



THINKSTOCK SHUTTERSTOCK

by Leslie Rouder, LCSW

IT'S TIME TO CONSIDER THOSE SPRING CLEANING PROJECTS.

Are your closets overflowing? Does your garage or attic need an overhaul? Have all those dresser or kitchen drawers accumulated mounds of clutter? Where *does* all that *stuff* in your night table come from, anyway?

When I consider all the possibilities, spring cleaning might seem like the biggest nightmare for someone with ADHD. But it doesn't have to be. You can successfully tackle spring cleaning projects despite your ADHD. Let's explore some ways to be consistently more productive and get those projects done.

► **Get motivated.** Without motivation, many projects or tasks seem difficult even to start, no less finish. Consider all the reasons a particular spring cleaning project is important. Do you need to make more room in your garage or closet for something you cherish? Does the

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thought of having more order remind you that you can save a lot of the time you spend looking for items that are buried under mounds of clutter? Get clear about the value of completing these projects, how they will positively affect your life, and keep those reasons in mind. Consider making a list of all the benefits and posting it near the project location so you will be reminded of them.

► **Know your engagement threshold and use it to your advantage.** Your engagement threshold is the longest amount of time you can consistently work while staying focused on a particular project, without being distracted or losing interest. After you have that figured out, evaluate how long you will actually need to accomplish the project. Since people with ADHD often have difficulty estimating how long



a project will take, try adding a cushion of about fifty percent more time. If the task takes less time than you think, you may be delighted to find you have a bit of unexpected extra time for yourself at the end of the project.

► **Make an action plan.** How will you accomplish this goal? What are your specific action steps? For example, if you are cleaning out your closet, it might look like this:

- Empty the entire closet (30 minutes)
- Separate items by type of clothing (1 hour)
- Have four boxes ready to sort all items
 - One box for donating to charity
 - One box for shoes and bags
 - One box for clothing
 - One box for items that you may want to discard
- Re-hang all remaining clothing items by type and color (1 hour)
- Re-fold and place clothing on shelves (1 hour) v
- Organize placement of shoes and hand bags on shelves (30 minutes)

► **Schedule the time to do the project.** Many people with ADHD think that the only way to get something done is to break it down into small action steps. You may think, *Maybe I will do thirty minutes here and another thirty minutes there.* This is true for some smaller projects, but here's the thing to consider: Every time you transition in and out of a particular activity, you lose *a lot* of time, which means you lose a lot of productivity. For this reason, it is important to know your upper-most threshold and set aside the time that most reflects that threshold.

If you only have thirty minutes here and there, you will avoid starting larger projects that require sustained attention and effort over a longer period of time because you already know you will never get enough done to make any difference. So why even bother to start when you will most likely end up checking email, going on Facebook, and surfing the web? Thirty minutes here and there will never provide you ample time to get those larger projects done.

Keeping your engagement threshold in mind, set aside an appropriate amount of time to get a good chunk of the project completed. Consider those times when you have the greatest energy and ability to focus. If you know that your medication wears off at 6 PM, don't start that project at 5 PM just because that's when you get home from



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work. If you are a morning person, don't start that project in the afternoon. Work with your schedule and block it off your calendar. If you don't make an appointment with yourself, you may put off the project altogether. Sound familiar?

► **Don't be a perfectionist.** Many people with ADHD get caught in doing such a perfect job that they lose sight of the big picture. Make a point of not getting stuck in the minutia. Do as much as you can as quickly as possible until the job is complete.

You can always go back *after* it is finished to make it even better, if you so desire. It's more important to complete the project in a timely fashion, so work quickly and continue working till completion.

► **Work with a body double or professional organizer.** Many people with ADHD find it extremely helpful to have someone there to work with them while keeping them on track. Find a friend or family member who would be willing to assist. Or hire a professional organizer to work with you if you want to and can afford their services.

► **Avoid distractions.** Turn off the phone, television, or any other distraction that could interfere with completing your project. Once you get started, place a DO NOT DISTURB sign outside the door of the room where you are working. Tell your family not to disturb you during your allotted amount of time unless there's an emergency. Take this commitment seriously and others will, too.

► **Make the project fun and interesting.** Play fun and lively music. Invite your friends to come over and help. Use timers and create some kind of challenge to make it more engaging. Promise yourself a special reward for completing the task. Bet your partner or friend that you will finish by a certain time or else. You get the idea.

After you read this article, don't just put it down and consider the ideas. Take the time to actually plan your spring cleaning project on paper, following each step above. Imagine that it is already completed and see it in your mind's eye. Envision yourself having completed the task. Imagine and enjoy the feelings of having accomplished your goal. Then, take action and do exactly as you have planned and envisioned. As Tony Robbins once said, "In life, lots of people know what to do, but few people actually do what they know. Knowing is not enough! You must take action." 🗨️