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Cleaning up the clutter

The Boston Globe

By Linda Matchan, Globe Staff | March 1, 2007

This is the sloppiest time of year, when front halls and mudrooms are covered with slush and sand, when even serious neatniks are organizationally challenged. It's also a busy time of year for professional organizers like Pam Krueger, who runs Girl Friday Life Management Assistance in Somerville. "Physically, there are more things to deal with -- hats and gloves and scarves and polar fleece vests," she says. "People need some place to put them so the wet won't damage the floors."

Recently she got an SOS call from Lucia Jenkins in Wakefield, whose mudroom/utility room was close to chaos. Jenkins, a nurse and lactation consultant, operates an active household. She has a husband and five children ages 16-26, all of whom either live at home or visit frequently; plus two dogs, three cats, and a bearded dragon lizard. They own heaps of sports equipment and have an array of hobbies that demand a lot of *stuff*, such as hand tools, canning jars, and gardening equipment.

When Krueger was called to the scene, she found a jumble of possessions and a mess. She could *not* find the floor. Her goal: to excavate, encourage Jenkins to eliminate everything she doesn't need, and consolidate in a logical system.

Organizing tips from Pam Krueger

1. When in doubt, throw it out.
2. Don't hang on to old containers because you've lost the top and think you might find it someday. You won't.
3. Label storage bins simply. Masking tape will do.
4. Do your organizing when no one else is home.
5. Be ruthless, even about gifts your children gave you, and toss things you never use. "They probably won't even notice it's gone."
6. No need to buy pricey, coordinated storage bins. Use whatever containers you have. "It doesn't make sense to buy more stuff."
7. Declare a statute of limitations on socks that don't have mates.
8. Organize sports equipment by season.
9. Store like objects with each other.
10. If you want to throw something out but think a family member will object, set it aside in a temporary holding area. ■