A HOW-TO GUIDE

What to Do When Your Husband Isn't Interested in Decluttering

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Introduction: What to Do When Your Husband Isn't Interested in Decluttering

"But Ellie, my husband doesn't want to declutter anything!"

This is a question I get asked all the time, so let's dive into it. **What if your husband isn't interested in decluttering yet?**

In this e-book, we'll explore practical strategies and offer support to help you if your husband isn't keen on decluttering.

But remember, if you try everything I suggest and still face challenges with clutter, you might need professional help.

I created my course, book, and the entire Frum Minimalism brand to bring peace and harmony to our homes and lives—what we call Shalom Bayis.
Clutter can cause tremendous stress and negatively impact our Shalom Bayis.

The most important principle I teach is that you must never declutter someone else's belongings. These items are not yours, and you do not have the right to make decisions about them.

So, what do I suggest?
Provide your husband with a clearly defined space, within reason, where he can keep all his things. I want this entire experience to be a peaceful one for you.

I also want to assure you that, so far, 100% of my students' husbands have eventually joined and embraced the process, even those who were initially hesitant and uninterested. After witnessing the positive impact decluttering had on their wives, children, and even themselves, they wanted their wives to help them declutter their own spaces.

In many cases, husbands even asked their wives to declutter more than initially planned!
However, this takes time, and you need to lead by example. First, focus on your own spaces and then on shared spaces. Never get rid of someone else's things, as our goal is to create Shalom in our homes.

Often, people get it wrong by starting with other people's belongings because it's easier to let go of others' things than your own.
This approach is flawed. Practice what you preach by decluttering your own things first, then move to shared spaces like the kitchen. If your husband does a lot of cooking, provide him with a couple of cabinets for his kitchen items and declutter the rest. You can also declutter areas like the dining room and bathrooms. But remember, anything that belongs to your husband should be put into a clearly defined space within reason.

Chapter 1: Understanding the Difference Between Clutter for Men and Women

The first thing to understand is that men and women often see clutter in totally different ways!
We are not wired the same.
It's not just about personal preferences—it's actually rooted in how our brains and experiences shape our views on organization.

Let's see why these differences matter and how understanding them can help you create a more peaceful home.

For Women:

Research shows that women are usually more sensitive to visual clutter. According to Psychology Today, women often find clutter more stressful because they're more aware of their surroundings. Our brains are wired to notice every little detail, making clutter feel overwhelming. Studies from The Journal of Environmental Psychology reveal that women living in messy spaces report feeling more anxious. **A cluttered home isn't just untidy; it's a stress-inducing environment** that can affect your mental well-being.

For Men:

Men tend to focus more on how functional a space is rather than how it looks. Research in the Journal of Consumer Research suggests that men might not stress as much about visual clutter because they're more concerned about whether the space works for their needs, not how it actually looks.

Studies from The University of California show that men process spatial information differently.

They might not feel as overwhelmed by clutter because their brains handle it differently, leading to less cognitive overload compared to women.

From my experience and research, here are some more differences in how men and women see and deal with clutter. Women usually prefer a more organized and visually pleasing environment. They might prioritize neatness and order in spaces like the kitchen, living room, or bedroom. Men might not always focus on these aspects as much, prioritizing functionality or convenience instead.

Clutter Threshold:

Some of us can handle a lot of clutter, meaning our clutter threshold is very high, while others have a very low threshold. Women often have a lower clutter threshold than men do. This means that women tend to feel the impact of clutter sooner and more intensely. **A few misplaced items might already be enough to disrupt a woman's sense of order**, whereas men might not even notice until the clutter becomes a significant obstacle.

Cognitive Load Theory:

Did you know? Our brains have a limited capacity for processing information. Clutter adds to this load, making it harder to focus and relax. Research from Stanford University explains that clutter can make it tough to concentrate. Women might feel this overload more intensely because we have so much going on and so much we need to remember.

