



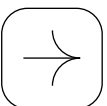
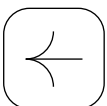
COMPASS TO REDUCING CONSUMPTION:

A practical guide to
freeing yourself from excess



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1.

OVERVIEW OF INSIGHTS THE GUIDE PROVIDES



1 OVERVIEW OF INSIGHTS THE GUIDE PROVIDES

1.1 WHAT IS THE AIM OF THIS GUIDE?

Do you have too much stuff in your home and want to create space or gain more clarity about your possessions? This practical guide supports you in sustainable decluttering. It's not just about getting rid of things. Rather, decluttering can be a great opportunity to engage intensively and critically with your consumption behavior and needs. It will allow you to discover ways to reduce your possessions in the long term.

1.2 WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT?

The first part of the guide gives you a theoretical insight into consumer society and its associated problems. You can also learn more about the current trends of minimalism and decluttering and about the risks and opportunities they bring for more sustainability. The following questions are focused on: Why do people own so many things? What are the consequences of consumption? Can less be more?

The second part of the guide focuses on practical implementation in everyday life. Dealing with “letting go” of things can be overwhelming. Therefore, each step provides practical suggestions to help you understand your own consumption behavior and change it. These suggestions can usually be put into practice quickly and will allow you to experience initial successes. Embark on a journey through your own consumption world in four phases:



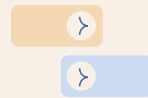
PHASE 1: CONTEMPLATE

Practically explore and reflect on your possessions: Which things are important to you?



PHASE 2: CUT DOWN

Mindfully get rid of things: Which things do you want to declutter?



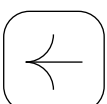
PHASE 3: PASS ON

Give things a new purpose: Where to put your discarded items?



PHASE 4: STICK WITH IT

The art of resisting: how do you manage to buy less?



POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF THIS GUIDE:

- You'll develop an understanding of your relationship to your things and what they mean to you.
- You'll look behind the scenes of the minimalism trend and recognize its risks to sustainability.
- You'll reduce excess and gain more control over your needs and purchases.
- You'll escape the trap of consumption and make more conscious decisions.



This is what people say who have already tried these mindful decluttering exercises:



It's fun to engage with the exercises and it motivates a thoughtful approach to our resources."

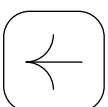


Exciting exercises! I walked through my apartment and was impressed by how many things I own."

DECIDE FOR YOURSELF HOW YOU WANT TO USE THIS GUIDE:

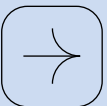
Would you like to find out more about the theoretical background and why it's worth combining decluttering and sustainability? Then continue reading on the next page!

Want to go directly practical? Then jump [straight to the practical part!](#)



2.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND



2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 ALL OUR THINGS – CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF OVERCONSUMPTION

Why do many people feel the (regular) need to declutter? Why do we own so many things? Probably the most important reason is that we live in a consumer society. This means that an "abundance of things" is our social norm. We buy things we don't need. We own a lot of things we don't even use. We also throw away things that still work.

To be more specific:


1 billion

Of the approximately 5 billion items of clothing in German closets, around 1 billion are never worn and another billion are worn less than four times a year.¹


<50%

More than half of the Germans use a smartphone that is no more than one year old. Only 11 percent use a smartphone that is more than 3 years old.² It has been estimated that more than 200 million old cell phones are stored in German cupboards.³


483kg

Every German produces 483 kilograms of waste every year.⁴ This includes around 10 kilos of electronic waste alone.⁵


2-3 times

Information and communication devices as well as vehicles have long been owned not only in single versions, but increasingly in duplicate or triplicate per household.⁶

2.1.1 WHY DO WE OWN SO MUCH?

Buying opportunities are omnipresent and available around the clock, especially on the Internet. We are surrounded by wide ranges of goods. Fashion trends change quickly. The prices of many products are low, and we are surrounded by advertising everywhere. The total investment in advertising in Germany – i.e. in measures whose only intention is to lead to (more) consumption – amounted to around 48 billion euros in 2022.⁷ So, it's not surprising that so much is being bought.



