



Brooke Levy and Katie Savage of Blue Pencil Home have turned their passion for organizing into a business.

Stored, Stacked and Streamlined

Memphis duo gives tips for organizing the after-holiday chaos and a checklist to kick off the New Year

The best business ideas almost always involve solving a problem.

And better yet, some of them are born while having wine by the pool. That's exactly what happened when Brooke Levy and Katie Savage, two busy Memphis moms, discovered they shared a mutual obsession with organizing. Katie was in the middle of moving and Brooke offered to help, and the rest as they say is history. As their friendship and business plan grew, they realized they were on to something and Blue Pencil Home, an organization and consultation service was born. "When we realized that other people hate organizing and we loved it so much we knew we could really help people," said Brooke. It is a win-win all the way around—they are doing something they both enjoy while providing a much needed service. Their tips for this time of year revolve around un-decorating and repacking after the holidays and getting organized for the new year. - CC



Use clear containers and attach labels or photos identifying what's inside, and where it is to be used.



If you keep your holiday cards we recommend this card organizer by The Home Sanctuary.

Handling Holiday Chaos Streamlining and storing decorations

- **If you didn't use it or decorate with it this year then get rid of it.** Self explanatory.
- **If it's broken—it must go.** Ornaments that may be broken, but are significant (vintage or passed down by a family member) that you can't bear to part with, can always be displayed in a lucite shadow box.
- **The big dilemma—Christmas cards.** We suggest that you don't hang on to Christmas cards, but if you're going to keep them we recommend using a card organizer that is broken out by year.
- **Purchase something (such as a reel or spool that winds up) to contain your lights.** And no matter how tired you are from the holidays, use it when you put them away.
- **Invest in matching ornament containers that are easy to use.** This will simplify your life. *We like the ornament baskets from The Container Store.*

Contain your lights!



Don't neglect steps such as this or you'll end up tossing things into a pile and will have to deal with the mess next year.
containerstore.com

Take pictures of how each area was decorated. You may think you'll remember how you decorated—but you rarely do. When you put items away, pack them according to *where they were used*, not by like items. For example keep mantle decorations separate from the Christmas tree—or guest bathroom decor separate from kitchen decor. Attach the picture on the outside of the storage bin, so you know exactly what's in each box and what room it goes to.

For wreaths and bows, keep storage simple. Hang them on a nail in the attic, so they don't get crushed or lose their shape.



Take a photo of each area of your home to remember how it was decorated and pack items according to where they were used.

Need help getting organized? For more information about their services, contact Brooke and Katie at bluepencilhome.com



Ways to reorganize after the holiday toy explosion

Oh, the joys of Christmas and all the presents that come along with it. As fun as it is to watch children open their gifts on Christmas morning, eventually all those toys and trinkets have to go somewhere. Even if your house was pretty organized before the holidays, the Christmas toy explosion can often get things off track.

Tips to make room for the influx of new stuff. First start the decluttering process. This means pulling absolutely everything out and separating the toys into categories. If you have toys in multiple places, plan to go room by room to avoid getting overwhelmed—and tackle the room that stresses you out the most first, in order to get it out of the way.

Keep these questions in mind to help you decide what to keep or throw away

- Does your child still play with this?
- Does it still work?
- Are any of the pieces missing, broken, or need batteries?
- Are there items in this room that should be somewhere else?

If most of your answers are no, then get rid of the item.

Other tips to decide what stays or goes

- We've found that the bottom of unlabeled bins and baskets are where all little and random toy pieces land. These odds and ends immediately go into the trash.
- If a toy needs batteries, this is an indication that your child has not played with it in a while and is no longer interested in it—so it's time for it to go.
- Games that don't have all of the pieces don't make the cut either.
- If there is a random toy that doesn't fit into one of the categories you separated all the other toys into, that should go too. The outliers are rarely things that your children want to continue playing with.
- Pack up toys that may have sentimental value one day. If your children have outgrown toys that you want to keep for their children like an old train set or American Girl dolls. It's time to box them up, and put them away for later.

Once you have decided on what to let go of and what to keep, gather up the items that can be donated and get rid of the rest.



When organizing kids' toys start with the room that stresses you out the most—and let the decluttering begin!





Now that you've purged old toys, here's how to organize what's left

- **Keep like things together.** For instance all Shopkins items, American Girl dolls and their clothes, nerf guns and their bullets, and lego sets stay together!
- **Keep board games out of reach.** This helps keep them intact, because you'll be more aware of when they are being played and can keep an eye out for any pieces that may go astray before putting the game away.
- **Make sure you have a place for everything.** Seems obvious, but when toys have a "home" children put their toys away. As much as we may be overwhelmed with the mess and chaos of a child's room, so are our little ones. Help them, and help yourself, by getting organized! Having the right organization tools will be a big help during the process. We love using pegboards to organize kids toys—mostly nerf guns—but they're also extremely useful in craft rooms. We've found that if the toys are in sight they're more likely to be used and put back when the kids are finished playing with them.
- **Take advantage of vertical storage space.** Ikea Kubbis hooks with Klunka laundry bag or Plumsa storage bags are great options that allows you to use vertical space without using a lot of depth. We use these in play rooms to organize small toys. Kids can easily grab a bag off the hook and return it when they are done.

