

## Organizing the Home and Office Space

Getting and staying organized is a real challenge for individuals diagnosed with ADHD. Many adults may have difficulties with clutter in both the home and the office and feel overwhelmed or stuck. Getting organized can help you in many ways, including:

- Increasing productivity
- Freeing up time spent looking for things
- Reducing anxiety
- Serving as a positive role model for your children
- Making more money by being efficient
- Improving your marriage, partnership and other close relationships

### Strategies to get you motivated and keep you going

One of the hardest things to do when making a change is getting started. Positive reinforcements or rewards can help motivate you to become more organized.



Before you start an organizing task, select a reward to give yourself when you've finished. When you've completed the task, make sure you give yourself the reward.

Getting a friend to help you can make the job easier and go faster, especially if you need to declutter. Friends can help you

get rid of things because they do not have the same sentimental attachment to them that you have. Online chat groups can also provide you with mutual support. Some have features where you make specific commitments to organize a space then move away from your computer to organize for a while and finally return to their computers to encourage each other.

The use of a timer and/or music can help you. The timer can be set to go off in 15-minute increments, with breathers in between. Some people find it helpful to put on a favorite music playlist, begin organizing and keep working until the playlist finishes.

### An Effective Strategy for Getting Organized

The best approach to learning a complex task is to break it down into smaller steps and tackle these steps one at a time. Organizing a physical space can be broken down into the following steps:

1. select the spaces to be organized
2. put them in order from easiest to most difficult
3. start with the easiest space
4. schedule time to work on it
5. decide on the reward or motivation to encourage the completion of each step
6. divide the space into sections
7. work on one section at a time, sorting, discarding or re-organizing each object in that section until it is finished



When the easiest space is organized, gradually move up to the most difficult, repeating steps as needed.

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## 1. Select a space and estimate/schedule time

The first step is to make a list of all the physical spaces that need organizing, numbering the spaces from “easiest to organize” to “most difficult to organize,” using higher numbers for more difficult locations. You can post a copy of this list on a bulletin board or refrigerator door—somewhere you can see it all the time. Start with the easiest space first to maximize the chances of success, and later move on to the more difficult locations.

Select the easiest space from your list. Estimate how long it might take you to organize it. Pick a deadline to complete organizing this space. If the estimate is off, additional time can be added later. Divide the estimated time into a number of short work sessions—30 to 60 minutes each. If you believe you would get frustrated or bored in 30 to 60 minutes, shorten the session to 10 to 15 minutes and schedule more sessions. The idea is to start working for a short enough time that you can experience success without becoming frustrated and overwhelmed. Using a calendar, schedule enough short organizing sessions over the next few days or weeks to complete the task, adjusting your estimate if needed. Record your deadline and the organizing times in the day planner.

## 2. Divide your selected space into sections or centers.

Divide the space you are working on into a grid and work on one portion of the grid at a time. There are a number of ways to divide the space:

**Quartering:** Divide the space into quarters visually or by marking it off with masking tape or string.

**Around the Clock:** Divide the room into workable sections by dividing it like a clock. Stand in the doorway of the room, make that spot 12:00 and organize it first. Work your way around the room systematically, organizing the area at 1:00, 2:00, 3:00 and so on until you return to where you started. If doing the entire room this way is too much, tackle one or two “hours” of the clock during each of your scheduled organizing sessions.

**Zones:** Organize the sections of the room by function. Keep all of the equipment, supplies, paperwork and other items for a given function in that zone of the room. For example, to organize your home office, ask yourself what functions might be accomplished in the office. Perhaps you decide that the following activities will be performed in the home office:

- reading and responding to e-mail
- surfing the Internet and making purchases online
- paying the bills, doing the income taxes and completing other miscellaneous financial paper work writing professional papers and reading scientific journals
- putting photos and slides in albums and working on digital pictures on the computer

The room could be organized into four zones.

**Computer Zone**—computer on a desk, printer, modem, printer and computer supplies, shopping catalogs, scientific journals and storage for professional papers

**Photo Area**—camera, film, lenses, photo accessories, binders for negatives and slides and photo albums

**Financial Paperwork Area**—file cabinets with financial records, bills, extra checks, bank books and calculator

**Reading Zone**—a comfortable lounge chair with an overhanging lamp, a table by the side of the chair and bookcases with books

Draw a picture of the room on a piece of graph paper, examine the current arrangement of the furniture and plan how to re-arrange the furniture to form the four new zones. Only after planning each zone and anticipating where the items in that zone will be stored would you move to the next step—working on each zone.

## 3. Systematically work on each section

Gather everything you need to do the job (such as several boxes, plastic containers, garbage bags, masking tape, markers, pencil and paper, cleaning supplies, labels). Set your timer or start the music you’ve selected. Start with three boxes and a trash bag. Label the boxes “keep here,” “goes somewhere else” or “not sure.” Place any leftover food and empty food containers in the trash bag. Place any dirty dishes or silverware in the “goes somewhere else” box to return to kitchen when you are done.

Pick up one item at a time. Decide which box the item belongs in and determine whether the item is still useful to you. If it’s not, put it in the garbage bag. Put saved items either in the “keep here” box, if they belong in the section you are now organizing or in the “goes somewhere else” box if they belong in another section or room.

Don’t take a lot of time with each item. If you cannot decide quickly to keep or discard the item, place it in the “not sure” box. Continue going through items until everything in the section has been sorted or the timer has gone off or playlist has ended. Then, stop the project for the day. Take out to the trash. Take the “goes somewhere else” box and return those items to their “home.” Don’t worry that the homes for these items may not yet be organized; just leave them in that section or room for now.