But there's more to "buying". The consumption of goods fulfills many different functions. Acquiring a good simply feels good for many people. Shopping has become a leisure activity. In addition, consumer goods fulfill many social and ego-related needs through symbolic functions. Symbolic means that it's about the effects that are attributed to a thing by advertising and society. This is why a pair of jeans can (supposedly) make you cool, a shower gel sexy and a car successful.⁸

The symbolic functions of consumption can be directed inwardly and outwardly.^{9,10} When directed inwards, consumption serves to satisfy pleasure, improve self-esteem or compensate for existing shortcomings and perceived deficits.¹¹ When directed outwards, goods help us demonstrate our status or affiliation with or distinction from certain social groups.

2.1.2 WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF OUR CONSUMPTION?

It has long been known from psychological studies that more materialistic people – i.e. people for whom money, valuables, high incomes, and status symbols such as cars or expensive clothes are particularly important – feel less joy in life and experience less well-being.^{12,13}

In the short term, it may feel good to consume and own something new – but it rarely pays off in the long term. What's more, owning things also comes with new tasks and obligations. For example, new products must be unpacked, tried out, stored, maintained or repaired. Clutter and disorganization caused by too many goods also have a stressful effect on people.

From an ecological perspective, high consumption of goods is also problematic because the production processes consume large amounts of energy, resources and land. At the same time, large quantities of waste are produced, most of which are still incinerated rather than recycled and generate emissions. This incineration contributes directly to climate change.

Our materialistic consumer society therefore raises problems and questions: To us as a society, but also to us as individuals. Perhaps we can turn away from the "the more, the better" way of thinking towards "enough is enough" or "less is more". You can find out why not only the environment but also you can benefit from this in the next chapter.

CONCLUSION:

- Many purchased items are unused or are thrown away even though they still work.
- Our consumption has a symbolic function that demonstrates status and belonging.
- A strong focus on material things has negative consequences for our well-being and the environment.



2.2 LESS IS MORE – BEING INSTEAD OF HAVING

Counter-movements to materialistic consumer society have been around for a long time. For example, people who lead a "simple life" or have even dedicated themselves to "anti-consumption" have become well-known.¹⁴ However, since the Netflix success of "Tidying Up with Marie Kondo" or "Minimalism: Less is Now", minimalism has also reached a mainstream audience as a lifestyle trend. As a result, it has also arrived in the minds and homes of many people.

FUN FACT FROM THE RESEARCH PROJECT

47%

In our project, we found that many people attach particular importance to their social relationships and experiences.



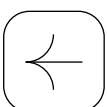
9%

On the other hand, few interviewees thought material possessions were very important in their lives.¹⁵

Experiences are more important than stuff. My motives for buying something often have nothing to do with the fact that I need it."

But what does minimalism mean in the original sense? The key characteristics of minimalism are getting by with few possessions, reduced and conscious consumer behavior, a reduced importance of material goods for one's own happiness and often simple aesthetics.¹⁶

The fundamental promise of minimalism is that owning less can lead to a more meaningful life and greater personal happiness.¹⁷ How much truth is there in this equation?



2.2.1 FEWER POSSESSIONS – MORE WELL-BEING!

Not only pop culture but also science provides evidence that people live more in harmony with their values after turning away from materialism and consumer culture. They also suffer less stress and anxiety without the burden of excessive possessions.¹⁸ Apparently, it is good to detach your happiness from material things and focus inwards. Studies confirm that a life of "voluntary simplicity", i.e. a life without excessive possessions and consumption, is associated with well-being. Study participants report greater life satisfaction, mindfulness, independence and even improved relationships.¹⁹

2.2.2 DECLUTTERING AS A START TO A LIFE WITH LESS?

Thanks to countless books, vlogs and TV shows with tidying coaches such as Marie Kondo, decluttering has recently gained media attention. With her KonMari method, the expert uses five basic principles to describe her approach to tidying and organizing. Many people have followed the trend and been motivated to declutter their cupboards, basements and garages. But what exactly is decluttering?

