



The ADD Survival Guide: **Where Did I Put That?**

Tips for Organizing and Decluttering

Part One

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Remember those elephant jokes when you were a kid?

How can you tell there's been an elephant in your refrigerator? You can spot its footprints in the banana cream pie. (Cymbal crash)

Here's a serious one for people with ADD:

How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.

This is the essence of organizing and decluttering. People with ADD are notoriously disorganized. I look at my office and there are times when I cannot find the top of my desk. At the same time, we love organization. In most cases, we actually feel most comfortable when we know where everything can be found. It cuts down on of anxiety. (My running joke with friends when they ask me what I'm doing, "Oh, I have to organize my sock draw. You know what is like in the morning trying to figure out the blues from the blacks, the greens from the brown." Like I said, it's my joke.)

So what hangs us up about getting organized? It can be overwhelming when we actually realize the mess we find our living space or work place in. Added to this is the shame that comes from living in chaos. What will our bosses think of us? Our loved ones? Worst of all is the fear that a partner will decide that he or she can't live with the mess any longer— and leave us. Pretty serious stuff! And all because we have never learned how to prioritize and organize.

Prioritization

Establishing priorities is one of the challenges for people with ADD. The Pre-frontal cortex is the area of the brain that manages our executive functions such as organizing, prioritizing, adhering to the numerous lists we make, use, misplace.

I've had the great pleasure of learning from some of the best thinkers and innovators in the world. I've incorporated the teachings of professional organizers who understand and recognize the mechanism necessary for getting ones' space in order. From people such as noted thinker and philosopher Dr. Fernando Flores, Mr. David Giwerc, Founder and President of the prestigious ADD Coaching Academy, and Lynda Foxman, Founder of The Organizing Group, I've learned how to develop competency in managing one's life with greater ease and skill.

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I wish to share a little of what I've discovered with you, as you continue to learn, grow and educate yourselves in how to take advantage of and benefit with ADD.

Decluttering: The First Step To Organizing

I've found that upon beginning any organization project, we often feel a tremendous drive to get it finished NOW!!!

Well, that certainly sounds like someone with ADD. "Get going. Get it done. What's wrong with you? I've got lots of things to do. I'VE GOT TO ORGANIZE MY SOCK DRAW!!!!!!!"

OK. Now it's time to take a deep breath and start at the beginning. The first item to focus your attention on is **decluttering**. George Carlin has a great routine about **STUFF**. We have our stuff and we keep adding to our stuff. It's time to move AND we take our stuff into our new home where we start collecting our NEW stuff.

Decluttering is all about taking a moment for ourselves, to care for and pamper ourselves-- which includes making room for what is important in our lives. This may be very difficult to the person with ADD. Why? If there is room, then how would we occupy our thinking? Did you ever think "If it's a mess, then it should keep me busy?"

Well I'm here to tell you you that there's a lot more to your life than walking around in clutter. Here's what the experts have to say about how to declutter, whether you have ADD or not.

How To Declutter:

You need to break down the area to be organized into sections. That's the first way of not being overwhelmed. **Don't eat the elephant all at once. We are going to take a bite at a time.**

Here's how you should approach each area; for example, a room:

1. Pick an area of the room, **just one area**. This could be a closet, a desk, a bookshelf, etc.
2. You are going to gather **four containers**-- boxes, collapsible laundry bags, whatever is easiest for you.
3. **Each container has a purpose. Color code** them blue, red, yellow, orange, etc. so you can spot them easily
4. Decide which color goes with which purpose and proceed:
 - a. Use one container for anything you know you are **going to keep**.
 - b. Use the second container **items that you're undecided about**.
 - c. Use the third container for donations, those things **you're going to give away to friends, church, the Salvation Army, etc.**
 - d. Use the last container for those **things that don't belong in this area, those things that live elsewhere**

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5. Have large trash bags on hand for those things that you know are for garbage.

Some things to consider when you are decluttering:

1. Go through magazines and newspapers you've been saving, cut out the articles you want to read and throw away the rest
2. Anything you've kept for 6 months and haven't read, throw away.
3. Anything you haven't worn for 2 years, give away.

Be like a samurai and get rid of anything that's in the way.

Discover Your Tolerance Level For Decluttering:

Pay attention to what you are paying attention to. If you begin to be distracted, notice the amount of time it took for distraction to set in and stop what you're doing. Do something completely different. Play music, look through cooking books, etc. You need to find your tolerance level. Some people can't work straight for more than 15 minutes. Once you've take a break, you most likely will be able to come back to do a little more. But if you get into it, just keep going!

Try working on one section, and only one. The main reason people have trouble organizing is they do not know what to name everything. They do not understand that everything has a place in which it lives. In Part Two, I'll pass along some organizing tips that I've learned from The Organizing Group's master organizer Lynda Foxman.

As for organizing one's life, I'll take you on a journey around Dr. Fernando Flores' 13 Domains of Human Concern. I found them to be enormously helpful in prioritizing and organizing.

Learning is a gift that is available to us all. Education is the goal to understanding what makes you one of a kind. You can learn to appreciate the gift of your unique brain wiring. I invite you to have fun and learn to benefit from your ADD.

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