



Mess Stress? 18 Tips for Staying Organized by award-winning author / stress-relief expert Susie Mantell

Let's take a look at everyday "Mess Stress," which seems to affect most households to some degree.

We now have entire TV programs focused on the inside world of people living with hoarding disorders. Those shows have become quite popular but remember that on the organizational spectrum, there are miles between normal everyday clutter... and compulsive hoarding disorders. In this Bigger-Better-Faster society, it can be challenging to make time for putting things away each time we use them. Subsequently, as clutter accumulates the thought of getting re-organized looms and taunts us, becoming "an event." If we thought we were too busy to put that credit card receipt away to begin with, how are we *ever* going to find time to file the daunting mountain of papers, magazines and catalogs now piled on top of it?

Personal Style + Integrity + Flexibility = Balance

Does your To-Do list feel like a comforting safety net... or a cruel taskmaster? We each have our own ways of organizing. Anyone can be taught a system, but if that system doesn't feel intuitive to us, it won't work over time. Punishing rigidity will never relieve anybody's stress, but neither will clutter visual chaos. When it comes to household or office organization, I think one's personal style + a sense of integrity + a degree of flexibility = balance. Are you soothed by photos and memorabilia on your desk, or do you experience those things as visual noise? If it's the latter, place those items in a nearby drawer to pull out when the spirit moves you.

External Mess & Internal Stress

Clutter can be a comfort to some, but if you're seeking to relieve Internal Stress, consider reducing External Mess. I keep a few tiny treasures in my office that comfort or amuse me, but I love smooth surfaces even more. I've come to understand that clear space helps me focus, so I use a white, six-tier In-Box to triage projects, each slot labeled at its edge. Throughout the day, piles, files and Post-Its festoon my desk as I work and no one else would likely know what it all means, but I do. When evening comes, each slides back into its slot so the next morning I am greeted by a clear desk, with projects close at-hand. In my office is also a small photo of a beach path cresting the dunes at a place I love, reminding me who I am even when phones are ringing, an article is due, the printer jams, email is stacking-up, and someone I love is in tears.

18 Tips for Avoiding Mess Stress:

1. Do you want to remember something? Write it down.
2. Keep only one To-Do list, and keep it in one place.

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3. Set realistic goals, and revise them as needed.
4. Schedule your days to include "cushion-time" before and after appointments for unexpected delays.
5. Maintain a Long-Term Timeline sorted by months, tracking when annual premiums are due, tax payments, dental exams, tuition installments, birthdays, etc.
6. Should you pitch, heave or stow it? Hold an item in your hand. Visualize the last time you used it, and the next time you likely would. Act accordingly.
7. Do you misplace your keys a lot? Assign them a home and always place them there.
8. Do you have an important item to take to work or school? Place it directly in front of the door or on the seat of your car so that you can't forget it.
9. R.S.V.P. to all invitations the same day they arrive. Write every appointment on one calendar. Every morning, look at the calendar before doing anything else.
10. Does a permission slip need to go back to school? For a small child, pin it to his/her shirt. *[For big kids, such a breach of coolness would constitute child abuse.]*
11. Do you need to organize user IDs and passwords? Keep one master list, off your computer, in a safe place.
12. Are you struggling with closet clutter? Consolidate. *(I once discovered I'd unwittingly accumulated ten of the same light bulb, stored in two different closets.)*
13. Do you need to reduce distractions at work? When I'm concentrating or on the phone, my assistant places a post-it on my desk with "?" on it. As soon as I can pause, I can respond without losing my train of thought. We also created a list titled, "Things to Do When Susie is Busy" (e.g. return calls, order supplies, review inventory, go to Post Office, add paper to fax/printer, file papers.)

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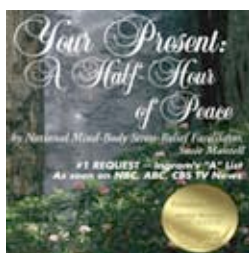
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14. Keep Post-Its in the car. They're great for everything from dry-cleaner reminders to strokes of genius.
15. Are you worried someone else will forget something? Set a specific place where you leave them reminders so you can relax. (A man having knee-replacement wrote in water-proof marker: "Not This Knee!")
16. It is easy to forget to honor what you've accomplished. When you feel swamped, pause and review the things you have completed. Don't forget carpool, bank deposit, breakfast dishes. Build healthy rewards into your week.
17. Chill. Compulsive Doing can create a euphoric adrenaline-rush, as cortisol and other stress hormones go into overdrive, eventually leading to depression and if unchecked, burnout.
18. Try to handle papers once rather than procrastinating and accumulating. Whenever possible: See it. Do it. Done! Remember the axiom: *"On the day you die, there will still be stuff in your In-Box."*

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