

# Clearing Clutter for Clarity and Confidence

By Lindsay Kenny, EFT Master

Clutter in one's life, whether in the home, office, car or mind, is just a symptom of "something else." **Most often, clutter is a control issue.** The unwillingness to let go of something is a way people can feel in control of their lives. Even though to others it appears they are totally out-of-control, hanging on to "stuff" gives people a sense of being *in* control. It's similar to how anorexics feel about food and the ability to at least control their weight.

Another common reason for clutter is fear. The fears of loss, rejection, failure and of losing control are the most universal of these. But again, all of these fears and issues are just symptoms. Underlying these symptoms of clutter is a cause or core issue.

***Clutter is often triggered by an event or a series of events that left the victim feeling traumatized, fearful and powerless.***

Hanging on to *things* gives some people a sense of commanding or controlling at least a portion of their lives.

***Determine the event that started the feeling of loss of power or control and neutralize it. You are then halfway home to eliminating clutter.***

Let me define what I believe to be the three categories or levels of clutter:

1. **Category 1-** Generally messy and disorganized at home, with "stuff" lying around on many or most surfaces.
2. **Category 2-** The above, plus-
  - a. A messy office, car and often (but not always) personal appearance.
  - b. An unwillingness to throw away outdated or useless things.
  - c. Lack of desire or ability to put away clothing or items, or to clean up behind one's self or others.
  - d. Litter and disorganization everywhere.
3. **Category 3-** The above 2 levels plus-
  - Elements of complete disorder and filth even to the level of pathology (meaning unsanitary conditions that create a health risk.)
  - Complete organizational chaos, from dirty dishes overflowing the sink to unwashed clothing everywhere.
  - Garbage accumulation (in or out of bags) on the floor or furniture, in the garage or car.
  - Often there is animal excrement on the floor or furniture.
  - All accompanied by a feeling of being "paralyzed" with an inability to do anything about the situation.

"Janice" came to see me with a Category 3 problem. Although she looked relatively clean, she assured me her home was beyond filthy. She described it as having magazines and newspapers that were 15 years old. Boxes or piles of articles and junk lined her walls and floors so that she could only reach her bedroom or kitchen by way of a small path. She said you couldn't see her sofa, chairs, TV, or even her kitchen table. Dog poop was on the floors, in the spare bathroom tub and even on her bed. With a parrot loose in the house, bird pucky was on everything and everywhere. She said the smell when you walked in the door was "staggering."

This was clearly more than just a messy house. I remembered seeing a case like this on Oprah where they carted away **three tons** of garbage in huge freight trucks. After a crew of dozen or so people cleaned and sanitized the house, it was unrecognizable as the same place. But 6 weeks later it was on its way to be the same pigsty as it was before. That's because the reason for the "clutter" had not been dealt with.

For Janice, the age of the magazines was a clue to me. So I asked her what happened 15-16 years ago. She had no problem remembering. A drunk driver had killed her only child, a much-adored, 11 year-old daughter. Janice was still

devastated and reeling and in shock when, three weeks later, her beloved husband of 15 years was killed. The mudslide that took away her husband also eradicated their home and virtually everything else Janice had left. Photos, family keepsakes and personal treasures and had been lost, along with the two people she loved the most. Her whole life had been turned upside down in a flash.

From that point on Janice was virtually paralyzed with grief, sadness and a sense of abandonment. She became frightful and hyper vigilant about everything. She didn't want to live and was terrified of dying. Janice became afraid to make a move, throw anything away, go anywhere or do anything. Her hoarding of the few things she recovered or replaced began her trend toward clutter. It wasn't that she did it intentionally. She subconsciously had developed such a fear of loss that controlling her environment was her way to controlling (and protecting) her very life.

With this knowledge, we first cleared out her grief and trauma about losing her husband and daughter. She said she had "dealt with it" through years of therapy. I knew that was doubtful, based on the results in her life.

