Why letting go is so hard

The emotional weight of our stuff

BY ERIN PILLMAN // PHOTOS PROVIDED BY ORGANIZING WITH ERIN

When people think about organizing, they often picture color-coded bins, neatly folded sweaters, and labeled drawers. But in my experience as a professional organizer, the real work is about much more than this.

Oftentimes it has to do with emotions.

Our belongings are sometimes more than just belongings. They may represent memories, relationships, hopes, guilt, aspirations, or versions of ourselves we don't want to let go of.

A box of old clothes may represent a time in someone's life when they felt younger, healthier, or more confident. A garage full of unfinished projects may reflect dreams that got lost beneath the demands of everyday life. Paper clutter can trigger stressful thoughts like "I just cannot deal with this right now" or "What if I need this later?"

Gifts can carry an unspoken pressure to keep them forever because they symbolize love, care, and connection. Family heirlooms can feel impossible to part with because they carry so much generational weight, history, and meaning.

This is why organizing can feel incredibly vulnerable.

People sometimes assume that clutter comes from a lack of discipline, but that is not what I see. I see overwhelm. Decision fatigue. Emotional attachment. Fear of regret.

Sometimes letting go feels less like getting rid of an object and more like erasing a memory, a relationship, or even a part of someone's identity. Behind clutter, there is often a deeply human story about attachment, transition, grief, exhaustion, or uncertainty.

That is why I believe organizing must be approached with compassion, not judgment.

When I work with clients, I am not there to force them to throw everything away or to necessarily create a picture-perfect home. I am there to help them reconnect with themselves and create a space that supports the life they are living now, not the life they lived ten years ago or the one they think they "should" be living.

I often ask questions during the process:

"Does this feel like the current you, or the old you?"

"Does the person you are becoming have one of these?"

"How do you feel when you wear this / see this / walk by this every day?"

These questions help shift organizing into a more thoughtful and empowering process.

Because ultimately, organizing is not about perfection.

It is about creating clarity, making space to breathe, and reducing friction in daily life. It is about walking into your home and feeling supported instead of stressed. When we let go of things we no longer need, we feel lighter.

Our environment affects us deeply. When our spaces are chaotic, our nervous systems often feel that burden whether or not we consciously realize it.

A calm space can create more calm internally. A functional space can create more ease. And a home that reflects who you are now can help you move confidently into what comes next.

Sometimes organizing is about letting ourselves move forward. It's about creating more space not only in our homes, but in our minds, relationships, and daily lives.





