

*Winter 2018*

## **An Invitation to Simplify Your Life**

By: Gretchen M. Stein, Ph.D.

This quarter's Sand Paper offers the invitation to simplify our lives as we move into a new year. Active busy schedules combined with a society that thrives on consumerism leaves us with an over-abundance of things, and little time to address the piles of papers or closets full of clutter in our lives. Speaking from experience, I have found that removing unneeded clutter opens up space in our environment. It helps us feel less burdened, opens our minds for creativity to freely flow to us, and brings tremendous peace of mind with a sense of wellbeing.

Last summer, a dear friend shared some wisdom. He told me that holding on to years of presentation outlines and file drawers full of trainings and meeting notes was my way of saying to the universe that I believed that I was never going to have another creative idea to share. That woke me up. I started to purge my files. I found training seminars I wrote and delivered on plastic overhead slides going back over 25 years. Today, gone are my file drawers packed full of old information. Today, I know where things are and can easily retrieve them from a cache of only important papers. My next step is to clear out the clutter in my electronic files too.

This fall, I turned my new found attention in decluttering to my home life. I was introduced to a book that changed the way I looked at the many things I was holding on to in my home. The book is entitled "The Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing" by Marie Kondo. I highly recommend this book to you.

The author has devoted her life to helping people declutter and organize their things. She goes through a process she has shared with thousands of clients over the years. It is a process very different from anything I had read before. The place she suggests we start in clearing the clutter from our homes is with our clothing. The first item she recommends we start with are tops. She asks us to take all our tops out from all closets and seasonal storage and bring them into one room. Living in Minnesota, I had tops for every season, layers for weather changes, tops when I was bigger, tops when I weighed less, tops for every sports team I cheer for, tops I loved years ago and even tops with the sale tags still attached that I got on sale, but never quite found a time to wear to my shock, surprise and embarrassment I had 268 tops.

This was eye opening for me. I realized that I was holding on to a lot of clothes that other people could use. In fact I realized profoundly that I was holding clothes that rightly belonged to people who needed these things I was storing, but not using. I lovingly packaged up the things that did not meet the criteria set by Kondo. They did not give me joy when I held them. I sent them to organizations where they could find their rightful owners. My closets are now neat and tidy. I have a fourth of the clothes I once had, but each thing hanging there is something that I like and find joy in wearing. I no longer wade through clothes I can't or won't wear today with the thought that maybe I could or would wear them in the future.

By methodically using Kondo's process I have gone through most of my home. When my adult daughters heard what I was doing they both were so relieved. To my surprise they had been talking about the burden that would come to them someday with all my stuff, my mother's stuff and my grandmother's stuff that I had been saving for them. The realization that my daughters do not want my prized possessions has also impacted my shopping and gift giving habits. No more stuff, I am now focused on creating special memories with my spouse, children, grandchildren and friends and not acquiring things they will have to get rid of someday in the future.

Dr. Erica Kanewischer's article in this edition entitled "Mom, I don't Want Your Wedding China," further elaborates on the generational tension around family stuff and offers wonderful tools for discussing this issue with love and respect.

Moving further into a discussion of relationship concerns, Erica's second article discusses "Simplifying a Complex Problem." To round out this edition, Dear Sandy shares her wisdom on this topic too.

We at Sand Creek thank you for the privilege of helping you and your family members with any concern that causes tension in your lives and relationships. We wish you a wonderful New Year and for those times that are not so wonderful, remember we are here to help.

# “Mom, I Don’t Want Your Wedding China”

## *What to Do With All the Stuff When the Kids Don’t Want It?*

By: Erica Kanewischer, Ph.D., LMFT



As baby-boomers are down-sizing, their parents are passing away, and their children are choosing to lead more simple and mobile lives – there is a lot of ‘stuff’ that needs to find a new home. According to the US Census, between 2012 and 2050 the U.S. population over age 65 will nearly double in size (Ortman, Velkoff & Hogan, 2014).

Surprise, frustration or disappointment can arise when your children do not want treasured family belongings. And, it can feel similar when parent’s or grandparent’s leave you with mountains of belongings to sort through, or have negative reactions when you don’t want their antique bedroom set. In this article we have five tips for dealing with this task and the emotions that come with it.

