

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 hands-down one of the most common questions I get: What if my husband just isn't into decluttering? Let's dive in and tackle it head-on.

In this eBook, we're going to explore practical strategies and share some real-life stories to help you navigate this tricky situation. Because, let's be honest, living with clutter when you're ready to let go of it—but your husband isn't—can feel downright frustrating.

And here's the thing: If you've tried everything I suggest and you're still knee-deep in stuff and stress, it might be time to bring in professional help.

I created my course, my book, and the entire Frum Minimalism brand for one reason: to bring more peace and harmony to our homes and lives—what we call Shalom Bayis. Because let's face it, clutter isn't just a mess; it's a major source of stress that can sneakily chip away at our Shalom Bayis.



The most important principle I teach is that you must never declutter someone else's belongings.

Those items are not yours, and you simply do not have the right to decide what stays or goes.

Full stop.

So, what can you do?

Here's my suggestion: Give your husband a clearly defined space (within reason, of course) where he can keep his things. A drawer, a shelf, a box, or even an entire closet—whatever works for your home. The key here is to keep this process as peaceful and respectful as possible.

Now, let me reassure you about something:

So far, 100% of my students' husbands have eventually joined and embraced the process. Yes, even the ones who initially wanted nothing to do with decluttering! Once they see how much calmer and happier their wives, kids, and even they themselves feel, they often jump on board.

I've even had students tell me that their husbands asked them to declutter more areas than they had originally planned!



But here's the catch: This takes time, and you need to lead by example.

Start with your spaces first—your closet, your desk, your side of the bedroom—and then move to shared spaces. But whatever you do, don't touch your husband's things.

Here's where people often go wrong: They start with other people's stuff because, let's be honest, it's way easier to let go of someone else's clutter than your own. But that's the wrong approach.

You gotta' practice what you preach!

Once you've tackled your personal areas, move on to shared spaces, like the kitchen. If your husband loves cooking, set aside a couple of cabinets for his tools, gadgets, and supplies—then declutter the rest. The same goes for dining rooms, bathrooms, and other shared zones.

And here's the key: Any of your husband's belongings should be placed in that clearly defined space.

It's about finding balance and respecting his things—***because our goal here is bigger than just decluttering. Our goal is to create Shalom in our homes.***



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.

So, let's break it down and see why these differences matter. Understanding them can help you create a more peaceful, harmonious home.

For Women

Research backs it up: Women are naturally more sensitive to visual clutter.

According to Psychology Today, women often find clutter more stressful because we're hyper-aware of our surroundings. Our brains are wired to pick up on all the little details.

Ever feel like you can't relax until the room is tidy? You're not imagining it! Studies from The Journal of Environmental Psychology reveal that women living in messy spaces report higher levels of anxiety.

For us, a cluttered home isn't just a physical mess—it's a stress trigger. It can weigh heavily on your mental well-being, making it harder to focus, relax, or even feel at peace.

For Men:

Men often approach clutter from a completely different perspective than women.

What does the research say?

Men tend to focus more on how functional a space is rather than how it looks. According to studies published in the Journal of Consumer Research, men typically don't stress as much about visual clutter.

Why? Because their primary concern is whether the space works for their needs—not how tidy or aesthetically pleasing it appears.

So, while you may see a chaotic, stress-inducing environment, your husband might only see a functional space that's "just fine."



More Differences Between Men and Women with Clutter

From my experience and research, here are a few more ways men and women see and deal with clutter differently:

Women usually like things organized and clean, especially in places like the kitchen, living room, or bedroom.

Men, on the other hand, might care more about if the space works for them than if it looks perfect.

Clutter Threshold:

Some people can handle a lot of clutter, meaning they have a very high clutter threshold, while others can not handle a lot of clutter. Women usually have a lower threshold for clutter. A few things out of place can bother us a lot more than it bothers our husbands. Men might not even notice it until the mess is too big to ignore.

Cognitive Load Theory:

Our brains can only handle so much at once. Clutter adds to the mental load, making it hard to focus. Research from Stanford University shows that clutter makes it harder to concentrate. Women feel this more because we tend to juggle so much at once.

