Sorting Guidelines

• Begin in a small space, or a space where you are highly motivated to work. Always work in the same area. Do not give in to the temptation to bounce around to other spots or you will not see progress.

• Set a timer (5 or 15 minutes) – this is IMPORTANT to reduce stress and leaves time for putting sorted items away.

• Pick up one item at a time (the top item or whatever is closest).

• Answer one or more of the following decision-making questions until it is clear what you want to do with the item.
  
  • What is the story behind this item?
  • Does it have sentimental value?
  • How many do I have and is that enough?
  • Do I have enough time and space for it?
  • Have I used it in the past year?
  • Do I have a specific plan to use this within a reasonable time frame?
  • Does this just seem important because I’m looking at it now?
  • Is it current, of good quality, etc.?
  • Would I buy it again if I didn’t already own it?
  • Do I really need it?

• Place the item into one of three piles: “Keep”, “Discard” or “I Don’t Know”. The “I Don’t Know” pile is useful for temporarily postponing a difficult decision and to keep the sorting efforts moving.

• When the timer goes off, make a snap decision about each item in the “I don’t know” pile and place them in the “Keep” or “Discard” piles.

• Take all items in keep pile to their final location (where would you look if you were looking for this item in your home) or get them as close as possible.

• Take all items in the discard pile to their appropriate location. Discard can mean: recycle, sell, give away, donate, garbage, etc.

• Sorting is an exposure to anxiety. Start with five minutes and slowly build up your tolerance. Take breaks. Be kind to yourself. Give yourself small rewards for successful sessions.

Adapted from “Buried in Treasures” by David Tolin, Randy Frost, & Gail Steketee
Remember, a session is not complete until all sorted items have been taken to their final location. If sorted piles are simply abandoned, the sorting becomes “churning.”

Adapted from “Buried in Treasures” by David Tolin, Randy Frost, & Gail Steketee