

# **Collaborative Therapy for Clutter Management: A Community Effort**

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## **Organizing is Complex!**

“The average American will spend one year searching through desk clutter looking for misplaced objects.”  
Dr. Richard Swenson

## **Where does it all come from?**

### **Unsolicited material**

Mail: Catalogs and magazines

E-mail

Phone/Fax

Text messages

Instant messages

Internet: pop-ups, spam

National marketing

Television: Advertising, QVC

Gifts

### **Solicitations**

Easy Money

Multiple charge cards

Catalogs

Buy now, Pay later

No interest loans

Ebay

Paypal

Garage/yard sales

Thrift stores

Shopping malls

Shopping channels

Collections

Inherited items

## **The American Way: Land of Opportunity**

“If I have that, I will be that!”

Impossible dreams can come true

Seeking: Bigger, better, stronger, faster, skinnier, prettier, happier, sexier, perfect marriage, kids, and perfect house!

Hope reigns eternal

## **Clutter is an Explosive Phenomena**

Unique to this last decade

Not expected

Not prepared

Not trained

No role models to manage the flood of information, piles of paper, and stuff!

**What have we tried?**

Working with someone

Learning how to organize: TV, books, magazines, internet

Attended classes, support groups

Donated, recycled, gifted, sold

Joined collectors anonymous

Joined clubs

**Who have we tried?**

Our partners

Our kids

Extended family

Friends

Neighbors

Cleaning ladies

Organizations like church groups

Organizers

Coaches

Therapists

**When have we tried?**

Company's coming!

Holidays

Special events like a wedding

Crisis: Flood, fire, earthquake

Major appliance breaks down

Before the cleaning lady arrives

**How are we managing? Poorly**

Holding onto the old & bringing in the new

Old photos and old clippings/coupons

Filling up back rooms, garages

Renting multiple storage units

We plan to "take care of it tomorrow"

Ineffective at saying "No"

Poor decision making

Overly attached to our "stuff"

**We are Exhausted!**

Physically

Mentally

Emotionally

Spiritually

**How do we clear clutter?**

- Don't do it alone
- Seek help from family and friends
- Shopping, closet, filing, or clutter buddy
- Websites like [www.Flylady.com](http://www.Flylady.com) or [www.Messiesanonymous.com](http://www.Messiesanonymous.com)
- Make these changes a part of your life
- Not a one time event!
- Identify your emotional clutter.

**Emotional Attachments: The Tough Stuff to give up!**

- Recognize the symbols of conflicted and traumatized attachment
- Identify past vs. present meanings
- Select symbols vs. keeping everything
- Grieve what you give up
- Honor what you keep
- If you get stuck, seek help

**Make Lasting Change: Set your Limits**

- Make firm decisions about what comes in:
  - Magazine subscriptions
  - Catalogs, books
- When and what to purge:
  - How long do you hold onto Nat'l Geographics
  - Sort mail over recycler and shredder
- Credit cards: Consolidate
- OHIO: Only Handle It Once

**Build Clutter Clearing Strategies**

- Simple Time Management plans
- Timers
- Large family calendars
- PDA's
- To do and Today lists
- Automatic bill pay
- Scanning important papers, photos
- Clear plastic containers for storage

**Build Clutter Clearing Alliances**

- Delegate what you can't or don't want to do
  - Bookkeeping
  - Filing
  - Yard/house work
  - Handyman
  - Cooking

### **Build Simple Systems**

- Automatic
- User friendly
- Quick access
- Multifaceted
- Easy, ongoing maintenance
- “Everything Out” Organizing (Insert jeep picture)

### **Meet Sara and her Closet**

- Therapist unaware of extent of clutter!
- Problem: Husband’s boss coming to dinner.
- Shame and avoidance
- Therapy focuses on broken promises.
- “Room form hell” spills over.

### **National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization**

- NSGCD Clutter Hoarding Scale (see [www.NSGCD.org](http://www.NSGCD.org))
- Clutter Hoarding Scale: Level I-V

### **CT: Members of the Team**

- Client
- Family
- Friends
- Community
- Organizer
- Coach
- Psychotherapist
- Landlord
- Adult/Child Protective Services
- Code Enforcement
- Building and Safety
- Animal Control
- Criminal Justice

### **Collaborative Therapy**

**Collaborative Therapy may involve organizers, coaches, psychotherapists, family and community services. By working side by side with clients, the team facilitates interventions that help create and maintain environmental change in the home as well as lasting change within the client.**

**This is a challenging, yet supportive effort to assist clients in removing excessive items to which they feel extremely attached. These items may represent a conflicted part of themselves. Hasty interventions are ineffective. Collaborative Therapy helps clients identify emotional and physical connections to their “stuff” while offering corrective alternatives that lead to long-term solutions.**

**CT: How it Works!**

## **Rules for Team Participation**

Confidentiality  
“All for one, one for all!”  
Respect and trust are central to the process.  
Shared goals.  
Written contracts.

## **CT: Why it Works!**

Crisis is apparent.  
Motivation matters.  
Support system is essential.  
Client realizes they can no longer live in their cluttered environment.  
    Something has to change.  
    Don't know how to fix it.  
    Can't do it alone.

## **CT: Why it Works!**

Process of Change  
    Accepts that clutter has taken over their life.  
    Goals are established, hope is revived.  
    Decision-making process is ongoing.  
    Clutter is removed.  
    Organizing systems are fit to each client.  
    Emotional baggage is identified and discussed.  
    Redefinition of time.

## **CT: A Community Effort!**

A “Collaborative Team” takes action to simultaneously address physical and emotional clutter to create a climate of trust and hope where dreams can come true.

## **Collaborative Therapy: Resources**

- Mail Preference Service     [www.dmaconsumers.org/offmailinglist.html](http://www.dmaconsumers.org/offmailinglist.html)
- National Do Not Call Registry     [www.donotcall.gov](http://www.donotcall.gov)     888-382-1222
- National Association of Professional Organizers     [www.napo.org](http://www.napo.org)
- National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization     [www.nsgcd.org](http://www.nsgcd.org)
- Obsessive Compulsive Foundation     [www.ocfoundation.org](http://www.ocfoundation.org)
- Clutter Support Groups