

# DECLUTTERING: For a Better Life

## 2021 Leader's guide and member handout

Written by Linda Hess, KAFCE Education Program Committee  
Additional Leader's Guide: NAFCE Hearth Fire Series # 25:  
"Someone's Asking ,,What Household Records Do I Keep?"



**Objectives-** Participants will learn philosophies and methods of decluttering.  
Participants will learn what papers are important to keep.  
Participants will learn how to responsibly and thoughtfully dispose of unwanted items.

### Why should you declutter?

Clutter causes stress. Most of us would like to have a less stressful environment in our homes. Clutter can create fall risks for young and old alike. Our homes need to be safe as well as pleasant.

The cleanest of houses can be a candidate for decluttering. We all have much more "stuff" than we need. You might be planning to move or downsize. Maybe you're running out of storage. Maybe you're just tired of having to search for an item or important paper. Maybe you actually bought a new one since you couldn't find what you knew you had! Or, you might be looking to the future when others will have to dispose of your belongings.

### Methods/Philosophies

Among the many methods/philosophies of decluttering are the Konmari method (developed by Marie Kondo-a Japanese organizational consultant) and Swedish Death Cleaning (Margareta Magnusson). Although there are numerous "one space at a time" methods available, many do not emphasize the **sort** process. This lesson concentrates on two that do so. Both methods are time consuming but can be divided into smaller tasks.

Regardless of method, serious decluttering can only happen if you ask:

1. Do I "love" this item? Does it, as Marie Kondo says, spark joy?
2. Is it necessary? (How many of this item do I need?) Is it worth keeping?
3. Does it work?

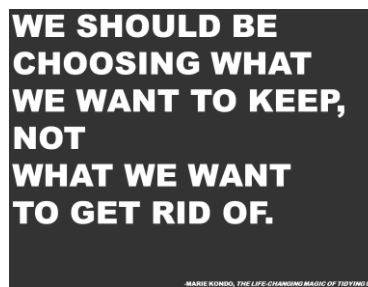
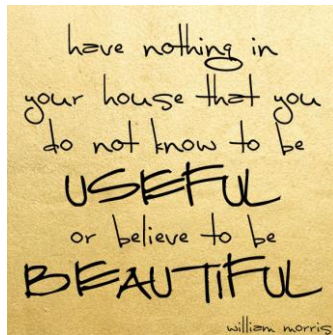
#### 4. Does it have a designated place to live?

##### **KONMARI Method**

The Konmari method is a serious decluttering process that can really downsize your possessions. Marie Kondo feels that by ridding ourselves of the unnecessary “stuff” we will be better able to keep organized permanently. Every item is to be **physically touched** as you ask the above questions. If the answer is YES-Keep. If the answer is NO-“Be thankful/ thank the item for all it's done for you and let it go.” Discard it thoughtfully.

##### **SWEDISH DEATH CLEANING**

While Death Cleaning is a Swedish custom of radical decluttering designed to make things easier for those left behind when we pass, Margareta Magnusson's approach is that living now with less will give you a happier life. In her book “The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning”, she points out that items that no longer have value to you should be discarded, for your sake now and for others' sake in the future.



##### **What Is The Best Order?**

As you sort, remember, you must be honest when answering the evaluation questions as you touch and examine each item. Otherwise you will keep picking up and rearranging the same things that clutter your life now.

Both Konmari and Death Cleaning methods suggest working from items that hold less emotional ties to those with sentimental value and from large to small. Don't start with photographs or old letters as you will be caught up in memories and make the process more difficult.

Starting with clothing is easiest: Items that no longer fit can easily be determined, along with items that need repair (repair it now or let it go), clothes that haven't been worn in over a year. Remember, if it doesn't “spark joy” you probably won't wear it anyway. Pass it on.

The Konmari method has specific lists of categories/subcategories to be sorted. Gathering all items of a category into one place is important because we have a tendency to store “like items” in multiple places in our space. Her general categories include: CLOTHING; BOOKS; PAPERS; MISCELLANY- office and craft, kitchen, pantry, utility room, living room, children's room, bathroom, laundry room, furniture, animals,



SENTIMENTAL. The order is interchangeable as long as the category/subcategory is completed before moving on.

### **Discarding**

Keep-Remember each “keep” item will need a designated place to live.

Trash-These items are broken or unusable. Some can be recycled. Please dispose of items responsibly.

Sell or give away-Items that are usable but no longer fit in your life. Dispose of at garage sale or living estate sale, online resale sites, local buy-sell-trade sites. Donate to charity, or gift to friends or relatives. Gift thoughtfully-consider the recipient's lifestyle. Have a family gathering and let each person choose items you wish to discard. You could even mark items you are still using for later gifting (furniture). Use special items for hostess gifts.

**Do not be afraid to discard items that you received as gifts! The giving and receiving of that gift is the special part of the gift. If it has outlived its usefulness to you, appreciate the memory and let it go! Don't grieve the items you let go. Appreciate the joy and usefulness they gave you.**

**Warning:** Do not let others “rescue” items. Encourage them to be honest in their reason for keeping something you are discarding.

### **Papers**

Papers can be divided into four categories:

Immediate action: Items arriving in the mail should be sorted and dealt with as soon as possible. Toss junk mail, pay bills promptly then file appropriately. Go paperless by scanning and filing on computer. Consider using e-bills, e-statements and email receipts from stores for purchases.

6-7 years: Income tax records and documents to support them. IRS has 3 years to audit, but may go back further for irregularities.

Until sold or discarded: automobile, home, real estate, receipts and warranties, investment records and certificates, loan agreements.

Forever: Birth certificates, marriage/divorce papers, life insurance, military records, social security card, updated will, advance directives, tax accountant contact information, and bank information.

**BE SURE TO WRITE DOWN PASSWORDS and answers to security questions.** Let a trusted person know how to access your financial information. Use an address book to organize this information.

Consider if copies of your information can be obtained online without you actually storing paper copies. If an item has a warranty or instruction manual online you wouldn't need to keep one.



You should have a file cabinet and a fireproof box or safe deposit box. Files may also be kept on the computer in a life.doc or valuables.doc.

### **Photographs**

Discard multiples or bad photos. Consider storing “keep” photos on disc or USB device. Scan and save on computer or icloud.

If you are the eldest member of your family, photos of ancestors you can't identify should be discarded. If you don't know them, no one else will. Consider donation of old photos to a historical society or post them on a genealogy website.

Make a family event of sorting photos. Let others take favorites for their own collections.

### **Storage & maintaining order**

If you are downsizing, don't forget to consider, even measure if possible, your new space. Don't keep something that just won't fit.

#### **Remember: everything you keep needs a designated space.**

Put items in that space and return them to that space after you use them. As you clean, wear an apron with large pockets or carry a bag and collect items to return to their space.

Don't go out and buy more. Consider putting “wishes” on a waiting list, perhaps for 30 days, to avoid impulse buying.

Maximize available storage space. Marie Kondo suggests folding clothing items and storing vertically instead of stacking. (Instructions on Internet) You may find that you no longer need the expensive storage systems you have been using.

As you declutter your personal possessions be considerate of others in your home. You would do better to set an example and assist if asked, rather than nag or force other adults to sort and dispose of their belongings.

### **Sources:**

Marie Kondo: The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up, Ten Speed Press, 2014

Margareta Magnusson: The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning, Simon & Schuster, Inc. 2018

www.getbuttonedup.com: How Long to Keep Important Information Organizational Guide

Hearth Fire Series #25-Someone's in Their Home Asking...What Records Should I Keep? NAFCE 2004

Reviewed by: Jana McKinney, FACS Agent, McPherson County