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WHEN YOU'RE TRYING TO declutter, some things are easier to toss than others. That '80s sweater? Buh-bye! But what about the pasta maker you never use? You know you should get rid of it, but it never quite makes it to the yard sale. Whatever your reason for clinging to stuff, parting doesn't have to be such sorrow. Our experts' advice can help you handle tough-to-ditch clutter once and for all.



too much stuff!

Consumed by clutter? Pare it down, clean it up—
and love your home by Melody Warnick

EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENTS

Items from your past, like the macramé potholder your child made at camp, represent sweet memories, so you hate to let them go.

THINK BIG When you're tempted to keep everything your kid brings home, try this visualization exercise from Scott Roewer, owner of Solutions by Scott, an organization firm in Washington, DC: "Imagine how the volume of stuff will grow until your child is 18. Suddenly, keeping only what matters is easier to swallow."

GO HIGH-TECH Use a scanner to create digital files of paper ephemera, like letters; toss originals. For bulky items, take digital snapshots and compile into a photobook at blurb.com

REPURPOSE FAVORITES One woman hung on to a beloved maternity dress for 13 years before Regina Leeds, author of *One Year to an Organized Life*, suggested she frame a swatch of the fabric and a few other keepsakes in a shadowbox. "Now she has artwork and more room in her closet," says Leeds. Another option: Make a memory quilt. At online crafts store Ticche & Bea, you can order a kit to help you transform baby clothes, concert T-shirts or college sweatshirts into a fun patchwork quilt (\$35 and up; ticcheandbea.com). ►

with the holidays fresh in mind...

Gather all your leftover paper goods (gift wrap, cards, tags, bows and ribbons, plus all the stuff you went crazy for at those after-Christmas clearance sales) and put everything together in one place. Open your 2009 calendar to November 26 and write a detailed list of your holiday supplies. Critical: Make a note of where you're storing all the stuff, too.

While you've got that calendar open, write your thoughts about the holidays just past. Here are a few sample questions to ponder: Which activities and traditions were the most enjoyable? Which were least enjoyable? What would you have liked to do more of? Now clip this mini-journal to the Thanksgiving page in your 2009 calendar right behind the inventory list. Next year you won't have a case of holiday amnesia.

pretty much disappeared since credit cards became plentiful, but you can create your own. And you should. Go to your bank, open a special account that has no minimum or fees, and fill out an automatic deposit authorization form.

I doubt if any of us will reach the level of perfection where we never make any financial mistakes. But I can tell you from my own experience that these mistakes can become fewer and farther between, even at the holidays.

POTENTIAL MONEY MAKERS

You're hoping that your silverware set and old LPs might go for big bucks one day.

GET REAL "If you think your item is worth something, the best way to get a reality check is on eBay," says Cynthia Townley Ewer, author of *Houseworks: Cut the Clutter, Speed Your Cleaning and Calm the Chaos*. When she had second thoughts about yard-saling a mint-condition, in-the-box action figure, Townley Ewer went online to check prices. After seeing that the listings didn't even get bids, she priced the doll at a buck with zero guilt.

HIRE AN APPRAISER Maybe you've seen *Antiques Roadshow* one too many times, but if you're convinced your knickknack could be valuable, hire a local appraiser to check it out. (You'll typically pay at least \$75 or more; find one at appraisers.org) You'll either be relieved of your big-money fantasies or motivated enough by the dollar signs to sell.

OUTSOURCE THE JOB When you're determined to turn your clutter into cash but can't find the time to list it on eBay or craigslist.org, sell your stuff to a middleman like an antiques buyer, a consignment store or an eBay drop-off franchise such as iSold It (i-soldit.com) or Auction It Today (auctionittoday.com). For a 30% to 40% commission you'll save yourself the hassle—and finally reclaim your space.

FORGET THE CASH Instead of focusing on money, think about the upside of donating to charity. It's a good deed (hello, karma!) and the tax write-off may be worth more than you could get at a yard sale anyway. To get every penny's worth on your tax deduction, access up-to-date lists of fair market values at TurboTax's itsdeductible.com and use the free online software to track your donations all year.

incomplete projects



You've never finished knitting that sweater or making that scrapbook, but you put too much work into it to get rid of it.

Live by the rule of four

Dispense with all but the four most meaningful unfinished crafts or projects, recommends Townley Ewer. Then don't start a new one until you've wrapped up the current ones.

Create a Someday Box Stow the supplies for projects you want to work on one day in a plastic bin, then post an inventory list on the fridge. The next time you have a spare hour or two, you'll have plenty of ideas for projects to tackle, and you'll know just where to find them.

Swap your stuff Sign up for a crafts swap at craftster.org to trade materials and projects with like-minded creatives.

Buddy up Ask your child to help you finish. He'll learn something new, and get to spend quality time with you.

FIXABLE ITEMS

The lamp with the torn shade, the toaster that won't toast: They may be broken, but that doesn't mean you can't fix them—at least that's what you keep telling yourself. Yet despite having good intentions, you never get around to it.

Take the next step If you value the item, figure out what it will take to get it in working order, and add that to your schedule this month. Then label the broken item with the date you expect to have it repaired. "Later on, if you find the lamp in the attic and realize the fix-it date came and went, that item goes out to be donated or recycled," says Roewer.

Centralize your widgets

Stow toy parts, solo screws, and other

household flotsam and jetsam in a clear box, recommends Sara Fisher, owner of A Simple Space, a professional organizing business in Atlanta. The next time you find a toy that's missing a piece, you'll know where to look. If the piece isn't there, toss the toy.

Freecycle Not all broken items belong in the trash; chances are a handyman in your community would love the project. List it on freecycle.org, an online network of more than 4,500 local groups where you can post a message about an item you'd like to give away. State clearly what's wrong with it and you may connect with someone who wants it as a fixer-upper that he can keep for himself. **wd**