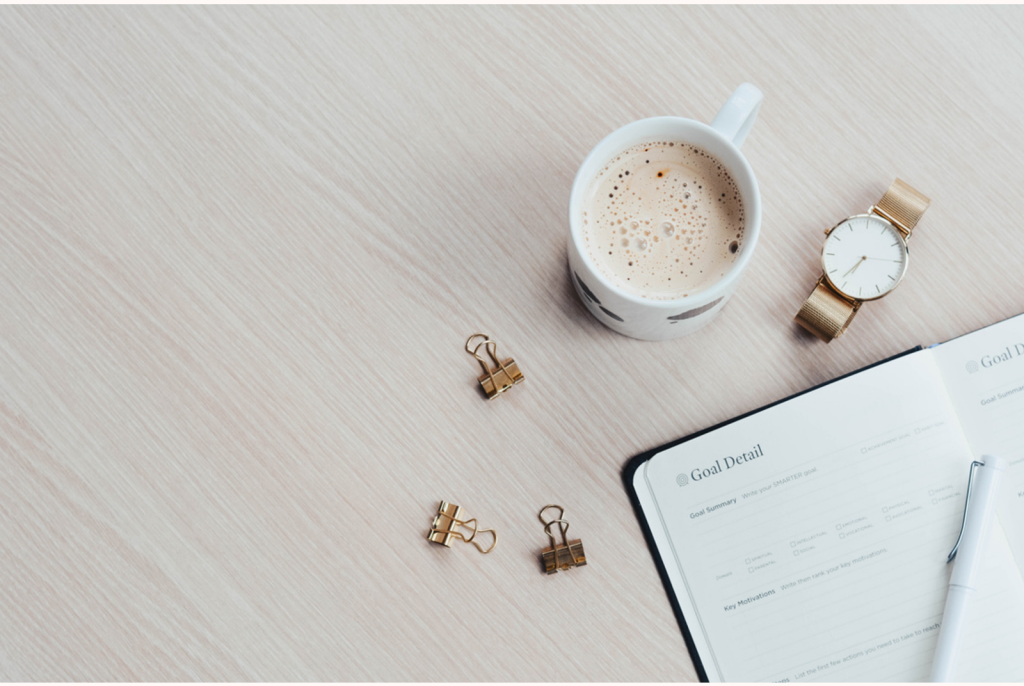
The Silent To-Do List:

I read in a book called “The Silent To-Do List” that we have all these things spinning in our heads. Take out the stuff from the washing machine, pick up the baby, defrost the meat—these silent to-dos are constantly running in our minds. When there is also physical clutter around our homes, it can seem extra overwhelming because our brains are already overloaded. This constant mental juggling makes it harder for women to ignore the mess, adding to our stress levels.

Hormonal Differences:

Hormonal differences also play a role.

Research from The National Institute of Mental Health shows that women often have higher cortisol levels (the stress hormone) in response to clutter. This means that clutter can make women feel more stressed and uncomfortable than it does for men.



Bridging the Gap

Understanding these differences is key to creating harmony in your home. Here are some practical steps:

1. **Communicate Openly:** Talk with your husband about how you both see clutter. Share why certain areas or items matter to you and listen to his perspective too. Open communication can help you find common ground and build mutual respect's preferences.

2. **Compromise and Define Spaces:** Work together to decide on spaces that cater to both of your needs. For shared areas, agree on a common approach to organizing. Then, give your husband a space where he can keep things however he wants. This way, you both have room to be happy.

3. **Lead by Example:** As you declutter your own spaces, show your husband the positive changes and benefits. Sometimes seeing the results firsthand can encourage a more cooperative attitude.

4. **Celebrate Small Wins:** Recognize and celebrate your progress together. Small victories in decluttering can build momentum and reinforce positive behaviors.

Chapter 2: Talking to Your Husband and Defining His Space

Now that you understand that men and women are wired differently when it comes to clutter, it's time to have an important conversation with your husband. This chapter will guide you on how to explain these differences to him and how to establish a clearly defined space for his belongings.

Remember, the goal is to create harmony and Shalom Bayis (peace in the home) by respecting each other's needs and perspectives.

Start by finding a good time to talk when both of you are relaxed and free from distractions.

You want this conversation to be open and honest, without any feelings of judgment or frustration. Begin by explaining that you've learned how men and women perceive clutter differently.

Share some of the insights from the previous chapter to help him understand why certain things might bother you more than they bother him.

Explain Your Perspective:

" I've been reading about how men and women see clutter differently, and it's really interesting. Did you know that women are usually more sensitive to visual clutter because our brains are wired to notice every little detail? For us, a cluttered space can feel overwhelming and stressful. It's not just about being tidy; it's about feeling calm and relaxed in our home."

Reassure Him:

"I want you to know that I respect your space and your things. I will never get rid of anything without your permission. It's really important to me that you feel comfortable and happy in our home too."

Propose a Solution:
"What I'm hoping we can do is find a way to keep our shared spaces clutter-free so that I can feel more at ease. I'd also love for you to have your own space where you can keep things exactly how you like them. That way, we both get what we need."

This approach shows respect for his perspective while also expressing your own needs. It's important to make it clear that this isn't about imposing your will on him but about finding a balance that works for both of you.

Defining His Space:
Once you've had the talk and he understands where you're coming from, it's time to define his space. This should be an area where he can organize (or not organize) his belongings as he sees fit. It might be his office, a section of the garage, or even a specific set of shelves.

