

Recovery from Cluttering: The 12 Steps of Clutterers Anonymous

(Yellow)

Clutterers Anonymous

What Is Clutter?

Clutter is anything we don't need, want, or use that takes our time, energy or space, and destroys our serenity. It can be outgrown clothes, obsolete papers, broken toys, disliked gifts, meaningless activity, ancient resentments, or unsatisfying relationships. We may be selective in some areas but not in others. Objects may be strewn about or wedged into drawers; neatly stacked or stowed in storage.

Our clutter seems to have a life of its own, to multiply without effort on our part. We may feel overwhelmed, controlled by our possessions,

doomed to be hopelessly disorganized. No matter how we deal with our clutter, it can be a source of pain and shame to ourselves and to those we live with.

Despite this pain, we fear throwing things out. We think we might need it, fix it, or wear it again. We don't want to be wasteful or ungrateful. We don't know what to keep and what to discard. We don't know how much is enough.

Decluttering is not merely eliminating, but gradually transforming our space so that we surround ourselves only with things that express our purpose. It means turning something useless into something useful, creating more leisure and space, being more honest in our relationships, eliminating distractions, and simplifying our lives in order to find our spiritual roots.

Although we may cling to our clutter, what we really yearn for are surroundings of beauty, order, and serenity; a balanced life; and harmonious relationships.

How do we achieve this? We have found that taking the following Steps can help.

Step One

We admitted that we were powerless over clutter—that our lives had become unmanageable.

To admit powerlessness over clutter, we mean that we can't solve our clutter problem by ourselves. We begin to realize the cost of clutter: uncompleted goals; damaged relationships; a nonsupportive environment; and a waste of our time, energy, talents, and money.

Step Two

Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

This Step gives us hope: we don't have to solve the problem alone. We can rely on a Power greater than ourselves. This Higher Power may be God, the universe—anything from which we derive strength.

Once we have come to believe in a Higher Power, the next part is accepting that this Power is ready, willing, and able to take the burden of clutter from us—to empower us.

The last part of this Step is "restore us to sanity." Insanity is living in unhealthy places where we are unable to breathe and move freely; being ashamed to let repair persons in; having so many possessions that we can't find vital documents, yet unable to resist bringing in even more items.

Step Three

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.

Step Three is deciding to let our Higher Power come into our lives and help us with our clutter problem.

By taking this Step, we show increased willingness. We let God do for us what we could not do for ourselves. We rely on our Higher Power to guide us and give us strength.

Step Four

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

This Step has a double meaning for us in CLA. The traditional meaning is to make a written inventory of ourselves to discover our assets and character defects. Here are some questions to write about: What areas of my life are cluttered? In what way? How has it harmed my relationships? How have I tried to control my clutter, and how successful has this been?

Another meaning of Step Four is to physically sort through our stuff: What have I not used in a year? What things are broken or useless? What am I keeping for others? What things do I truly treasure? What things do I no longer love? This is a good time to total up the true cost of keeping things (extra car insurance and fees, storage space rental, lost relationships, emotional pain).

Once we increase our awareness of the impact of clutter on our lives and why we find the need to clutter, we gain insight and strength to declutter.

Step Five

Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

Step Five helps us deal with our shame about being a clutterer. By sharing our written inventory with someone we trust, we no longer have to carry the burden of our secrets.

During the process of sorting through our physical clutter, we may ask this person to be there.

By letting another person hear our story and see our "stuff," we gain a new perspective. Once we take this Step, we may feel enormous relief.

Step Six

Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

After taking the first five Steps, we have increased our willingness to release our character defects. These might include: people pleasing, overscheduling, hoarding, procrastination, perfectionism, and resentment. All of these may underlie our cluttering. We have also increased our willingness to let go of the excess “stuff” that is cluttering our lives.

By taking Step Six, we affirm that we are willing to let go of anything that stands in the way of our healing.

Step Seven

Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.

Now we are asking our Higher Power to remove anything that interferes with our recovery from cluttering. We are requesting that God (or our Higher Power) remove our resentments, fears, envy, dishonesty. Once this change happens, we will feel more able to deal with our clutter.

Step Eight

Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

With this Step, we become stronger by facing our wrongs and the guilt we feel about them.

The first person on our list would be ourselves. Others might be family, significant others, friends, roommates, neighbors— anyone whom we have harmed, no matter how or how much.

Step Nine

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

This Step really refers to mending, or making something whole, rather than simply apologizing. It may mean: decluttering and cleaning our homes, respecting the space of others, reimbursing others for damage, buying only what we truly want or need (and have space for), learning to say no. It may seem a daunting task, and may take some time, but if we are painstaking with Step Nine, we will surely see amazing results.

Step Ten

Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

This Step maintains the progress accomplished in the earlier Steps by helping us stay in touch with ourselves and others. As challenges arise, we can return to Step Three and turn the problem over to our Higher Power. If resentments arise, we can use Step Seven and ask God to remove these shortcomings. If we become aware of more people we have harmed, we can return to Step Nine and make amends.

Step Eleven

Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God’s will for us and the power to carry that out.

In order to maintain our progress, we need to keep in contact with our Higher Power and to call on that Power for guidance whenever needed. Step Eleven reminds us to put God first, not clutter and busyness.

The second part of this Step is “praying only for the knowledge of God’s will for us...” The problem is interpreting what that will is. We believe God wants us to live useful and joyous lives and not be burdened by clutter.

Once we understand God’s will for us, we can ask for the power to carry it out. When we are tempted to collect unneeded items, we can ask that our compulsion be removed. God’s help is always available. Our part is then to do the footwork: using the Tools and the support of our CLA group.

Step Twelve

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Upon reaching Step Twelve, we find that we have had a spiritual awakening to the possibilities within us. The compulsion to clutter has been lifted by a power greater than ourselves. We are able to create a loving environment and an orderly life.

One of the best ways to maintain a clutter-free life is by being a good example and passing on what we’ve learned. With the experience, strength, and hope we have gained in the program, we can know the joy of helping others become clutter free.

As we practice these principles in all our affairs, we will discover the serenity, freedom, and fulfillment we have sought.

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