you like the best. Professionals like Pauline come into your home to help with your organization, but they personalize it to your needs. They try to learn about what you daily needs and lifestyle are like and also about what is important to you (sentimental items are important, and they work hard to respect that while also teaching you to consider the value of your space), to help come up with a system that works.

For example, some people are very visual and like to have all their daily use items available and visible to them each day, while other people like things to be tucked away behind closed doors.

When beginning an organization project, DO NOT go out and buy new things (eg. containers, tubs, book shelves etc.). You probably already have what you need or can repurpose something you already have to serve a different function.

Begin by cleaning out the area you're trying to organize. To implement a new system, you always want to start from ground zero. Once you have sorted out your important things, you can create an organizational system with containers you may already own, or repurpose boxes that your items came in or ones that you usually recycle. (Eg. the bottoms of cereal boxes make great drawer organizers)

It is very important to consider what items are important to you. It is good to keep things that are meaningful, but really consider what is important to you – the item or a clean, uncluttered space. There is a very psychological aspect to

organization and some people have a hard time deciding what is really important (eg. hoarding).

Everything you own should have its own designated “home” (esp. small items like nail clippers, tweezers, jewelry etc.). If you know where it “lives” you know where to look for it and if you find it lying around somewhere, you also know where to put it away. That is the most important part! Ensuring things get put back in their “homes” is what keeps an organizational system working.

Deciding where an item goes should be easy, they should be easily accessible from where you normally use them (eg. nail clippers go in the bathroom, scissors in the kitchen, coasters in the living room etc.). It can sometimes be difficult when there are many people living in your home who may move things and not put them back in their spots. This is why it is important that your “homes” for these items be logical, so that others (eg. kids, spouse, support workers) can easily follow the system. However, you may have to provide some instruction as well to make sure they understand where things go and that they do need to be put away once they are finished using the items.

Also, there are something that you may use more often, if you could find them or knew that you even had them. They need to be more accessible to you! Find a new spot to store them, where you will think to use them more often.

Sometimes, while cleaning up, people are distracted and put down an item in a strange spot because something else caught their attention. This happens all the time! Pauline suggested that for a short period of time, it may be helpful to put up signs in your home that read: “Don’t put it down! Put it away!” to help remind yourself and others. However, after about 6 weeks, these signs lose their effectiveness because we stop noticing them – but they might help you to start the habit.

Decide what stuff is important and what you use every day/week. This stuff gets the “prime real estate” in your home. These are the items you want to be easily available. These are the items that you should have on open flat surfaces in your home – not junk that just sits and collects dust!

If you have some small items that clutter up a flat surface in your home, you can buy cute boxes from the dollar store to hold those items together and

make the space look less cluttered, while still having your everyday-use items easily available. Alternatively, use a cute container you already own, or make one! These also make surfaces easier to clean, because you can easily pick up the basket full of items all at once. You can also use a few different baskets or a basket with dividers to help categorize your items. If you want something that makes your stuff a little less visible, you can always tuck boxes/buckets on a bookshelf, and even hang a curtain over the bookshelf so that you don't have to see the baskets.

*Don't forget about vertical space! A shelf or a hook can help give something a home and reduce clutter, without having it take up valuable surface space.

Cleaning supplies are something that everyone has and they often require organization – especially if they are spread throughout your kitchen and bathrooms. First, you will want to minimize the number of supplies that you have – you do not need 4 different types of Windex! Pauline suggest containers with a flat bottom and a handle are best for storing cleaning supplies. If you can condense them all into one basket, that makes them easier to keep track of and store. AND it gives you a handy way to carry your supplies to wherever they are needed. Alternatively, you may want to separate them and have your kitchen supplies stored in the kitchen and your bathroom cleaners stored in the bathroom.

Paper is another one that many people struggle with! When sorting your paperwork, you will find that everything falls into one of 4 categories. An easy way to remember this is: "When you feel like you're drowning in paperwork, you want to get a RAFT"

R – read (any paper sitting around that needs to be read)

Eg. magazines, flyers

A – action (any paper that requires you to do something)

Eg. forms that need to be completed, stuff that needs to be taken somewhere, like an appointment

F – file (any paper that needs to be kept, but has no real purpose right now)

Eg. tax forms, pay stubs etc.

T – toss (any paper that can just be thrown out, shredded, or recycled)

One suggestion for maintaining organized paperwork is to have an inbox. Then go through the inbox once a week (or as often as you can manage) and divide all papers into these 3 categories. Dealing with them doesn't necessarily have to happen right away, but then when you have a few minutes, it makes it easier to identify which items are which and you can sit down and read the ones that need to be read and filing can be done on a regular basis, whenever you have time or if that box gets full. Action paperwork requires a bit more attention, especially if things need to be completed by a particular date. So, be sure to go through this stack often, but if you know you need a particular piece of paper for an upcoming appointment, at least you know where to look. One alternative, is to tack all action paperwork to a bulletin board, so that all forms are easily visible and you will be reminded of their due dates or appointments whenever you look at it.