

Stop clutter before it starts

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RIVERDALE — Constantly waging war against clutter? One way to gain ground is, don't bring things into the home that aren't necessary. At the store, when something or other is just begging to be purchased, try this exercise: ask whether the item is a need or a want.

Organizing the home starts at the store where you can decide to stop clutter before it starts.

A need can be put in the shopping cart; a want can be returned to the shelf. When uncertain whether something is a need or a want, put it back and think about it for a few days. Chances are, it won't be important enough for a return trip.

For each new item that comes into the home, get rid of something old. This is a great practice to get into year-round, and especially helpful at birthdays and holidays, when kids get an influx of new items.

For each new book, game, or stuffed animal, have them select an old one to throw out or donate. The same can be done with clothing, or footwear...practically everything that comes into the house.

What's the best way to organize all the existing stuff?

Professional organizers advise implementing a system of categorization as belongings are sorted through: keep, donate, or toss.

Break the sorting tasks down into simple steps that can be accomplished in manageable blocks of time — say 15, 20, or 30 minute chunks.

Do a few of these a day — as many as can be handled without feeling overwhelmed. Upon completion, relax, or enjoy a treat, whether a few minutes on the couch with a good book, a phone call with a friend, or whatever motivates and refills the well. Be sure to indulge so that the next day's challenges aren't quite so daunting.

Linen closet bursting at the hinges? Sort through the contents of one shelf at a time. This type of task is simple enough to be done while watching TV.

What sort of storage works best? That depends upon the individual.

"Whatever container you use, it must be not only easily accessible when you want to retrieve the item, but also easy to put back, which means your home will be neater. It must be practical for the individual's lifestyle," says Linda Anders, owner of COC Enterprises, a cleaning and organizing company in **Riverdale**. For example, "I have a client who had a file cabinet where the files were accessed from the top. The client kept piling items on top [of the file cabinet], therefore started not to put files away."

The solution? Find a file cabinet with pull-out drawers. Part of the process of organization, and selecting products that will work best, is knowing the size of what has to be stored, and the available space to store it in.

"When I shop for clients, I always have measurements of the item that needs to be stored, and I always have small tape measure with me in my purse," says Anders.