Clear Boundaries:
Set clear boundaries for his space and the shared spaces. For example, "You can keep anything you want in your office, but let's agree to keep the living room and kitchen clutter-free. That way, we both have places where we feel comfortable."

Respect and Compromise:
This is a two-way street. Just as you're asking him to respect your need for tidy shared spaces, you must respect his need for a personal space where he has complete control. Compromise is key. If he needs more space, find ways to accommodate that without sacrificing your need for order in the shared areas.

Real-Life Stories:

Let me share a couple of real-life stories to illustrate how effective this approach can be:

Story 1: Sarah and David: Sarah was always frustrated by the clutter in their shared office. David, on the other hand, didn't see it as a problem.
They had a heartfelt conversation where Sarah explained how the clutter made her feel anxious and overwhelmed.
David was surprised but understanding. They decided to give David one side of the office where he could keep things as he liked. On the other side, Sarah organized her space neatly.
This compromise works wonders. Sarah feels more at ease, and David appreciates having his own area.

Story 2: Rachel and Matis: Rachel found the clutter in their garage unbearable, but Matis viewed it as his creative workspace where he worked on various projects.
They talked about it, and Rachel explained how the disorganization made her feel stressed.
Matis understood and agreed to keep his projects confined to a specific section of the garage, while Rachel organized the rest.
They set clear boundaries, and Rachel respects Matis's creative chaos within his space.
This arrangement allows Rachel to feel more relaxed and Matis to enjoy his projects without pressure.

Celebrate the Effort:
Acknowledge the effort he's making to accommodate your needs. Positive reinforcement goes a long way. When he keeps to the agreed boundaries, let him know you appreciate it. "Thank you for keeping the kitchen tidy; it really helps me feel more relaxed."
By taking these steps, you're not just decluttering your home—you're building a stronger, more understanding relationship. And that's truly what Shalom Bayis is all about.

Chapter 3: Understanding Why Our Husbands Hold Onto “Dumb” Things

Decluttering can sometimes feel like a battle, especially when we don’t understand why our husbands—or even ourselves—hold onto items that might seem unnecessary or, even a bit silly.

What appears as clutter or junk to us can hold significant meaning to others.

By embracing this understanding, we can create a more harmonious home and foster a more empathetic approach to managing our belongings.

Why Do We and Our Husbands Hold Onto These Things?

It's important to recognize that everyone has their own reasons for keeping certain items. Here's a look at why this happens:

- **Sentimental Value:** Sometimes, what seems trivial to us holds deep sentimental value for others—or the opposite- even what seems trivial to others holds sentimental value to ourselves. An old t-shirt, a pamphlet from a memorable event, or a random gadget might evoke special memories and emotions. These items carry significance tied to personal experiences.
- **Practicality and Usefulness:** From a practical standpoint, some people keep things because they believe they might come in handy someday. An old tool or piece of equipment may seem like clutter, but to your husband, it's a useful item that could be needed in the future.
- **Fear of Loss or Scarcity:** Sometimes, people hold onto things because they're afraid they might need them later or because they worry about not having enough. This fear of scarcity can lead to accumulating more than we need and finding it hard to let go of even the smallest items.
- **Emotional Security:** Holding onto certain items can provide a sense of comfort and stability. These belongings might offer a connection to the past and help during times of change or uncertainty.
- **Personality Traits:** Different personalities lead to different attitudes towards possessions. Some people naturally collect and keep items, while others prefer to live with less. Understanding these personality traits can help in appreciating why certain items are valued.

Putting It Into Perspective

Understanding why others—whether it's your husband, children, or even yourself—hold onto items can help maintain harmony in your home. Here's how you can navigate this:

- **Respect Their Sentiments:** Even if you don't see the value in an item, respect that it means something to them. This shows empathy and appreciation for their perspective.

- **Define Their Space:** Use the concept of a clearly defined space to help manage these items. By giving your husband, your children, (or yourself) a specific area to keep cherished belongings, you can keep shared spaces clutter-free while respecting individual attachments. This space could be a drawer, a shelf, or even a whole room, depending on your living situation.

- **Avoid Arguments:** Instead of focusing on disagreements, look for compromises. If an item means a lot to them, suggest keeping it in their designated space so it doesn't clutter shared areas.

Understanding Different Values

We all have different values, and that's perfectly okay. Embracing and respecting these differences can lead to a more harmonious living environment:

- **Acknowledge the Value:** When you come across items that your husband or family values but you might not, take a moment to recognize their importance. This act of acknowledgment can build mutual respect.