Don't worry too much about your kids getting upset about a missing toy or two. Our children have never been sad that we've gotten rid of something; they are always so excited to be able to see all the toys they actually have!



We love using pegboards to help organize toys.

New Year Closet Declutter

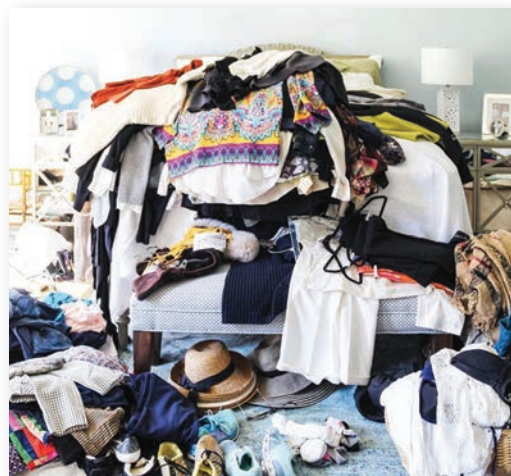
If something is damaged, stained, doesn't fit, or hasn't been worn in a long time, let it go. Throw it away or donate it and be finished.

Just because you paid a lot of money for it years ago does not mean it remains valuable—if you aren't using it, then it's just taking up space. If you find yourself saying, "I might use this sometime in the future," that's a quick indication it needs to go.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

Touch every single piece of clothing that you own. Start with one or two pieces you love so you can remember that feeling when going through the rest of your items. This feeling is important because it means that piece of clothing sets the bar as you compare other pieces to the ones you *really* love. It sounds simple, but it works. Items that you get this feeling about? Keep them.

Things that you know immediately you do not want go in one of two places—a black trash bag or a donation pile. The black trash bag is for items you plan to toss—this is key because the bag prevents you from seeing them later and changing your mind. Items you want to get rid of, but not throw away completely go in the donation pile.



Behind the scenes: The mess always gets worse before it gets better during an organizing job.

The next step of the closet purge is deciding about the items you are unsure if you want to keep or toss. A lot of people stop at this point because the work gets a bit more tricky and can be time consuming. Don't give up here—you will be so thankful you stayed the course!

For these items, use the following questions to guide your decisions

- Does it fit today? (Skip this question if you are currently pregnant or postpartum!)
- Is it stained, torn, damaged, or worn out? (If yes, toss)
- Do I try it on but never wear it? (If yes, donate)
- Does it cause me to have negative emotions? (If yes, donate)

Made it through all the questions and still not sure?

Invite a friend over who will be honest with you and try these pieces in front of her—she'll veto what doesn't look good and tell you what needs to be tossed immediately.

Now that you've decluttered you need to decide what exactly to do with everything. It's one thing to purge and edit; but it can be daunting to know what to do with everything left over. If you have some solid pieces, in amazing condition, and believe you can make money at a price point that works for you, selling your clothes might be your best option. Use apps like Poshmark or eBay to sell on your own, or consign at a local consignment shop.

Not sure what your item might be worth? When pricing items for resale, research similar items online to see how much they sell for and how long they take to sell. Consider the following factors when pricing pieces for resale.

- Brands are important
- Quality of the item is key
- Style and trend will indicate if your item is still in demand

Clothes that aren't in the best condition should be donated to a good cause or tossed out. We know it can be hard to get rid of something you spent good money on, but remember to tell yourself the money is gone whether you keep it or not. Finding a charity with a mission you feel strongly about will make this decision easier.

General Home Organization Tips
Start the new year off more organized

Identify your problem areas

- Trouble getting ready in the morning?
- How can you streamline your morning routine?
- Struggling to open your sock drawer?
- What space drives you the most crazy or where are you losing time?

If there's an area that slows you down, or you find that every day you're struggling to find something—that's the area you should focus on fixing in the new year.



Resolutions Checklist

TASKS TO CHECK OFF IN THE COMING MONTHS

- ✓ Organize your junk drawers
- ✓ Clean out your pantry and spice drawer—check for expiration dates
- ✓ Deep clean your fridge and freezer
- ✓ Organize linen closets—Keep only two sets of sheets for each bed—one spare
- ✓ Purge cabinets of serving pieces you keep for holidays if they weren't used