



SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS
Affiliated with National Volunteer Outreach Network, Country Women's Council, U.S.A., Associated
Country Women of the World and in partnership with Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service
SCFCL website: <http://www.scfcl.com>

Leader Training Guide

Title: "De-Clutter" Your Life

Objectives:

The participants will be able to:

- Help members determine if they have a problem with clutter in their homes.
- Identify ways for dealing with clutter.
- Motivate individuals to look at their homes and to eliminate some of their clutter.

Lesson Overview/Introduction:

- More than 3,000 documents can be found in the average home.
- The average household purchases 13,000 bags of items in a year. Average households have 25% more furniture and 75% more toys than they need.
- Lack of space is not the cause of clutter. Disorganization results in 80% of the clutter in most homes.
- In the average home, getting rid of clutter eliminates 40% of housework. Americans waste more than 9 million hours looking for lost items.
- Most Americans use 20% of what we own. The other 80% is made up of items we do not use, feel we should use, or think we might use someday.

The popularity of today's reality TV (ex. A&E show Hoarders) demonstrates how people's lives have gotten out of control and have been taken over by their "stuff." Once too much "stuff" invades your space, you start feeling out of control.

Lesson:

What is clutter? According to Webster's Dictionary, clutter is defined as many things scattered in disorder; jumble. Another definition might be "anything you own, possess, or do that does not enhance your life regularly."

When Is Clutter a Problem? Clutter can be a cause for concern if:

- Safety is an issue - clutter can cause problems with safety, such as clutter on the floor that may be a tripping hazard or flammable items stacked next to a heating element that may be a fire hazard.
- Cleanliness is an issue - clutter makes it harder to keep areas clean and can be a place for rodents and dirt to hide.

The Clutter Challenge

The challenge is to take stock of what we have and to simplify and downsize to give ourselves peace of mind and to leave a clutter-free legacy to our families.

Why So Much Clutter?

Here are some of the reasons that clutter may be a problem.

1. **Guilt.** Almost everyone has keepsakes from deceased relatives. Holding on to these items shows that we are paying our last respects to them by valuing and holding onto their stuff. You may feel guilty if you do not want a family keepsake. If so, ask yourself a few questions:
 - Is there another family member who might like an item you are not using?
 - Would your relative be using the item or throwing it out?
 - Do you have other keepsakes to remember the deceased person by?
2. **Need.** The minute you throw something out; you might need it. To help, get someone unbiased to help you decide.
3. **Mistake.** You may feel that you might make a mistake and throw away something, but very few things are irreplaceable. Some areas where you might start are your closet, files, warranties, and instructions.
4. **Time.** Start small and focus on one area of your home. Walk in like you have never seen it before. What do you see? Piles of unread magazines? Newspapers? Just take a 15-minute approach, so you are not overwhelmed.
5. **More.** We are urged to buy things every day. Every time we watch TV, listen to the radio, or walk into a store, we are urged to purchase more (and more, and more...).
6. **Don't know.** You don't know where to put something, so it's set aside. This may be due to a lack of space or a lack of organization system.

What's Your Clutter Quotient?

Have members complete the self-evaluation of their clutter quotient. The scoring system is on the back. Allow time for members to complete this self-evaluation, then ask if anyone wants to share their results.

The first step in getting a handle on clutter is to find out your organization quotient.

Classify Your Clutter: *Refer members to their handout "Classify Your Clutter." Have members write down items in their home that fit in each of these categories. Complete the handout as you talk about the various forms of clutter. You may want to give prizes for the most items, the fewest items, and the most creative.*

If clutter is an issue for you, the first step might be to "Classify Your Clutter." By thinking about where clutter is a problem, you can then identify where to start to deal with clutter. Here are some of the kinds of clutter that are common:

Travel Clutter - souvenirs you got on a special vacation and can't bear to throw away.

It Used to Be Important Clutter - keys that don't work, clothes that don't fit, toys no one plays with.