Decluttering is initially preceded by more invisible activities such as sorting, organizing and storing. As soon as it feels like too many things have piled up, the need to declutter arises, i.e. to identify the no longer needed and then get rid of it.²⁰ Decluttering is therefore part of the recurring household tasks of buying, using, reusing and disposing of goods.²¹ Although decluttering is a form of housework in our consumer society, in the current minimalism discourse it's seen more as an expression of self-care.²²

But why has decluttering become such a big trend in the first place? What is so satisfying about it? For one thing, it's about regaining control over your environment. Getting rid of things that are of no use or enjoyment can provide more clarity and order. Suddenly you know exactly which clothes are in your wardrobe and where to find which pen. This conscious process of letting go can also lead to inner clarity and order, and possibly even relief, serenity and joy. Many people report their happiness with a new, uncluttered living environment and have developed a better awareness of the items around them.²³

Another advantage of decluttering: if you no longer spend so much time searching for items, you have more time for the important things in life. For example, the time gained can be used for hobbies or social events. Cleaning your home is also quicker with less clutter. Decluttering can also lead to a more intense appreciation of certain experiences and increased enjoyment of experiences with friends and family. Sometimes, decluttering can be such a formative experience that people question and change not only their possessions but also other areas of their lives, such as finances or their living and working situation.²⁴ By spending less, more money is left for things that matter to you.

Decluttering can even enable us to redefine our own identity. The questions "Who am I?", "What do I need?" and "What makes me happy?" help us to find out which things are important to us. But they can also help us to discover our tastes and individuality. Consciously downsizing our possessions can therefore be conducive to self-expression.²⁵



Decluttering is often a first step towards living with fewer things. However, this does not automatically lead to less or more sustainable consumption. It's above all a reduced and conscious consumer behavior after decluttering that brings more sustainability into your life.²⁶

2.2.3 LESS CONSUMPTION – MORE SUSTAINABILITY!

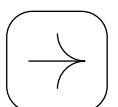
What role does consumption play in sustainability? Mobility, food and housing are mainly responsible for the CO2 footprint of private households.²⁷ However, the consumption of goods also causes considerable greenhouse gas emissions, especially in countries with a high per capita income.²⁸

By reducing our consumption, we are actively helping to reduce our CO2 footprint. The climate but also the environment will benefit if we consume less. This is because other problems of overconsumption are the depletion of natural resources,²⁹ the generation of waste and the associated environmental pollution.³⁰ The longer we use a product and the less we buy new, the fewer resources are used for producing and maintaining goods and the less waste is produced through use or disposal.³¹

In "real" minimalist living, the focus is not on decluttering but on a reorientation towards conscious consumption, long-term use of goods and a focus on durable products when purchasing new ones.³² At this point, there are links to "sufficiency" – a sustainability strategy and lifestyle that aim to reduce resource consumption by reducing demand for consumer goods and services.³³

2.2.4 SHARING – FEWER POSSESSIONS AND CONSUMPTION DO NOT NECESSARILY IMPLY SACRIFICE

The decision to own and buy less does not have to be a sacrifice. Car sharing, for example, allows you to use a car exactly when you need it and pay only for that period. You can borrow tools and outdoor products from specialized platforms so that drills and tents don't have to be stored unused in the basement. Clothes and jewelry for special occasions don't have to gather dust in a wardrobe – you can rent these too. Small everyday helpers such as a waffle iron or an extra chair for a birthday party can be requested from a neighbor. And on top of that, you get to make friendly contact with the local community for free!



2.2.5 ON THE SIDE: ERICH FROMM AND THE EXISTENCE OF BEING

In his book "To Have or to Be"³⁴, the psychoanalyst Erich Fromm contrasts a "having" way of life (mode of existence) with a "being" way of life.

The mode of existence of having

Fromm observes that industrial societies are based on the principles of acquiring, owning and making profit, which he argues become part of people's character. Fromm sees the consequences of this, among other things, in the unreflective, repeated acquisition of things and in the fact that people ultimately base their identity on their private property. As possessions are not accompanied by any obligations, are not shared and their origin is not questioned, this mentality worsens the prevailing economic, social and ecological crises. According to Fromm, the mode of existence of having is lifeless, isolated and dehumanized, and characterized by great political powerlessness.

The mode of existence of being

According to Fromm, in the mode of existence of being, people pursue their individual talents and gifts, practice critical reasoning and act according to their values. Their well-being is based on these activities and experiences – and not on possessions. The human need for love and solidarity with others is a guiding principle, with giving and sharing playing a central role. The mode of existence of being is characterized by humanism, artistic and intellectual creation, solidarity and economic, social and ecological sustainability, political co-determination and sensible consumption.

CONCLUSION

- Minimalism is a countermovement to the materialistic consumer society.
- People who live a minimalist lifestyle actively try to get rid of possessions and overconsumption.
- Decluttering can be a starting point for living with fewer things.
- For many people, fewer possessions go hand-in-hand with an increased sense of well-being, a greater awareness of their priorities in life, more time for personal relationships and experiences and less stress and anxiety.



