

the
elephants
in the
room



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how to cope when you are
overwhelmed with clutter

by Lisa Cole

less
stuff

The Elephants in the Room

How to cope when you are overwhelmed with clutter

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It is good to have stuff, but pointless when you have so much stuff you can't find it!

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“This works! Lisa's prompts to guide you through the chaos and overwhelm are humorous, sensitive, respectful and always practical. Giving just five minutes a day using her fun and very clever methods makes the process manageable. Before you know it you are seeing results that last without exhausting yourself. This little gem of a book enables you to distinguish between clutter and treasure. Without much time investment you realise that you are looking at 'stuff' differently and have integrated healthy habits for keeping your 'stuff' relevant.” Anya

“Lisa's little and often strategy for decluttering works perfectly for me as my health only allows small bursts of energy but it would be equally good for those with a very full and busy lifestyle.” Gaynor

"I love gentle decluttering - It's scary looking at a pile of stuff and not knowing where to start, but Lisa's advice has helped me by starting with small and manageable prompts. This encourages me to do a little each day and by the end of the week, I am amazed by what I've achieved !" Sue

“I used to wildly swap from drowning in clutter to violently purging my belongings to streamline my home (later finding I had flung out something irreplaceable in my mindless scouring).

Gentle decluttering takes out the overwhelm. Easy prompts to inspire you to make the small changes to tackle your chaos while keeping your cool.” Jenny

“Lisa's prompts are practical and often link to my own clutter hotspots, the questions she suggests to help decide what can go (and what shouldn't) are always incredibly helpful and sensible and her style is encouraging and non judgy. Lisa's methods help decluttering feel manageable and not overwhelming.” Helen

“It's the difference between fearing I'll drown, or fully knowing I can do this, without harming myself.” Angela

Introduction



This book is for anyone who looks around their home and despairs at the amount of stuff in it.

It is decluttering with a difference, aimed at real people who love stuff. There is no encouragement to tip out whole cupboards and it is not at all ruthless.

The Elephants in the Room starts with good concrete decluttering strategies. You will learn how to choose the best time to declutter. You will find out how to make it easy to get rid of thousands of things you do not need. You will know how to declutter without getting stressed out or overwhelmed.

Learn how to declutter in an easy and manageable way with *The Elephants in the Room*. This book will hold your hand and walk you through the process.

Avoid getting overwhelmed

Are you daunted by the idea of decluttering and finding it hard to start? The very idea of tipping out whole boxes of clutter and going through them all at once fills me with dread. This can be so bad I don't get further than turning on Netflix and worrying about it later. This book will introduce you to a way of controlling your clutter. It is easy to do and doesn't need lots of energy and time.

You will learn how to break down the overwhelm into very small and easy tasks. And you will be able to get a system into place that helps you every step of the way.

It is ok to have stuff!

It is great to have things. You should be able to keep them if you like them. Even if they are not at all useful, slightly broken and don't look that nice to other people. If you genuinely like them, then keep them. This book will not encourage you to purge your belongings. I believe that the things we own are important to us, and make up part of who we are.

If you are aiming to lead a simpler, less cluttered life, get rid of the stuff you really don't need first. This will make it easier to decide what you want to keep. This book will help you identify the real clutter. You don't need stuff that is useless, takes up space for no reason and even makes you feel bad about yourself. It is fine to have a home filled with things. Those things should mean something to you and should have happy memories. Stuff we have around us should be liked and/or used often.

There is nothing wrong with having stuff; it helps make us who we are. Academic Russell Belk, who writes about collecting, said that our belongings form part of our 'extended self'. Possessions are very important to us, linking us to our past, our family, our peers and to the world.

Some people say they find minimalism liberating. Having a minimal wardrobe can save lots of time in the morning. People say that they feel better with fewer daily choices, less to clean, less to look after. There is a balance between having so much stuff you can never find anything, to having so little you can live out of a rucksack. If you like the idea of living with very little this book will start you on the way. If you want to live a moderately cluttered life, in a home filled with reminders of happy times, this book will get you there.

Why do we keep things?

Feeling bonded to certain objects that are important to us is not only a human trait. I once met a dog and their owner on the beach; the owner was throwing stones into the ocean for the dog to run in and get. Without fail, the dog got the actual stone thrown, out of millions of other options, time and time again. The stone chosen by the owner was important to the dog in some way, it belonged to the owner therefore it belonged to the dog. My cat has a favourite toy, so loved we call it the 'manky thing'; if she can't find it she will howl.

From a very early age we bond with our possessions believing they have what Christian Jarrett calls a 'unique essence'. Even very young children would rather have the toy they had been given minutes earlier than an exact replica. It does not take long for our possessions to become part of us, almost a physical extension of ourselves.

Our belongings connect us with the past. I know many people who love a particular kitchen utensil that came from their grandmother. We keep photos of relatives who died long before we were born because they connect us to our own histories. We lug around antiques of varying value purely because they once belonged to Uncle so and so. Often we cling onto things that mean nothing to us other than

a historical connection. We hold onto stuff that reminds us of the past and how we felt. I am never going to get rid of 'Fluff'. This 50 year old bit of rabbit skin was once sewn into a rough kitten shape. Now mended to within an inch of its life, with the big clumsy stitches of a child, it has had one too many brushes with an accidental boil wash. Fluff went everywhere with me when I was little. Still to this day he makes me feel safe and secure, even though he is now tucked away in a cupboard lest the cats mistake him for a manky thing.

Our belongings show others who we are in the world, even if we don't want them to know. From fast red showy sports cars to the muted tones of an environmentally friendly ethical organic t-shirt, the things we choose to have make a statement about who we are. There is a language of clothes that is delicately nuanced and speaks reams about us before we open our mouths to strangers. We read each other's shoes and bags, we make snap decisions based on what people carry with them. We don't see many bowler hatted men in town centres now but we can easily identify people who might be office managers from their clothes. Any opportunity we have to choose our stuff gives us a chance to display who we are to the world. Even our choices in the supermarket tell other shoppers a lot about us and our habits. There is no escape from this unless you live off-grid and see no other humans.

We need tools that help us get on with life more. We keep things because they connect us with other humans. Belongings help us define our identity and can make us very happy.

Is minimalism for you?

Paring down your stuff to the bare minimum is increasingly fashionable. Bloggers travel the world living out of carry-on bags. Smart and fashionable people write about how freeing it is to have a limited wardrobe. Key influencers of our society wear a self imposed uniform. They share photos of their replicated outfits and we aspire to be like them.

While the idea of extreme minimalism can be attractive, what is the reality?

Pros

- Less cleaning
- Less storage needed
- Easier to find things
- Time saved not choosing what to wear
- Money saved from not shopping

Cons

- You need lots of discipline
- Less choice in every aspect of day to day life
- Need to buy or borrow if you don't have something