

# MOVE

## Kick out clutter and make space in your mind

There’s never been a better time to sort through your excess stuff – and it’s good for your mental wellbeing, discovers *Linda Daly*

When Anne Tuohy, an interior designer, was downsizing last year, she had to clear two attics, five reception rooms and a house full of memories. Tuohy filled five skips, made 10 trips to charity shops and even sold some furniture that she didn’t need.

“I got rid of half my life and with it a huge weight off my mind. The attic was filled with so much junk, we even had our kids’ primary school books – and they are now adults,” says Tuohy, who runs the company RoomJunkie.

You don’t have to wait until a big move to declutter. Staying at home during the pandemic – provided you don’t have kids and work to do – may give you the chance to sort through a lifetime’s worth of possessions. It may also be good for your mental health.

Vera Keohane, of Enjoy Your Home, is the first person in Ireland to be certified in Marie Kondo’s KonMari method, a system of simplifying and organising your home. She says clutter can have a negative effect on your mental health. “It signals to the brain that your work isn’t done; it causes stress in the home, conflict between couples and can hinder relaxation and sleep. By decluttering and organising your space, the freedom that it gives you mentally and physically is incredible.”

However, professional organiser Breeda O’Sullivan, of Beyond the Clutter, says people shouldn’t feel under pressure to carry out big tasks during the pandemic. “Some people are all over the place, emotionally. Others are busier than ever with home schooling and working from home. There are other things you can do, such as moving furniture or changing pictures around. They can give your home a boost,” says O’Sullivan.

**Where to start**  
Decluttering your home and then taking the resultant rubbish to a dump isn’t an essential journey, so wait until the restrictions are lifted before you head out.

Besides, some bring centres and recycling facilities are closed, so check with your local authority to see if your nearest one is open. Galway’s recycling centre is closed, while Cork city council is asking that only essential waste is dropped off at its centres. In Dublin, meanwhile, bring centres are closed but some recycling centres are open, such as at Ballymount and Ringsend.

Rather than tackle a house room by room, the KonMari method suggests doing it by category: clothes, books, papers, miscellaneous items, sentimental items and photographs.

“Usually, when people do it room by room, they will come across sentimental

items and get lost looking at them. This way, if you start with your clothes and come across something sentimental, you can put it aside and look at it when you get to the sentimental category,” says Keohane.

Tuohy, who has been hosting interiors and home-improvement sessions on her Room Junkie Facebook page since the pandemic began, says you should get three bin liners and mark them “discard”, “donate” and “keep”.

“The minute the donate bag is full, put it away until the charity shops reopen.”

Likewise, she says, don’t be tempted to buy storage containers online. “Do the declutter first and you may fall in love with your house all over again. Having drawers and drawers of stuff will only drag you down.”

### Clothes

When you’re sorting clothes, says Keohane, get up early in the morning and give yourself at least six hours. Towels and bedlinen all come under this category. Take every single item from your wardrobe and pile them on the bed. Start with tops, then go on to trousers, and so on. “Ask yourself, as you pick up each item, does it bring me joy? You should throw out everything that doesn’t, even designer clothes,” she says.

“I have a 12-month rule,” adds Tuohy. “Have I worn it or used it in a year? If the answer is no, I throw it out.”

### Books

It can be difficult to offload books, even when the charity shops are open. During the lockdown you could see whether neighbours or friends would like them. Remove books from boxes and under the bed and put them on bookshelves.

“People get confused between their love of reading and their love of books. Once you’ve read a book, it’s within you and you can give it away. If you have books you haven’t read, how long have you had them and will you ever read them? Anything you keep, you should display and celebrate,” says Keohane.

To avoid more clutter building up, Keohane says we must limit what we buy

“Get three bin liners and mark them ‘discard’, ‘donate’ and ‘keep’”



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Organising your space is good for your mental health, says Vera Keohane

and suggests reading ebooks on an e-reader such as a Kindle, using Borrowbox from the library, or listening to audiobooks on apps such as Audible.

### Paper

Going digital on all of your household bills and bank statements is one way of reducing future clutter. For the existing pile, O’Sullivan advises you should tackle them head on.

“Now is the time to go through your medical receipts and send them through to your insurer. Try to file away what you need and put the rest into your recycling bin, which can be collected,” says O’Sullivan, who has been offering decluttering consultations by phone for €20 an hour during the pandemic.

Put the papers you need into folders or file boxes and, from now on, deal with everything at source. “When letters come in, open them, recycle the envelope and put what you need in files,” says Keohane.

### Miscellaneous

One way of getting rid of miscellaneous items – creams, candles, and arts and crafts – is to use them, according to O’Sullivan. “Rather than decluttering in the pandemic, perhaps it’s time to use the face masks, light the candles and read the books.”

For the kitchen drawers or presses that you hate going near, Keohane recommends taking everything out and giving it a home. “Put things where they belong or put them in the bin. A drawer or press must have a given purpose and if it doesn’t, it will be filled with junk.”

### Sentimental items

These are the most difficult for people to part with, so take your time with them. Now may be the time to give family members heirlooms or sentimental pieces of jewellery. For the rest, ask if they are sentimental for the right reasons.

Keohane says people in their mid-sixties should start having a thorough clear-out of their sentimental items, which often include photographs and letters. “None of us are getting out of this world alive. Someone will have to be responsible for our stuff after we’ve gone. If we are holding on to letters from ex-boyfriends or girlfriends and don’t want our family to read them, now is the time to get rid of them. Once you do it, you will feel better.”

### Photographs

You can declutter both physical and digital photographs. “I have boxes of photographs from long ago when you had to develop your entire roll and keep the good, bad and ugly. If there are only two good ones from an entire roll, keep those two and throw out the rest,” says Keohane.

As with clothes that remind you that you are no longer a size six, throwing out photos that call to mind what you no longer have can be cathartic. For the ones that recall happy times, Keohane and Tuohy recommend framing the best, putting others into photo albums or uploading them to your phone or computer and creating photobooks on websites such as photobox.ie.

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