

Getting the house in shape

By Melanie Furlong
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Statistics show that 25 per cent of the population is naturally organized, so the other 75 per cent don't have to feel bad if they call on the services of a professional to help get their houses in order.

Halifax's Jane Veldhoven is one of a growing number of professional organizers in this country who help clients sort, purge and organize their clutter.

"Usually by the time they call me they are desperate. They've tried everything on their own and nothing is working. They're buried in their stuff, or their desk is buried and they can't do their work anymore," she says.

If you're really ready to clean up, Veldhoven says you have to be brutal.

"The biggest question people have to ask themselves is, 'When is the last time I used this or looked at this?'"

If the answer is 'not within the last year' then it's time to toss it, sell it or give it away.

"Sometimes I'm more lenient depending on what it is," Veldhoven admits.

But what she's not lenient on — everything that is kept must have a place. She says this is one of the biggest errors she sees families making in

their home.

"Papers, magazines, recipe books, or the kids toys don't have a physical home or a place they belong, instead they just kind of sit where they land," says Veldhoven.

Veldhoven says to group of items from around the house, put them together, figure out where they're useful and then give them a home.

Choosing the proper storage container is the next challenge.

Some people run out to the store to buy containers, baskets and boxes or furniture and really have no idea what it's for so most of the time the stuff doesn't fit, says Veldhoven.

"Don't buy the containers until you're done the other three steps. When you buy containers or furniture, it's supposed to fit the stuff that goes in it," she says.

Some of the big problem areas are in the attic, garage, basement or office.

"It's the whole 'out of sight out of mind' thing. Really what people are doing is just postponing a decision," she says.

There are many psychological reasons that make people feel the need to hold on to things, says Veldhoven. Perhaps they got it from their parents who grew up in the Depression and never got rid of anything, or they grew up with nothing and they feel better when they have a lot around them.

Whatever the reason, she says there is hope.

"The skills can be learned to a certain extent by most people," says Veldhoven.

This is how a closet could look if it's properly put together.