Leave the “not sure” box in the room until you have finished sorting all of the items. Then, close and seal the box with masking tape. Write with a marker a future date three to six months away on the outside of the box. This is the date when you will re-open the box and review the contents. Mark the re-open date in your day planner. Place the box in a storage area. When you review the items on the designated day, make one of the following choices:

- If you have not had to look for the item in that box during the three to six months storage time, then you don’t need it. Put it in the trash or give it away.

- if you have looked for the item or decide now to keep it, find a home for it and place it there.

At the end of each organizing session, congratulate yourself on your successful effort and give yourself the reward you picked.

#### 4. Finish organizing the space.

Repeat the steps for organizing each section until you have finished the space. Congratulate yourself and treat yourself to a large reward. Move on to the next item on the list of spaces to be organized and follow the steps outlined above. Continue to follow these steps until all of the spaces on the list have been organized.

#### Tips for Staying Organized

After working very hard to organize the important spaces in your life, you want to keep them organized. Here are some tips and strategies to help you maintain the decluttered spaces.

##### *Paper Ideas*

- trash or recycle it
- refer it to someone else
- act on it now
- save or file it

You can also reduce the need to deal with paper in the future by removing your name from mailing lists. Catalog Choice is a website that you can use to unsubscribe from multiple catalog mailing lists, and retailers have agreed to honor these requests.

Another way to reduce paper is to use your camera, scanner or phone to take pictures of recipes, memos, newspaper clippings or other documents that you want to save but don't need to have the originals of; save these on your computer and back up the files regularly. You can use computer folders to organize these images for easy access and searching. Once you scan the paper, recycle it.



##### *Make a Ticker Filing System*

Every day your home or office is bombarded with papers, notes, phone messages, flyers, coupons, bills and mail that you *have*

to know about. The ticker system is a dated filing system that eliminates the piles, files and lists that clutter up your life. The system consists of 43 folders, one marked for each month (labeled January–December) and one marked for each day of the month (labeled 1–31).

Put the current month folder in front of the 1–31 numbered folders. Keep these folders in plain sight (such as a folder stand on the desk or kitchen counter). File these papers in

the folder of the date that you need to act upon them. To make this system work, always remember to check the folders daily.

At the end of each month, move the next month's folder to the front and sort the items that are inside that folder into the appropriate daily numbered files.

##### *Storage Strategies*

- If you don't put things away because you are afraid you will never find them, try storing them in clear containers. Being able to see inside the container will also save time.
- Use over-the-door hanging organizers with divided pouches in each room to store things, such as office supplies, jewelry, makeup, tapes or CDs, cleaning supplies, pantry items, baby care items, gloves, hats and scarves, and craft supplies.
- Store small items in under-the-bed boxes with lids.
- Purchase a tall trash can to store extra sheets and blankets or out-of-season clothes. Place the can next to your bed, cover with a floor-length tablecloth, and use it as a night stand.

##### *The Launch Pad*

You can spend less time hunting for stuff by setting up a table or small bookshelf by your front door for items you need when you leave your home. Place a small container or basket on the table to hold keys, glasses and wallets. Briefcases and backpacks can also be placed there for the next morning.

##### *Centers*

Set up centers to hold similar items and supplies needed to complete a particular task. The items for each center can be placed in any available mobile container, including baskets, tackle boxes, buckets and carts on wheels. This will save time because all of the supplies needed to complete a project will be in one place. Make a list of the centers that you develop and the items in each center. Post the list on your bulletin board so you will easily remember where these items are.

#### Eight ways to maintain a newly organized space

##### *1. The handy box*

Keep a box or basket handy for items that are out of place as you are cleaning out a room. When you come across out-of-place items, put them in the container. After you have completed cleaning the room, take a few minutes to put these items in the proper room.

##### *2. In the moment*

- When you pass an open drawer, close it.
- When you pass a full wastebasket, empty it.
- When you see a clothing item on the floor, hang it up.
- When you see some loose papers, put them in the to-file box

### 3. 10-minute pickup

Spend 10 minutes each night on a quick pick-up. Take a basket and go through the house quickly picking up and dropping things off where they belong. Better yet, get the whole family involved by having them clean up their space each evening before bed.

### 4. Quick clean

Pick up the dropped stuff.

Put away what you use.

Wipe up a spill as soon as it happens.

### 5. Just for 15 minutes

This is an excellent way to get started on a project you have been putting off.

Set a timer for 15 minutes.

Focus your effort on one thing for those 15 minutes.

When the timer goes off, decide whether you can keep going for another 15 minutes.

If you can, set the timer again for the next 15 minutes.

If you can't, simply stop and do the same thing later in the day or the next day, until the project you are trying to finish is completed.



It may seem like a short amount of time but it soon makes a difference. You can always see and feel what has been accomplished in those 15 minutes.

### 6. Subtract before you add

Make a rule for yourself—"Always subtract before you add!" You will not add (purchase) a new item unless you subtract one (such as no new books or magazines unless you read or give away unread books or magazines).

### 7. Put it in place

Whenever there are a few minutes to spare, put away five or 10 items that are not in their correct place.

These could be toys that the kids have left somewhere, letters that need filing away or socks that need to be put in the drawer.

### 8. Toss/Donate Box

Keep a box or bag in a storage area to collect items to donate. As you notice an item that you don't want or use, immediately take it to the donate box. Don't let unwanted or unused items take up valuable space waiting for a periodic dig-out. Place small items in the trash and larger ones in a storage area for trash pick-up day.



## Get Started

Some readers will be able to start organizing after reading these suggestions. Others may find that they need the assistance of a coach, professional organizer, or therapist to get started. If you need help, don't despair or give up. It took a lifetime to get to the state of disorganization in which you have been living; it's going to take time to fix it. The key is to get started.

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