**We started with a Reversal on the Karate Chop (KC) point:**

"Even though I don't want to let go of the grief and trauma over losing my family and home...."

**Then the Set-up on her sore spot (or KC point):**

"Even though I'm still grieving at some level over the loss of my daughter and husband...."

**Reminder statements:**

We did several rounds just tapping on grief, sorrow, emptiness, sadness, anger, being afraid and alone. This brought a lot of tears, which surprised her.

**On the third round we gave voice to her feelings** at each point, with phrases like,

"It was so unfair...I still miss them...I blame myself somehow....How could they leave me like that...Why me...It still hurts...My life isn't worth living," etc.

After a few rounds of venting like this her intensity had dropped to a six. We did a few more adding in the phrases of "I want to let this go...I want to move on...I'm ready to get over my grief...I'm ready to honor their lives by living mine to the fullest...Bob and Melanie wouldn't have wanted me to live like this," etc.

**When at a two intensity we changed to the Choice Statement**, choosing to let go of the negative emotions around the loss of her family and choosing to live life to the fullest. She was responding very well and reached a zero in intensity at the end of that process\*. I asked her to really try to get upset about the loss of either of her loved ones. But she couldn't do it. She actually laughed about something funny she remembered her daughter had said.

*\*The first round of the remaining issue, second round of positive affirmations ( like choosing to let it go) and the third round alternating negative and positive statements at each consecutive point.*

With the *cause* of her clutter issue now put to rest, we could then move on to fixing the *symptom* of clutter problem. As always, I used the Ultimate Truth Statement (UTS) to work toward a positive outcome. I could have started the whole process with this as well, but the underlying grief issue seemed so apparent that I wanted to eliminate that first.

**I had Janice come up with a basic Ultimate Truth Statement as the goal she would like to achieve.** It was:

*"I live in a neat and orderly environment."*

**We then filled in the reasons she wanted this to be true. For her they were:**

- I could find things easily
- I could have people come to my home without feeling shame
- I would feel healthy, safe and comfortable to have a clean home, car and office

- My life would be easier and simpler

**We added some of those positive phrases to the UTS, so that it read something like this:**

*“My life is easy, comfortable and safe living in a healthy, neat and orderly environment.”*

**I then asked her to describe how that would make her *feel* when that statement became true.**

- I would feel free and proud of myself
- I would have clarity!
- I would feel good about myself and have more confidence
- I would feel WONDERFUL and so happy
- I would feel so much lighter!

**By adding some of those phrases to her statement it looked like this:**

*“I feel so wonderful, light and safe living in a healthy, neat and hygienic environment. My life is comfortable, easy and free with my clean, well-organized, tidy lifestyle. I have clarity and confidence again, and I’m happy and proud to invite people to my beautiful, clutter-free home.”*

This was a statement Janice could not only live with, but loved! She was very excited about the possibility of achieving. On a scale of 10 to 1, with 10 feeling and owning the statement right now, she was at a 5.

**The disparity for her was two-fold.** One concern was her wondering how she could possibly clear everything out and clean up the incredible chaos she lived in. The second issue was a fear, or fears. She feared letting go of things (control), a fear she’d throw something away she might need later (fear of loss of control) and fear that she could never even get started or fear she would start but fail at completing it.

**We put aside the UTS for the moment to work on the obstacle of fear in her way.** We clumped her fears together and Janice gave them a nine. We then did a Reversal neutralization on them, on the KC point saying,

“Even though I don’t want to let go of these fears,” and “even though these fears keep me safe or from failing,” and, “even though I may not deserve to let go of these fears” and “Because **I don’t really want a clean orderly environment**, and these fears insure that doesn’t happen....”

**Just doing the Reversals gave Janice some relief, which surprise her.** We then simply tapped away the fears:

“Even though I have these fears about letting go of my filth, feces, and squalor ....”