Phony Clutter - stuff posing as a bargain, such as things you got at a garage sale or a 2 for one.

Inheritance Clutter - anything someone gave you because they didn't know what to do with it, such as video collections or mom's old dishes.

Bequeathed Clutter - stuff you got as presents.

Rabbit Clutter - clutter that multiplies fast, such as Beanie Babies, fabric or needlework kits.

Imposter Clutter - clutter disguised as good stuff, such as musical instruments no one plays, outdated cameras, video equipment, and electronics.

Ambiance Clutter - household accessories that you put away after you changed your decorating scheme.

Get-to-it-someday Clutter - anything you need to fix, finish or get to someday.

Eclectic Clutter - miscellaneous clutter such as stuff in your drawers you don't know what to do with, clothes that still fit but don't match anything else, lone socks or gloves.

Car Clutter - fast food bags, empty water bottles, bits and pieces of handouts from programs, broken ice scrapers or old maps.

Bob Hope Clutter - thanks for the memories - love letters, honeymoon matchbooks, or babies first birthday cards.

Snob Clutter - crystal vases, silver platters, or silver tea service.

Mysterious Clutter - objects you find and don't know what they are, but they must go to something important.

Now that we've identified some of the types of clutter, you can get started eliminating some of the clutter that fills your life and home.

Organizational Strategies: *Ask members to share strategies that work for them to control their clutter. Then share these ideas if they don't come up in your discussion. Refer members to their handout.*

- 1- Make your system fit your own life.
- 2- Sort and classify.
- 3- Clean out constantly.
- 4- Use storage devices to fit your system.
- 5- Keep it simple.
- 6- Decide to decide.
- 7- Ask for help.
- 8- Organize year-round.

More specific suggestions for clutter control include:

- Focus on one room.
- Get tough when you consider objects.
- Go through your mail daily.
- Set a limit on saving bags, food containers, or boxes.
- Get rid of the old when you buy the new.
- Pare down mementos.
- Consider making a daily or biweekly uncluttering appointment.
- Use labeled boxes or bags and group items into categories.

What Can You Do with Your "Good Stuff?" Now that you have identified your clutter and thought about what to eliminate, where does your clutter go?

If it is hard to let go, ask yourself, "would you prefer to surround yourself with things you love and use?" If you don't love it - think of someone you know who might enjoy having what you no longer want - it could be a family member, or it might mean giving it away or selling it to someone else who will cherish the item. The primary outlets for secondhand items are consignment shops, classified advertising, internet auction sites, and, of course, yard and garage sales.

Here are some suggestions:

- Donate items to a local charitable organization
- Sell larger items directly by placing a classified advertisement.
- Look for stores that specialize in buying and selling valuable items.
- Look into vintage resale/consignment shops.
- List your item on an internet swap/giveaway site.
- Try an online auction.

Take Control of Your Clutter Activity

As you think about your own clutter situation, try to identify areas of clutter in your home and what you need to attack these cluttered areas. Use the handout "Take Control of Your Clutter" to help you identify these areas.

The next step will be to start with one cluttered area and make a more specific plan to accomplish your goal of clutter control. Use the handout "Tackling the Clutter" at home to assist you with a more complete clutter control plan. Writing down your goal and the steps to achieve the goal, along with a completion date, will make it more likely that you will accomplish your clutter control goals.

Lesson Summary: Remember the 10 Laws of Stuff as you take control of clutter:

1. The more you have, the more you need.
2. Useless stuff crowds out the good stuff.
3. Dirt and bugs love stuff.
4. Stuff stays where you put it.
5. Stuff multiplies to fill the spaces you have.
6. Over time, you don't see your stuff.
7. When you have a lot of stuff, you pay over and over for it.
8. Stuff affects your mental health.
9. Stuff is valuable only if you use it.
10. Stuff can't buy happiness.

As Albert Einstein wrote, "Out of clutter, find simplicity."

Sources:

This program was adapted from the Oregon Family & Community Educators lesson library: oregon-fce.org

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