

## The Messy House Symptom

Sometimes a dirty house is not merely a dirty house. For some of my clients a dirty or cluttered house is a symptom of their physical or mental illness. It may also be a symptom of a life style that is just too busy. Cleaning and organizing take concentration, time, energy, and “know how.”

Unfortunately, clutter has a cycle. You are too tired and stressed to organize and not organizing makes you more stressed and unorganized. Every item needs a home so that little thought can be put into cleaning. Some people have difficulty seeing the moves for organization just as they are challenged by checker game moves and puzzles. Christian Professional Organizer, Holly Boyd has a motto of “Less Mess Less Stress-God Bless.” She quotes an article from Newsweek, which says that Americans spend 5-15 hours each week looking for things. Boyd commented that the stress of “clutter is a killer and it affects the mass majority.”

Like sports, reading, or mathematics, organizing can come easier to some people, yet it can usually be learned. I have known of people who make the mistake of telling their children to clean their rooms. They simply assume that they can do this. Sometimes there has been no training in this process. There is no system and children are overwhelmed by the task. It is important for parents to help their children to break the project into very small parts. If a child is willing to do the job in small parts then it is probably not a discipline issue.

The National Study Group of Chronic Disorganization provides amazing insight into the relationship between disorganization and disabilities. A visit to this website is a must for families and professionals alike, [www.nsgcd.org](http://www.nsgcd.org). Some disorders steal energy. Pregnancy can also be an energy zapper. Pain can be another energy thief. Painful sensations naturally cause us to limit our mobility and thus housekeeping may suffer.

Organization requires clear thought. Unfortunately some people go through life being distracted by everything, running from project to project. Little ever seems to get completed yet they put great effort into their work and become very frustrated at failure. Some have conditions, which cause them to zone out, and be totally unable to concentrate on much except getting through the moment. The spectrum of causes for unclear thought is vast.

Challenges with organization can be particularly common with senior citizens. Many have limited mobility and other limitations. Communication with these individuals must be handled delicately with an understanding of their needs.

Our society defines people by their homes. We cruelly judge their worth as a human being by their property value and its upkeep. We fail to realize the deep meanings behind the clutter. This clutter and the inability to control it may cause deep shame and contribute to a variety of other challenges. It can also limit friendships and support systems. Any help offered to those in need must be sure to preserve their self-respect.

I've had challenged clients receive eviction notices from their apartments due to cleaning issues. Fortunately intervention from WV Advocates has helped. There are agencies, which help with housekeeping for those who qualify. Lists are available through the Altnheim Resources and Referral Center. Occasionally churches can assist with meal preparation, babysitting, and cleaning when someone is ill short term.

I invite you to take an inventory of your organization and housekeeping. Does it identify a physical or emotional challenge that needs addressed? What lifestyle changes are needed? Are your expectations realistic? Does your loved one or neighbor need help with their housekeeping instead of nasty gossip? In all reality they probably hate the mess and would love to be helped by the next episode of CLEAN HOUSE if their dignity could be preserved.