

HOW TO *spring clean* ALL AREAS OF YOUR LIFE

By Margarita Tartakovsky, M.S. | PsychCentral.com

Come springtime, many of us start refreshing our surroundings, yearning for brighter, tidier spaces. But spring cleaning doesn't only include decluttering and deep cleaning our homes. We can spring clean all areas of our lives to create greater meaning, fulfillment, and happiness. Here's how.

SPRING CLEANING YOUR CAREER

Spring cleaning your career is reflecting on "what is truly fulfilling and helping you achieve your bigger goals, and what (you're) doing out of fear, habit, (or) confusion," said Aurora Meneghello, founder of Repurpose Your Purpose.

- **Apply the 80/20 rule.** Consider what 20 percent of your work is giving you 80 percent of your results. Keep the 20 percent, and consider whether you can drop the rest.
- **Re-evaluate your current projects.** List the projects you'd like to say goodbye to, and for each one, ask yourself: "What would I gain by closing or leaving this project?"
- **Re-evaluate your current position.** Sometimes, you need a more drastic change, such as a new job or even a new line of work. To figure this out, carve out time during the weekend to simply enjoy yourself: Sleep in, take a walk, take a mini road trip, or spend time with loved ones. "Tune into your deepest self, spend some time there, within your heart. And at the end of the

(weekend), ask yourself whether you would miss your job or business if you left."

Meneghello noted that "spring cleaning your career doesn't have to be a rash, anxiety-provoking process," and can take time.

Spring is also a good time to declutter your workspace, evaluate your calendar system, and update your website, resume, online profiles, and anything else you use for work.

SPRING CLEANING YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

"When you are talking about spring cleaning your relationships, it is about taking a step back and looking at (each one) from a bird's eye view," said Jennine Estes, LMFT, a certified emotionally focused psychotherapist in San Diego.

- **Reflect on what you'd like to keep and change.** List the habits and communication styles that you like and dislike, and decide which ones to keep and toss, Estes said. For instance, maybe you realize that you don't like watching TV with your partner every night and would rather connect face-to-face. Maybe you realize that you'd like to work on being assertive – instead of passive-aggressive – with your friends when they hurt your feelings.
- **Check out relationship resources.** Maybe you'd like to attend a couples retreat or workshop to strengthen



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Q: I feel like winter is never going to end. What are some ways I can make myself feel better this of year?

A: It's no secret that the winter months can drag on forever, especially up north where I live. The seemingly never-ending stretch of cold, dark, snowy days can be enough to make anyone feel out of sorts. While taking good care of ourselves is important at all times during the year, it can be especially hard to remember during the winter months.

Wintertime conjures up images of cold and dark, and our natural tendency is to stay inside and away from others. Time indoors, however, does not have to be a bad or isolative pastime. A way to practice self-care when stuck indoors is to utilize techniques from the Danish art of Hygge. Pronounced "Hue-Gah,"

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your connection. Maybe you'd like to read books on growing your relationship. (Estes often recommends Sue Johnson's "Hold Me Tight.") Maybe you'd like to attend couples therapy or premarital counseling.

- **Minimize time with unsafe people.** Think about the people in your life, and who you feel safe to be yourself with. Then spend less time with the people you don't feel safe with (even if they're family). For instance, instead of calling your mom every day and listening to complaints and negativity, call her once a week, Estes said.
- **Find what works best for you.** Do you feel good about how much time you're spending with your partner, your family and friends, your kids – and yourself? While you won't be able to reach a perfect balance, you can reflect on a good-enough split, and make small changes.

SPRING CLEANING THE SELF

"Spring cleaning one's self is about decluttering the things that no longer serve you so you can make space for (joy)," said Christina Cruz, PsyD, an online life coach.

- **Thank your old habits.** Similar to Marie Kondo's tip of giving sincere thanks to objects we're giving away, psychologist Lauren Appio, Ph.D., suggested acknowledging the coping strategies you've used thus far – even if they're no longer useful. Instead of criticizing ourselves for not coping well, we can practice self-compassion. We can acknowledge that we were doing the best we could at the time, and those strategies got us to here.
- **Adopt a new coping strategy.** After saying goodbye to an old habit, consider trying out a new stress management, self-soothing, or communication technique, Appio said.
- **Check in with yourself.** Be honest about your feelings, needs, preferences, and limits, Appio said. For instance, you might ask yourself: "If I wasn't afraid of judging myself or

being judged, how would I feel about this?" or, "If I wasn't worried that I would hurt or disappoint others, what would be my preference here? What would my limit be?" This doesn't mean ignoring others; it means gaining a clearer understanding of your own needs before considering other factors.

- **Toss out a limiting belief.** Replace it with a new belief, look for the evidence to support that new belief, and then practice saying it over and over, Astor said. She shared this example: You trade out the belief "I am unlovable" for "I am lovable." Some of your evidence includes your parents and best friend regularly saying they love you, and your dog always being excited to see you and being sad when you leave.
- **Address avoidance.** Cruz noted that avoidance can add to our mental clutter – whether it's avoiding a task or avoiding an emotion. If you've been avoiding an emotion, Cruz suggested this practice: Take five deep breaths, and focus on your body. Visualize your breath running through your body. Focus on the emotion, and its location (e.g., your belly, heart, chest). Describe the emotion and visualize it "as a wave that ebbs and flows." Gently notice any desire to avoid it. Finish up by taking five more breaths. If you've been avoiding a task, Appio recommended breaking it down into manageable, even tiny, actionable steps. You can set a timer, or use different techniques to spark your start.
- **Clear your mind.** To help keep her home clean, Cruz spends about 10 to 15 minutes tidying up at night. We can do the same by tidying up our minds. For instance, she said, if you were particularly self-critical today, replace negative thoughts with kinder ones by imagining that you're talking to someone you love. You might say: "I may have made a mistake today but I am still a good person," or "I accept who I am." Cruz also recommended asking ourselves these questions: "What no longer serves me? What can I let go of

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this practice does not follow a set of pre-defined rules or require any special skills. A main tenant is "letting go of everyday life and being in the moment."

Since Hygge can mean different things to different people, there is no right or wrong way to incorporate this practice into your routine. It's about feeling good, living life, and creating memories. Spend a quiet evening at home with a cozy blanket and a cup of tea (or cocoa), or perhaps enjoy time with loved ones or a pet. Have friends or family over for a home-cooked meal; everyone can bring something to contribute and enjoy the evening together.

Whatever you decide to do to help with self-care and feeling better, make sure they are activities or things that "fill up your cup" and make you feel good.

Although it is hard in the winter, spending time outside in the fresh air and sunshine (hopefully!) can be a quick and easy way to bolster your spirits. Have a snowball fight with friends or go cross country skiing. Being outside is a great way to help brighten your mood.

It can be helpful to remind yourself that no matter how long winter may seem, spring will come and the days of cold and snow will be behind us. Take time to appreciate the joys that life can bring and the good things that are happening, rather than focusing on the long winter or the things you aren't able to do because of the cold and snow.

If negative thoughts or moods persist, remember you and your household members can reach out to The Village to schedule an appointment with a counselor through your Employee Assistance Program. Simply call 800-627-8220 and mention that you are part of The Village EAP.

today that would serve my higher good? What was not meant for me to keep?"

After all, that's what spring cleaning is all about: relinquishing what's not working, and creating a clear, refreshing canvas.

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