### ONE

#### *Start talking early.*

Do not save talking about “who gets what” or “where will this go” until the week a move is happening or after a terminal health diagnosis. Spend time with family members talking about new homes for heirlooms, furniture pieces and pieces of art. Share the stories that go with these pieces. This is also useful when multiple family members want the same thing – a decision can be made and legal documents written in advance (University of Minnesota Who Gets Grandma’s Yellow Pie Plate). The stories told will help make the item special, and if it is not kept may help it be sold to a collector or antique shop.

### TWO

#### *Use empathy.*

If your family member is saddened and let down that you do not want their dining room table set, before becoming defensive try to understand their perspective. Likely their life is changing in a big way as they downsize and this table may be symbolic of the joyful family get togethers they have hosted over the years. Also, if your children do not want the wooden rocking chair that you remember rocking them in try to see it from their eyes. They may not be dismissing the joyful and close childhood they had, but may not see a need or space for the chair in their current home. Try to see the situation from the other perspective and talk about how each of you are feeling.

# "Mom, I Don't Want Your Wedding China (Continued)

## THREE

*Don't let the 'stuff' get in the way of your relationship.*

This builds off of empathy. Work together to clean out spaces and make decisions about where belongings go. When my grandmother passed away and my mom dropped her rocking chair off at my house I knew I was quickly passing it on to a good friend who is going to have her first baby. While there was some sadness about the rocker leaving our family, I had no need for it (I had 3 already!) and my mom and I both knew that grandma would be happy to know a new baby was being rocked in her chair. Making decisions and finding new homes for beloved items can bring you closer - even if this means selling the items. Use the money to tackle bills, for a nice dinner or vacation together.

## FOUR

*Understand the cultural shift.*

For many years accruing material goods was a way to demonstrate social position and status. Additionally, wedding gifts and house warming gifts had significant meaning and were meant to be treasures for the family. Though this is still true for some young people, many millennials find a more 'simple' way to live desirable. They may have a smaller home due to social consciousness or tight finances. Millennials are also more apt to move frequently and may have design tastes that are more minimalist and modern (Verde, 2017).

## FIVE

*Remember it's the memories attached to the object that are the biggest treasures.*

Going through belongings can be emotional as old memories surface and fun-filled times with loved ones are reflected upon. These memories will not disappear when the item is gone. Purchase a journal and record family memories together. Go through the photo albums and label pictures together.

Life transitions can be filled with mixed emotions. Acknowledging these and working together can help family members as they navigate the changes. If you need support on talking to your family members, call your Sand Creek at 888.243.5744.

## References

1. Ortman, Velkoff & Hogan. (2014). An Aging Nation: The Older Population in the United States. Retrieved 12/5/17 from <https://www.census.gov/prod/2014pubs/p25-1140.pdf>
2. Who Gets Grandma's Yellow Pie Plate. Retrieved 12/15/17 from: <https://www.extension.umn.edu/family/personal-finance/decision-making/who-gets-grandmas-yellow-pie-plate/>
3. Verde, T. (2017). Aging Parents with lots of stuff and children who don't want it. New York Times. Retrieved 12/5/17 from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/18/your-money/aging-parents-with-lots-of-stuff-and-children-who-dont-want-it.html>



## SIMPLIFYING A COMPLEX SITUATION: USING A SOLUTION FOCUSED APPROACH

There are many reasons we encounter complex situations. Home and work often serve up challenges; a new project, a rebellious teenager, a house full of guests, competing work demands. In these moments it is easy to feel overwhelmed and sometimes with little power. Solution Focused Therapy (SFT) is a future-focused and goal-directed form of brief therapy (Dolan, 2017). Using this lens of looking at changing behavior we can see several ways to simplify a complex situation and give ourselves more power to create change.

In the process of simplifying a complex situation, below are some questions to help frame it by using the SFT lens.

**Have I been in this, or a similar, situation before?**

**What did I do that helped?**

SFT believes that we often have skills that we have used in similar situations that can be applied to the current situation. When have you encountered a similar problem? What helped? What made it worse? Articulating the answers to these questions helps you to identify your own strengths to work toward your goals.