**Note:** *When dealing with something you want to eliminate, I found it’s far more impactful to paint it in the worst possible light. Using loaded words as shown above instead of just saying “clutter” has much more punch. If you want to stop drinking Pepsi, call it “this sugar and chemical-laden brown toxic stuff.” This is not, however, a good idea if you’re letting go of a trauma or abuse issue.*

**After two to three set-up statements we did one round just alternating the fears;** “this fear of letting go, fear of failing, fear I might need something I threw away”.

**On the second and subsequent rounds** we added verbiage to give voice to the fears:

- “What if I throw something away I really need?”
- “What if I can’t even get started?”
- “I’d feel like even more of a failure. “
- “How will I ever get this all done?”
- “I’ll feel so out of control and helpless.”
- “I can’t do this.”
- “I need my stuff.”

- “I want to keep it.”

**After a round or so I then transitioned to the ridiculous:**

- “I need my squalor... I love filth...It smells so good in there... Feces is my friend...I don’t really need to find my cat.”
- “I need these fears...they help me keep my “clutter and filth” ...they are my friends “
- “I don’t want to let go of the fears, OR the filth.”
- “Oh ewwwwwwwww, yes I do!”
- “No I DON’T.”
- “YES I do!”
- “I’m tired of living this way.”
- “I want to have a clean, healthy environment.”
- “No, I love garbage.”
- “No I don’t! I want to eliminate these fears and this filth so I can be healthy again.”

**Get the idea? Argue both sides of your own position or feelings.**

With Janice we reassessed the number after two or three of the above rounds. By then her fear issue was at a three. We then moved to the Choice Statement with the set-up of:

- “Even though I still have some fear of cleaning up my environment, I choose to let them go....”

**After doing that two or three times** we did the next three rounds as per the Choice Method protocol:

- **Round 1:** Just the negative, “Remaining fears of letting go of clutter”
- **Round 2:** All positive statements such as: “I choose to eliminate these fears. I choose to be fearless about cleaning up. I choose to have a neat an orderly home. I choose to let go of any remaining fears about it. I choose to feel good about being fearless. I choose to make this easy!” Etc.
- **Round 3:** Alternate the positive with the negative statements at every other point; i.e., “Remaining fears,” “I choose to let them go,” “remaining fear,” “I choose to be fearless,” etc.

By now Janice’s fear was completely gone on all levels and I tested her to make sure. To test yourself, simply “try” to get upset or fearful about your issue. It was truly at a zero for Janice.

Now when looking at her **UTS**, her intensity number had gone up to an eight (with 10 being the target). She felt like she was almost there in feeling and believing in the veracity of her statement -- in spite of the reality of a mess in her home. It’s those positive feelings you want. That’s what pulls you into the position in which you want to be.

**We then used the set-up statement of**

- “Even though there’s still some reluctance or resistance in owning my **UTS**, and I don’t even know what it is, I choose to let it go now. I choose to have a clutter-free, clean environment.”

**We did slight variations of that three times.** Then:

- **Round 1, on the negative,** “Remaining reluctance to owning my statement.”
- **Round 2, on the positive,** “I choose to eliminate this resistance to cleanliness.”
- **Round 3, alternating** remaining negatives with positive statements.
- **Round 4, only positive statements** pulled from portions of the Ultimate Truth Statement. Such as: “I feel great now, owning my cleanliness. I love having a tidy, clutter-free home. I feel confident and comfortable having people over,” etc.

At this point Janice was at a 10. Meaning she could say her UTS with absolute conviction as if it were already true. I had her tap on this statement daily, just to reinforce her resolution. But she didn't need to for long. Within a week she was completely clutter-free.

Now, at this point most people say, or want to say "But how do I get it done?" Well if you really trust the Universe it will just happen, or an idea will come to you, or a solution will be shown to you. But if you're a person of action, as Janice was, you can do a few more rounds to further put your mind at ease:

**Simply alternate on these *kinds* of phrases:**

- "I ask the Universe to clear this clutter for me."
- "I want to be involved and I want it to be EASY."
- "I ask the Universe to show me a creative, fun way to have a clean, orderly environment."
- "I know a safe, tidy home is on the way."
- "And I want to have fun participating in it."