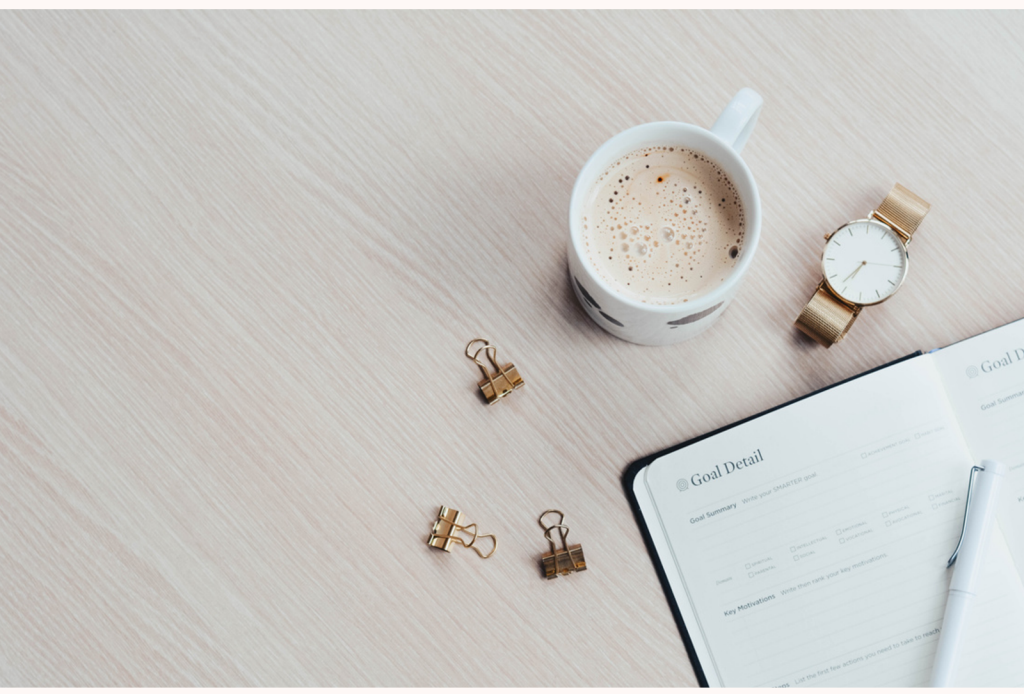


The Silent To-Do List:

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.



Understanding these differences is key to creating peace in your home. Here's how to make it work:

1. Talk it Out:

Start by having an open conversation with your husband about clutter. Share why certain areas or things matter to you and listen to his side too. A good conversation can help you both understand each other and find common ground.

2. Compromise and Define Spaces:

Agree together on shared spaces and how you'll organize them. Then, give him a space where he can keep his things as he likes. This way, it's not spilling over to every area of your home.

3. Lead by Example:

As you start decluttering your own spaces, he'll see how awesome it is! (Maybe not right away- but he'll get there! Have patience!) Seeing the positive changes in your home *will* inspire him to join in.



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 picking a good time to talk when you're both relaxed and not distracted. You want this conversation to be open and honest, without any judgment or frustration.

Begin by explaining that you've learned men and women see clutter differently.

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

Explain Your Perspective:

"I've been reading about how men and women view clutter, and it's really interesting. Did you know that women are usually more sensitive to visual clutter? Our brains are wired to notice every little detail. For us, a cluttered space isn't just untidy—it can feel overwhelming and stressful. It's not about being perfect; 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 would never get rid of anything without your say-so. It's important to me that you feel comfortable and happy here, 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.”

If you do it this way, you’re respecting his perspective while also sharing what you need. It’s important to make it clear that it’s not about pushing your way, 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.

Real-Life Stories:

Let me share a couple of real-life stories to show you 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 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.

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 bit of a challenge, especially when we don't understand why our husbands (or even ourselves!) hold onto stuff that seems unnecessary or a little silly.

What we see as clutter or junk might actually have some serious meaning to someone else. It could be a special gift, a memory, or just something they feel attached to.

When we get that, it's so much easier to approach it all with more patience and understanding. Instead of just getting frustrated, we can work together to create a space where everyone's stuff has a place, and everyone feels heard.

Why Do We and Our Husbands Hold Onto These Things?

It's important to remember that everyone has their own reasons for holding onto certain things.

Here's why that might be:

Sentimental Value: What might seem like a random item to us could hold deep meaning for someone else (or even for ourselves!). An old t-shirt, a program from an event, or a random gadget might bring up special memories or emotions.

Practicality and Usefulness: Some people hang on to things because they think they might need them someday. It might seem like clutter to you, but to your husband, it could be something useful down the line.

Fear of Loss or Scarcity: Sometimes, we keep things because we're afraid we might need them later or that we won't have enough. That fear can lead to holding on to things we don't actually need.

Emotional Security: Certain items can give us a sense of comfort, especially during times of change or uncertainty. They help us feel connected to the past and can be emotionally reassuring.

Personality Traits: We all have different ways of looking at things. Some people like to keep stuff, while others prefer to live with less.

Understanding these differences can make it easier to appreciate why certain items are so important to each person.

Putting It Into Perspective

Understanding why your husband, kids, or even you might hang on to certain things can make a big difference in keeping the peace at home.

Here's how to make it work:

Respect: Even if you don't get why something's so important, it's helpful to acknowledge that it holds value for them. It might not make sense to you, but it's meaningful to them—and that's worth respecting.

Clearly Defined Space for Special Things: Every person in your family should have a clearly defined space just for their own stuff—whatever they want to keep. The key is, you shouldn't go through it, just tidy it up, or snoop in it. Give your husband, kids, and even yourself a drawer, shelf, or even a whole room to store these things. That way, you can keep shared spaces neat while still respecting everyone's special things

Avoid Arguments: If something is really important to them and they want to keep it, no problem! You know exactly where it goes—in their clearly defined space. That way, they get to hold on to it, and it doesn't take over the living room! Everyone wins!

