

order. balance. beauty.

He Said/She Said

When clutter cultures clash at home

Marin Rose

It seems to be a law of nature that, in every couple, there's a pack rat and a minimalist. Or at least it's rare to find two people who are on the same page about clutter. In many households, "he" and "she" aren't even in the same book when it comes to tolerance of stuff, and choosing what should stay and what should go. So how can we live in harmony when we just can't agree?

Listen. First, put aside the judgments and talk it out. With an open mind and a sympathetic heart, discuss what's really important about the way each of you wants to live. Focusing on both motivations (the emotional reasons we want what we want, whether they're rational or not so much) and goals (the practical benefits we seek out in our home like order, efficiency and comfort) minimizes antagonism and makes it easier to find a path to compromise.

Compromise. Once you've approached the challenge together, negotiate fairly about what to keep or toss. If she's not budging on her shoe collection, then he shouldn't have to sacrifice his tools. Of course, there are some caveats here. Both shoes and tools are practical in some way. But if you find that you're both attached to items that are purely sentimental, either agree to forgive one another's foibles or support each other in working through the tough emotional process of letting go. Whatever you decide should reflect the goals you discussed. After all, the aim of organized living is to align your behaviors with your priorities.

Organize. If you're like most couples, you're never going to see perfectly eye to eye. But organizing your space is a happy solution. He may not feel so overwhelmed by your shoes if they're kept neatly on your side of the closet. And his tools won't bother you if they're contained in one place in the garage. For classic cases of minimalist/pack rat relationships, designate some areas of the house clutter-free and others stuff-friendly. Compromise in common areas — like the family room, kitchen and master bedroom — by clearing some surfaces but allowing a few beloved tchotchkes to reside there. But designate private areas for each partner to keep as he/she likes. Perhaps the home office is her domain and the basement his. Giving each other authority over separate spaces increases opportunities for self-care and reduces resentment.

Free your kids. Even the most Type-A parents sometimes find themselves raising clutter-loving kids. Whatever the case, don't try to force your organizational style onto your children. It won't work and only breeds conflict. Instead, try a balance of discipline and freedom. Young kids who hold on to a lot of stuff may have some insecurities or anxieties that often fade as they grow older. Creative kids tend to be more visual, with messy or simply cluttered spaces. Kids must respect your preferences in common areas around the house. But, as long as they're able to be on time and prepared for their activities, and are performing well at school, give your kids the autonomy to control their own bedrooms.



Finally, lead by example. Even simple habits like making your bed each morning signals to your children that order and habit are both worthwhile and approachable. This may or may not translate into their forming those same habits — but it's a start.

Bring your Valentine! Join Marin for a small group class on managing clashing clutter styles. A fun, worthwhile exercise for singles and couples on the morning of February 14. Free, including snacks. Details at libraorganizing.com



Marin Rose owns *Libra Organizing*, an Augusta-based organizing, home staging and move assistance business. Marin serves clients throughout the CSRA, as well as in her hometown of Washington, D.C., New York and beyond. For more information, including notices of free seminars and community events, or to hire Marin to speak at your event or organization, visit libraorganizing.com.