At this point Janice stopped me and said, "I have a plan!" When she told me, it was so similar to the one Ester and Jerry Hicks used that I knew it must be from the Universe. Here is my version of it for you to play with.

**First, recruit three trusted friends (who love you and don't judge you) to help with your project.** Promise to return the favor when they move or need anything (and keep that commitment)! Have them bring or wear old clothes, plastic gloves, facemasks and good senses of humor. Optionally, you can provide the gloves and masks. Do tell them what they're in for, however. If they don't hang up on you, then you've got a great friend.

***Beforehand buy* (at Office Depot or other office supply store):**

- 10 or more boxes of the large black trash bags (more if yours is Category 3)
- 30 medium storage boxes with removable lids
- 6 large magic markers
- A box of 4x6 index cards
- Several pens
- Extra plastic gloves and face masks (painters' masks)

***Label each box with big numbers*** from 1 to 20, on two adjacent sides and on the lid. Hang on to the extra 10 in case you need them. Return them if you don't

***Put on some fun, upbeat, happy music.*** Don't dilly-dally or plan, just jump in and start by throwing away the obvious "junk." Include old magazines and papers, obvious trash, tax records older than 5 years, old receipts, deal batteries, dog poop, etc. (unless you want to keep that for sentimental reasons). Work as fast as you can, as if your pants were on fire, but with a sense of fun and excitement. Pretend there's a bag of gold hidden under all that junk. No cleaning yet, just bagging of the obvious rubbish.

***Drag the garbage outside*** as soon as each bag is full.

- Call your local refuse company when you're done.
- They will bring over a large dumpster to you home for very little money. And they'll come pick it up a few days later.
- If you live in an apartment or in the city, ask your landlord for help in disposing of your bagged "stuff."

***Once the obvious garbage is bagged and out of the way...***

- Have Amy and Bill starting putting things into the numbered boxes that you just can't bring yourself to throw away.

***As Bill puts things into box #1, have him call out what's going in the box while...***

- Amy writes it on a 4x6 card or folded sheet of paper (labeled Box #1). If you have a laptop, setting up a data file makes this part a cinch. If you do it that way, as Bill is filling up boxes Amy should be writing each item into the database, with one column for the number of box it's going into.
- Later on you can have the computer alphabetize what's in each box or the whole list, to see which box "Shoestrings from 1989" are in...or to see what's in box 82.
- When a box is full, tape a copy of what's in that box on the front side, next to the box number.

***Cindy's job is to create 2 other piles with the things not going into boxes.***

- Pile 1 is to be donated to a charity (not *really* awful stuff, but legit things you just don't want (like the ugly tie from Aunt Betty or the CD of Britney Spears biggest hits).
- Pile 2 is definitely throwaway junk missed in the first go-around with the trash bags. This should be everything you really don't need. If you can't throw it away, then it goes into one of the boxes.

***When you're through getting everything into boxes and piles***

- Move the boxes against the walls or into the garage or storage shed.
- Your "stuff" will always be there, should you have the need down the line for a yo-yo or autographed picture of Scooby Doo.
- You can lay your hands on anything pretty easily, anytime.
- When you realize you seldom, if ever, dip into the boxes for a treasure, then have a garage sale or E-bay extravaganza and get rid of it all.

***Now congratulate yourself and your unbelievably gracious and generous friends.***

- Show your gratitude to them by taking them out for pizza (a nice dinner would be better, but you may all smell a bit *odd*).
- Give them a thoughtful gift that you purchased ahead of time, to thank them for their kindness. Optionally you could give this to them before you start just to thank them for being willing to help.

As a follow up to Janice's story, she did complete the above assignment with great success and carted off dozens of bags and boxes of "stuff." She said there was very little she actually wanted to hold onto. Three months later, when we spoke again, her home and car were still immaculate. She had hired a housekeeper to help her clean each week and never again experienced a clutter problem.