REAL LIFE STORIES:

Story 1: Leah and Yehuda

Leah couldn't figure out why Yehuda was holding onto a box of old, mismatched screws and bolts. To her, it just looked like junk. But after a quick chat, Yehuda explained that these little parts came in handy for his DIY projects, saving him time and effort. Leah got it then and decided to give him a dedicated drawer in the garage for his "hardware stash." That way, she didn't have to look at it, and Yehuda still had what he needed.

Story 2: Miriam and Akiva

Miriam thought Akiva's childhood comic books were taking up way too much space—especially since he didn't even read them anymore! They talked it over, and Akiva opened up about how those comics reminded him of a happy, carefree time in his life. Miriam suggested they set up a special shelf in their office just for the comics. That way, Akiva could still enjoy them, but they didn't clutter up their shared spaces.



Understanding Different Values

We all have different values, and that's totally okay! Embracing those differences can help create a more peaceful home.

Here's how:

Acknowledge What Matters:

When you come across something your husband (or kids) values but you don't, take a second to recognize that it means something to them. A little acknowledgment can go a long way in building respect.

Talk It Out:

Have an open chat about what matters to each of you. Understanding each other's perspectives can help avoid arguments. For example, you might say, *"I see this old piece means a lot to you—why is it so special?"*

Make Decisions Together:

Work together on what to keep and what to get rid of. This can be a fun and bonding experience, and help you both understand each other's needs better.

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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"

Here's a super helpful thing to suggest to your husband if he's not sure if he really needs something but isn't quite ready to part with it yet: the "I Can't Decide Bin."

I actually came up with this idea on the first day of my decluttering journey. I had all these things I was unsure about—things I didn't want to throw away, but didn't need taking up valuable space either. So, I grabbed a bin and just tossed everything in there. This way, I could clear my space without having to make any immediate decisions.

Here's the secret: label the bin with a time limit—three months max. That's it! If, by the end of that time, you haven't missed a single thing in the bin, just get rid of it. Don't even open it. Trust me on this—if you open the bin, your brain will start playing tricks on you. You'll start remembering what's inside, and before you know it, your oxytocin (the "love hormone") will kick in, and you'll feel a sudden attachment to everything. You'll start thinking, *"Ooooh, that's mine! I might need that!"* and next thing you know, you're keeping things you didn't need in the first place.

So, encourage your husband (or anyone else in your family) to do the same. When something's in the "I Can't Decide Bin," it's like a safe zone where you don't have to decide right away.

The best part? By the end of the three months, he'll either realize he didn't miss anything, or he'll have had enough time to truly know what's worth keeping.

It's such a simple trick, but trust me—it works!

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.



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 important 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 suggest to tidy up a little bit each day. 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 of you to maintain your own space in a way that works best for you both.

Practical Tips for Staying Organized

Keeping shared spaces organized doesn't have to be complicated.

Here are some simple ideas that can make a big difference:

- **Baskets and Bins:** They're seriously the best for keeping things neat and easy to access in shared spaces.
- **Return Items to Their Place:** Make it a habit for everyone to put things back where they belong.
- **Designate Homes:** Create a home for every single thing so they don't end up in random places.

Here Are Some More Tips to Help You:

1. **Daily Clean-Up:** Take a few minutes every evening to clear counters and tidy up common areas. It keeps things from getting out of hand.
2. **Monthly Tidy:** Do a quick tidy every month to make sure everything in your shared spaces still belongs there and serves a purpose.
3. **Confine And Label Things:** Use baskets, bins, or shelves for shared storage and label them so everyone knows where things go.
4. **Quick Pick-Up:** Before you leave the house, do a quick 2 minute tidy-up of the common areas. It's an easy way to maintain tidiness all day long!

A Story of Shalom Bayit

Let me tell you about Leah and Daniel.

Leah, like many of us, loved walking into a clean, organized living room. It made her feel calm, collected, and ready to take on the world. Daniel, on the other hand, didn't mind clutter as much. His approach was more "it's fine, I'll deal with it later."

But over time, Leah found herself getting more and more frustrated. Every time she walked into the living room, the mess seemed to take over her peace of mind. One evening, after a long day, she sat down with Daniel in their living room—clutter everywhere. Instead of getting upset, she chose to approach it with a calm, understanding attitude.

She explained how a tidy living room made her feel more at ease, like she could breathe easier and unwind. She wasn't asking for perfection, just a little more effort on both sides to keep the space neat. Daniel listened, and they came up with a solution together.



They agreed on a quick, 2-minute daily clean-up routine. Just two minutes. It was simple, easy, and didn't feel like a big commitment. They also designated specific spots for their stuff, so everything had a home and wasn't scattered all over the place.

What happened next was magical. Not only did their living space improve, but so did their relationship. They both felt heard and respected. Daniel understood how important this was to Leah, and Leah appreciated Daniel's willingness to compromise.

The result? A home that felt more harmonious and a relationship that felt stronger. It was a win-win.

When we approach shared spaces with empathy, and we're open to practical solutions, we create a home where both partners can thrive. It's not about giving up what matters to you; it's about finding that balance. With a little teamwork, you can create a peaceful, organized space that works for both of you—and that's the true meaning of Shalom Bayit.



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 really help you.

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 help you with 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.