Kick the Year Off Right!
Organize Your Life to Reduce Stress

Stress can enter our lives from many different places. And like many, you may be burdened by clutter more than you realize. It could be that your home, your plans for the future, or your finances need a bit of dusting off and straightening-up. So, as the new year kicks off, here are a few tips and tricks to help you focus on the good stuff, and get rid of the rest.

"While we can’t eliminate stress from our lives, there are some forms of stress we have control over, and reducing these stressors can significantly improve our moods," said Kirsten Anderson, Aurora Mental Health Center Division Director, Child and Family Outpatient/Disaster Coordinator.

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Set goals, make a plan. The first step in organizing your life is to assess where you are and where you want to be. It could be that your home, your plans for the future, or your finances need a bit of dusting off and straightening-up. So, as the new year kicks off, here are a few tips and tricks to help you focus on the good stuff, and get rid of the rest.

- Break down your vision for a calm and relaxed life into manageable tasks. Then set long term and short-term goals – this will transform big jobs into small, manageable pieces.
- As you plan, be realistic! Set benchmarks and make a conscious effort to congratulate yourself when you succeed.
- Also, as you look to the future, don’t dwell on the past. Mistakes or failures are some of our best learning opportunities. Leave the baggage behind and don’t sweat the small stuff.
We wish you much success and a more organized and relaxed new year. If you’re overwhelmed at this point with your to-do list, just set aside a specific time each week to clean and organize. Being on a defined schedule is a great way to create lasting habits!

- Don’t forget your electronic devices! Computers, cell phones and media players can get cluttered too. Take a few minutes to delete all those old files and apps you haven’t touched in months.

Money. We all stress about it. Not surprisingly, there’s a lot of evidence that shows a strong link between financial problems and high levels of stress and anxiety. If you can add a few small goals this year to improve your financial situation, you may be surprised how much it can help.

- A great first step in any plan is to educate yourself! Read up on financial literacy – something we are rarely taught in school. A little reading can help you learn to manage your money more effectively.
- Topics to look for include reducing debt, planning for retirement, how to most effectively invest any savings you have, how to create and stick to a budget, and general money management.

Meditation and mindfulness.
Life can be hectic, and regular meditation and mindfulness – even in small doses – can treat things like stress, worry, lack of focus, relationship problems, addictions and more. Just ten minutes of quiet reflection or meditation can make a huge difference.

- Learning to meditate isn’t easy at first, but you can start small.
- At a convenient time each day, sit on a chair or on the floor, close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Start at two minutes and try to work your way up to ten.
- If you want to learn more, head to the internet for how-to videos.

Scientists have studied monks who meditate regularly and found that the monks actually increase the physical size of the “happiness” centers in their brains.

Organize and prioritize personal relationships
As you plan for the year ahead, take a look at how you can organize your personal relationships to reduce stress and find more emotional support.

- If you feel you’re not seeing your family or friends enough, talk with them and carve out a time each week to spend time together.
- Do you have relationships that cause you more stress than stress-relief? Be honest with yourself and know if it’s time to take a step back from people who aren’t supportive and respectful.
- One more bullet if space from older copy lots of good stuff still on the first draft (CB)

Off you go!
If you’re overwhelmed at this point with your to-do list, just remember, easy does it. Pick one thing at a time and try to be positive. Nobody’s perfect and if you do fall off the wagon (and we all do!), be easy on yourself. Your chances for success are much better if you’re spending more time patting yourself on the back than criticizing yourself.

We wish you much success and a more organized and relaxed new year!

You may be able to notice and begin to help someone having a heart attack, but what about someone who’s hurting mentally or emotionally? What are the signs and symptoms, and how should you respond?

Think CPR for the head and heart. Mental Health First Aid is a certification course open to all adults – regardless of training or vocation – who want to better understand mental illness and know what to do to help someone experiencing a mental health crisis.

Classes cost $25. Upon completion of the 8 hour course you will receive your certification in Mental Health First Aid. Classes focus on youth or adults (adult-focused class also available in Spanish). Register now!