- **Open Communication:** Discuss the things you both value. Understanding each other's perspectives can help avoid conflicts and foster a better understanding. For instance, ask, "I see that this old jersey is really important to you. Can you share why it means so much?"

- **Shared Decisions:** Make decisions about what to keep and what to let go together. This can be a bonding experience and help you understand each other better. For example, you might say, "Let's review these items together and decide what works best for our home."

Trusting in Hashem (Bitachon)

This chapter wouldn't be complete without talking about **bitachon**: Hashem took care of us yesterday and today, and He will continue taking care of us every day moving forward. We don't need to hold onto things because we don't trust that He'll provide for us. He always has! I know this is a deep concept and not easy, but if we get into the habit of trusting in Him because He *always* took care of us, we will be so much better off.

What You Can Do to Help

- **Have Open Conversations:** Start by talking about each other's experiences growing up. Share why clutter might be a bigger issue for you than it is for him. This can build mutual understanding and empathy.

- **Respect Emotional Attachments:** When you're working on decluttering, acknowledge the sentimental value of certain items. Offer to help find ways to preserve memories without keeping everything. For example, take photos of items before letting them go.

- **Address Fear of Loss:** Reassure your husband that letting go of things doesn't mean losing them forever. I teach my students to always have an "I Can't Decide Bin" where you can store items that you are just not sure about. Periodically review this box to see if anything can be donated or discarded.

- **Break Down the Process:** Help your husband tackle decluttering in smaller, manageable chunks. Instead of overhauling an entire room at once, focus on one drawer or shelf. This can make the task feel less overwhelming and more achievable.

The "I Can’t Decide Bin"

A great strategy for managing items that you, your children, or your husband might be unsure about letting go is the "I Can’t Decide Bin."
This bin is a designated space where you can place items that aren’t ready to be discarded but are taking up space.
Periodically, you can revisit this bin together and decide what to keep, donate, or throw away. This method respects your husband's attachment to his belongings while keeping your home organized.

Real-Life Stories

- **Story 1: Leah and Yehuda:** Leah couldn’t understand why Yehuda wanted to keep a box full of old, mismatched screws and bolts. To her, it seemed like clutter. However, after a discussion, Yehuda explained that these small parts were often needed for his DIY projects, saving him time and effort. Leah agreed to allocate a specific drawer in the garage for his “hardware stash.”

- **Story 2:** Miriam and Akiva: Miriam found Akiva’s collection of childhood comic books to be unnecessary and space-consuming. He never even reads them anymore! They talked about it, and Akiva shared how these comics represented a happy time in his life. Miriam suggested creating a special shelf in their office for the comics, allowing Akiva to enjoy his collection without it overwhelming their shared spaces.

Embracing Mutual Respect

It's important to remember that we all have our own reasons for holding onto items, whether they seem "dumb" or not.

Just as we want our husbands and family members to respect our own belongings—like 30 pairs of shoes or that "nothing to wear" dress dilemma—we should offer the same respect in return.

By understanding and accepting why others keep certain items, and by addressing our own tendencies with kindness, we foster a more respectful and understanding home environment. This approach not only helps in decluttering but also strengthens relationships through mutual respect and empathy.

Chapter 4: Keeping Shared Spaces Tidy

Creating a home that feels peaceful and organized isn't just about decluttering—it's also about maintaining those shared spaces so they stay calm and harmonious.

As a wife, having tidy and orderly common areas can significantly impact how relaxed and happy you feel at home. So let's dive into why keeping these shared spaces clutter-free is so important and how to approach this conversation with your husband.

Why Shared Spaces Matter

Shared spaces are the heart of our homes. They're where we gather, laugh, and unwind together. For many of us, having these areas neat and tidy isn't just a preference—it's a crucial part of our peace of mind. When these spaces are cluttered, it can feel like chaos is sneaking in and disturbing the calm we're trying to create.

Take the kitchen, for example. It's not just where meals get made; it's a hub for family conversations and daily routines. A cluttered kitchen can lead to stress and frustration, which affects the overall vibe of the home. The same goes for living rooms and dining areas. When these places are messy, it can disrupt the atmosphere and our connections with each other.

How to Talk About Tidy Spaces

When it comes to discussing shared spaces, a little sensitivity goes a long way. It's essential to approach the conversation with understanding and empathy. Here's how you might talk to your husband about keeping these areas tidy:

1. **Share Your Feelings:** Start by expressing how you feel without making it a big issue. For example, you could say, "I've noticed that our shared spaces have been getting a bit messy lately, and it's been stressing me out. Can we work together to address this?"

2. **Talk About Goals:** Explain why keeping shared areas tidy is important to you. It can help reduce stress, make things easier to find, and make the home more welcoming for both of you and any guests.