**When has this not felt complex?**

**What other situations in my life are currently less complex?**

These questions encourage us to look for exceptions to the current issue. By noticing when it is not occurring, new ideas for solutions and clarity can arise. This also helps to decrease feeling overwhelmed and see places in your life where more clarity and peace can be a restful place for you.

**How would I know that the situation is no longer complex? How would I know that there is no longer a problem?**

**What would the first sign be that would clue me into seeing that change has occurred?**

SFT often encourages people to imagine that a 'miracle' has occurred and then articulate the first things they would notice around them as different and indicators of this miracle. Identifying these can give you a starting point in knowing what to do and where to put your energy to create change and decrease complexity. By scaling down to the indicators of change, you can see small and separate pieces of a complex situation.

**What can I/my family/my team do in the next week to change the situation?**

Keep your thinking future focused. Sometimes if we spend too much time thinking about past situations it can increase complexity. By focusing on the future and working toward a goal related to how you would like things to be, positive energy is moving you along to more simplicity.

Solution Focused Therapy gives us one lens with which to simplify complex situations. By keeping a positive, strengths focused and future oriented perspective, new options for clarity and change can arise.

### Reference

1. Dolan, Y. Institute for Solution Focused Therapy. Retrieved 12/5/17 from: <https://solutionfocused.net/what-is-solution-focused-therapy/>



## DEAR SANDY,

I recently married my long time boyfriend Mike. We dated for about five years and I just moved into his home after the wedding.

Everything about him is wonderful. He's a loving and supportive father (we each have kids) and provider for our family.

However, the one area that I always knew might become an issue is the reality that we both have very different ideas regarding messes and how to keep a home. I'm a 'neat freak' and probably a bit overboard in terms of how I kept my place prior to blending our families. Mike is the exact opposite. He seems to thrive in chaos and clutter.

This has begun to impact our relationship. I knew that it would be an exercise in compromise, but it seems like he is oblivious to how his piles and messes affect me. I'm starting to feel frustrated and resentful. Any suggestions you could offer is greatly appreciated.

## DEAR NEAT FREAK,

Congratulations on your recent wedding!

The changes that accompany two adults with children in any new living situation – married or otherwise – can be daunting. Please know that your edginess brought on by Mike's messes are not imaginary. Studies show that a messy home can disrupt a person's level of cortisol, the stress hormone. People can actually have a physiological stress response when feeling overwhelmed by clutter. It could be a nudging reminder that things are left undone.

For Mike, it could be the exact opposite response. His piles of stuff could serve as a means of security, memories and maybe even pride.

Marital harmony begins with understanding where each person is coming from. By focusing on the person and not the clutter, you can begin to learn more about Mike's processes and reasoning. Ask him to explain it to you, while withholding any judgment or criticism. This might help change your own perspective.

Another suggestion would be to establish "Neat & Messy Zones," that fit in with each of your personalities. This can honor both of you and give you an opportunity to work together, while still having a say in the new process. Identify specific areas that you both agree on that should be kept neat, while other areas are deemed as spaces that can be messy. (For example: kitchen and bathroom areas are agreed on that they will be kept clean and tidy, while the bedrooms not so much.)

Remember to be patient with one another. It sounds like it's a fairly new living situation for each of you. Communicate respectfully about motivations and processes without imparting too much of your own emotion about the clutter. Mike can work to establish areas that he is willing to keep free of clutter and mess. With this in mind you can make some good progress and be on your way to a better overall situation. Don't be afraid to experiment until you find the right balance!

Good Tidings,

Sandy



SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO DEAR SANDY BY EMAILING US  
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## About Sand Creek Workplace Wellness

Sand Creek is a women-owned small business specializing in providing exceptional workplace wellness services to support the human spirit at work. We embrace our core values of service, hope, trust, compassion, and wisdom in each interaction, there by upholding our mission of providing helpful solutions to improve productivity and shining a light in the darkest of moments.

Our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is designed to offer face-to-face counseling and consulting to those that voluntarily reach out to us. We are not simply a phone counseling service or online tool type EAP. Thousands of professional counselors form a worldwide Sand Creek network available to deliver personal care and support to you in your community. Our services are administered nationally, but delivered locally.

Sand Creek supports the relationship between individual health and overall organizational health. Our Organization Assistance Program (OAP) service extends the reach into the organization and provides work teams with a systemic approach to improve the health and well-being of an organization.