



Another summer is over and fall is here again. For many people, the fall season brings a return to routine and it usually doesn't take long for life to feel quite busy again. Between family, work, relationships, finances, chores, various appointments, and the random events that life throws at us, it can sometimes feel like our heads are spinning. It is fairly common these days to end up multi-tasking, feeling stressed out, and ultimately not being our best selves or doing our best work in any of our endeavours.

So, what to do? How can we cut through all the noise and busyness that we sometimes find ourselves in and lead a more focused and grounded life? The answer can often be found in lifestyle choices we make and the unhelpful habits we unwittingly fall into.

As we began researching this topic, we realized it involves much more than we could easily fit into a single newsletter. Therefore, over the next four editions of Connections, we are presenting a 4-part series on how to simplify your life. We hope that you find these ideas helpful for making your days less stressful and more fulfilling. And, as always, UICS is here to support you with whatever challenges life throws your way.

*The Team @UICS*

## How to Simplify Your Life Part 1 of 4:

### Eliminate Clutter

[adapted from wikiHow: <http://www.wikihow.com/Simplify-Your-Life> ]

Simplifying doesn't need to be complicated. Below are six strategies for de-cluttering your world and living a simpler, lower stress lifestyle.

**1) Decide what stuff is unnecessary.** Identify what's most important to you and eliminate everything else. Imagine you had to pack everything you owned in an hour to move across the country for ten years, or for the rest of your life. What would you take? What would be essential? In general, if you have not used an object in 18 months, you are likely not going to. Cut your possessions down to the bare essentials and get rid of everything that's merely taking up space.

**2) Stop buying new things you do not really need.** Just because you found a good deal on something does not make it necessary to buy. Simplify by stopping the additional accumulation of junk in your life. Before you buy anything new, ask yourself:

"Do I really need this?"

"Is there a sustainable alternative?"

"Do I have a family member or friend who already provides this service or product?"

**3) Do quick cleans.** Walk through your house with a big basket. Fill it with necessities. Crank up something good on the stereo and give yourself 15 minutes to de-clutter and see how much you can get done. Throw away garbage, gather clothes and put them in the laundry. Be judicious. If it's not necessary, throw it in the garbage. Focus on the high-traffic areas, like the living room and the kitchen. If dishes are piled up in the sink, you'll feel stressed out and messy, even if the rest of the house is clean-looking and tidy. If you've only got a little bit of time, focus on the most important spaces.

**4) Do big cleans every season.** A couple times every year, you should do a more thorough cleaning to get rid of accumulated stuff and simplify your living space, as well as cleaning the house of dirt and grime. Go through desks and clear out the paper archives, too. Clean out drawers to get rid of that hidden clutter. Move toward eliminating paper waste and digitizing important documents. This will simplify your living space. Go paperless.

**5) Shrink your wardrobe.** Find your favorite, most versatile clothing items and donate the rest. If it's worn out, get rid of it. If it doesn't fit anymore, get it to someone who can wear it. If you've always meant to wear it but just never seem to find the occasion, give it up. Pare down what is in your closet.

**6) Have a routine.** Take little steps to simplify your experience of the day. Maybe you start the day by tidying the kitchen and listening to the radio. If you drink coffee, spend meditative time making your coffee every morning, grinding the beans, heating the water, and pouring it into the press pot. Make your bed every day. It only takes five minutes and it can do wonders to change your mood. Your bedroom looks much more elegant, simple and tidy with the bed made and cleaned up. Taking little steps like making the bed can help to de-stress you and simplify your life.





## 10 Relationship Tips That Couples Often Forget

Once a couple has settled into a relationship, things can fall into a bit of a rut. Routines form, the attentiveness that was present at the beginning of the courtship might be replaced by content complacency, and ultimately tensions arise. These simple tips may seem like common sense, but you may be surprised at how often people forget about their importance.

**1) Communication is Vital** Very few of us are able to read one another's minds, so it's important to express things that weigh on us, whether they're positive or negative. Little behaviors that bother us can become more irksome over time, so it's good to address them early, before the irritation accumulates to the point of anger. Similarly, miscommunications can lead to some pretty ugly arguments, so if you're uncertain about something, try to discuss it calmly so you can sort things out.

**2) Never Take Each Other for Granted** Be aware of every wonderful thing that your partner does for you, and express your gratitude whenever possible. This might be as simple as thanking them for doing the dishes after you've eaten dinner, or telling them how much it means to you that they make your coffee/tea exactly the way you like it. They'll feel appreciated for the love and kindness they show you, and will express their appreciation to you in turn, so no one ever feels like their actions aren't being acknowledged.

**3) Respect Each Other's Alone Time** Togetherness is important, but just as important (if not more so) is the ability to spend time alone. Too much time spent together can make you irritable, especially if you feel like your personal space is always being invaded. Time alone is necessary for personal reflection, growth, meditation, or even just quiet contemplation. Remember that absence makes the heart grow fonder, and you'll appreciate your partner a lot more after having some space away from them.

**4) Don't "Let Yourself Go"** It's inevitable that once certain comfort levels have been reached and closeness wins out over early awkwardness, some behavioral patterns will change. That said, closer comfort levels don't mean that you should neglect your personal hygiene, or let your living space fall into complete ruin. Try to keep things tidy and your appearance a step or two above "slovenly," and your partner will undoubtedly feel that they're worth making an effort for.

**5) Share Some Hobbies, and Have Solo Pursuits as Well** While it's great to pursue some hobbies and interests together, it's important to have your own social groups and interests as well. Take cooking classes or swing dance lessons together, hook up with friends to go to wine tasting nights, but then split off for your individual pursuits: you'll have fun things to talk about when you meet up afterwards.

### **6) Admit When You're Wrong (or When They're Right)**

This may be difficult for some people to do, but it really is important. If you discover that you've been wrong about an issue, own up to it: you'll gain your partner's appreciation and respect if you do. Additionally, if you've been discussing something and your partner turns out to be in the right, acknowledge that fact: they may have been filled with self-doubt, and acknowledging their awareness or knowledge may boost their self-esteem exponentially.

**7) Have Faith In Your Partner** Having trust and faith in another person can be difficult, especially if you've been hurt by others in the past. If you find that your own insecurities are poisoning your partnership, talk it out with them and consider seeking therapy: they're not the person who hurt you, so please don't assume that just because one person treated you badly, everyone else will too.

**8) Leave the Past In the Past** If you work through a hardship together and come to a positive resolution, move past it and use the experience as an opportunity to learn and grow. Don't refer back to it during arguments, don't bring it up as a means of guilt-tripping your partner, and try not to assume that just because something happened once, that it'll happen again. What's passed is past, and rehashing old ugliness will just poison future happiness. Let it go.

**9) Mutual Goals are Important** It's great to have a goal or a project that you're both working on together, as that can affect many aspects of your life outside of your actual relationship. You could be working on an art piece, saving up for a trip, building a cottage, or even working on a garden. Determine your strengths for the project so you're working in harmony, and build something amazing that you can be proud of having achieved as a team.

**10) Be Honest** Some people lie to their partners for years out of fear of hurting or offending them, but that can lead to a whole lot of ugliness on all sides. The one being lied to will likely know that something is wrong, and the one lying may feel more and more stress about their dishonesty and the relationship may end up suffering badly as a result. Ultimately, honesty really is the best policy, and a strong couple will be able to work through just about anything together.

*Adapted from Lifehack:*

<http://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/relationship-tips-couples-often-forget.html>

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**"I'm the Clutter Fairy. I'll come back ...  
I'm gonna need a much bigger wand!"**

"Simplicity is making the journey of this life with just baggage enough." - Charles Warner