3. **Suggest Solutions:** Instead of pointing fingers, offer solutions to help keep shared areas tidy. Perhaps propose a plan to tidy up a little bit each day or designate specific spots for items. Be open to hearing his ideas as well!

Respecting Each Other's Personal Spaces

Remember, it's essential to respect each other's personal spaces. Your husband's individual areas are his to manage as he sees fit. Just as you'd like your personal space to be respected, it's important not to interfere with his areas. The goal is to create harmony and order in shared spaces while allowing each person to maintain their own space in a way that works best for them.

Practical Tips for Staying Organized

Here are a few small changes that can make a big difference in keeping shared spaces organized:

- **Use Baskets and Bins:** These can help keep shared spaces neat and accessible.
- **Adopt a "Return Items to Their Place" Habit**: Encourage everyone to put things back where they belong to prevent clutter.
- **Designate Spots for Common Items:** Create specific areas for items like mail or keys to avoid piles and make tidying easier.

Examples of Rules for Shared Spaces

1. **Daily Clean-Up:** Clear off counters and tidy common areas each evening to prevent clutter from building up.
2. **Designated Spots:** Assign specific places for commonly used items such as keys, mail, and bags to keep areas organized.
3. **Monthly Review:** Conduct a quick check each month to ensure everything in shared spaces is necessary and in its place.
4. **Shared Storage Solutions:** Use baskets, bins, or shelves in shared areas, and label them to help everyone know where things belong.
5. **Personal Item Zone:** Keep personal items like shoes or coats in designated areas to prevent them from spreading into shared spaces.
6. **Quick Pick-Up:** Encourage a quick tidy-up of common areas before leaving the house to maintain tidiness throughout the day.

A Story of Shalom Bayit

Let me share a story about Leah and Daniel.

Leah loved a clean, organized living room, while Daniel was less concerned about tidiness.

Leah approached Daniel with a calm and understanding attitude, explaining how a tidy living room made her feel more at ease.

They agreed on a daily 2 minute quick clean-up routine and designated specific spots for their items. This compromise not only improved their living space but also strengthened their relationship, showing how understanding and cooperation can lead to a more harmonious home.

By approaching the topic of shared spaces with empathy and practical solutions, you can create a home environment that respects both your needs and your husband's. It's about finding that balance and working together to achieve a peaceful, organized space where both of you can thrive.

Chapter 5: Recognizing When to Seek Help

Sometimes, no matter how hard we try, things don't seem to change.

If you're finding that your husband's reluctance to declutter is causing more and more tension, it might be time to consider reaching out for some extra help. Let's talk about how to recognize when you might need professional support and how it can make a difference.

When you're feeling stuck in a cycle of arguments about clutter and it's starting to impact your relationship, seeking outside help can be a real game-changer.

It doesn't mean you've failed or that your efforts have been in vain. **Sometimes, all it takes is a fresh perspective.**

It's also important to recognize when the clutter is causing significant stress or affecting your overall well-being. If you're feeling overwhelmed and anxious because of the situation, bringing in a professional can provide much-needed relief.

When you're ready to talk about bringing in a professional, approach the conversation with care. Share your feelings openly with your husband, emphasizing that this is about finding a solution that works for both of you.

You might say something like, "I think talking to someone who can help guide us through this could be really beneficial. It's important to me that we find a way to manage this together and make our home a more comfortable place for both of us."

Seeking professional help is not about placing blame; it's about getting the support you need to navigate the challenges and move forward. A counselor or therapist can offer valuable insights and strategies, helping you both tackle the decluttering process with a renewed sense of direction.

When to Consider Professional Help

1.Ongoing Tension: If you and your husband keep clashing over clutter and it's affecting your relationship, professional guidance might help mediate these discussions and find common ground.

2.Repeated Efforts: When you've tried various solutions and systems without success, a professional can offer fresh strategies and perspectives to break through persistent issues.

3.Significant Stress: If the clutter is causing you considerable stress or impacting your well-being, seeking help can provide relief and support in managing your environment.

4.Need for Communication: If you struggle to communicate your needs effectively or feel that conversations about clutter lead to misunderstandings, a therapist can help facilitate clearer, more productive discussions.

5.Desire for New Insights: When you're looking for new approaches or insights to address the clutter problem, professionals can bring in innovative solutions and techniques.
The ultimate goal of all of this is to achieve Shalom Bayit—peaceful and harmonious living—by working together and respecting each other's space and preferences.

May we have Shalom Bayit in our homes and lives, and may the Shechinah rest in our midst, bringing peace and harmony to our daily lives.