2.3 THE DARK SIDE: DECLUTTERING AND MINIMALISM AS A CONSUMPTION TRAP?

Decluttering can be a start to living with less. However, if, after decluttering, we continue to consume just as much as before, our closets and homes will quickly fill up again. Have you ever noticed that the newly created space quickly fills up again due to new purchases? You are not alone in this experience.



(NOT SO) FUN FACT FROM THE RESEARCH PROJECT

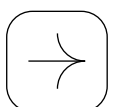
Decluttering does not always lead to a long-term reduction in possessions. Many people report that the space they have freed up quickly fills up again after decluttering. According to the interviewees, the reason for this is old patterns of behavior and the many new purchases. For some, however, decluttering has meant that they have less in the long term. How has it been for you in the past?

Unfortunately, sometimes the very trends that suggest reduction tempt us into new consumption. What are the dangers of minimalism and decluttering? We want to get to the bottom of this.

2.3.1 THE NEW AESTHETICS OF MINIMALISM

The minimalist appearance of popular minimalism is superficially a nice side effect. At the same time, it is a risk for more consumption. It generates simple designs, clear lines and monochrome colors.³⁵ An apartment furnished in a minimalist style, for example, is characterized by more than just a few pieces of furniture. It often contains objects with a recognizable minimalist design: a table and sofa with clean lines, cushions and curtains in muted colors, a striking mirror and a few well-positioned plants. The minimalist aesthetic is so precisely formulated that it can rarely be achieved with existing items; instead, new purchases are necessary, and consumption is stimulated.³⁶

The same applies to capsule wardrobes, i.e. a set of clothes limited to a minimum. This wardrobe should consist of simple pieces that are easy to combine. However, here too, companies, media or influencers often define which items of clothing are suitable. Fashion houses in all price segments advertise must-haves for the capsule wardrobe in their departments. This can also stimulate new consumption.





2.3.2 DECLUTTERING AS LEGITIMIZATION FOR MORE CONSUMPTION?

Another danger of decluttering lies in the many supposedly helpful rules of thumb. Many guides to decluttering publicize rules such as "one thing in – one thing out".³⁷ This principle states that new items may only be purchased if an old item has been decluttered first. Other guides promote the "permission-to-buy" principle to make decluttering easier. Although both suggest lasting joy, they're not very sustainable. Because what happens if you stick to these rules consistently? After decluttering, most people feel relieved and have the feeling that they have done something good for themselves, their surroundings or the environment. And now: treat yourself to something after all that effort. After all, according to the principles, you are now "allowed" to buy something again.

The fact that people happily continue shopping after decluttering is not an urban myth; it is a widespread phenomenon that can be explained by the psychological effect of moral licensing. This effect states that people justify "immoral" behavior (e.g., buying new clothing) by saying that they have previously behaved "morally" (e.g., cleaning out old clothing and passing them on to friends or using a cloth bag for shopping).³⁸ This explains why people are less critical of future consumption decisions and "continue" to consume without feeling guilty. In the long term, this licensing can lead to ever-faster cycles of decluttering and buying new things. It's important to identify this danger at an early stage.




I used to see shopping as a reward for decluttering and making space."



2.3.3 REBOUND: MONEY SAVED, OFF ON VACATION?

One last danger: the money saved and the newly gained free time. In the best-case scenario, decluttering is taken as an opportunity to make do with the reduced possessions and not to buy any more unnecessary things. Many people hope that this process will also save money in the long term or – as time is no longer spent shopping, storing and organizing – that they'll have more time available for experiences.³⁹ Sounds promising, doesn't it? It can even be beneficial for the environment since walks in the woods, going swimming or visits to restaurants consume fewer resources than a new laptop. However, by reducing spending on material goods, there is also more money available for environmentally harmful activities, such as air travel.⁴⁰ The freed-up income can then trigger the rebound effect. This effect occurs when the potential benefit for the environment (e.g., emission savings through fewer material purchases) is lower than the actual benefit (i.e. more emissions through air travel).⁴¹



I realized that I need less than I thought. [...] I've realized that I'd rather spend money on good food or a restaurant."

CONCLUSION

- Not everything that says "decluttering" is always gold. The visually appealing world of minimalism and guides to decluttering often encourage new consumption.
- Money saved and more free time can lead to resources being used for other, potentially environmentally harmful activities such as air travel.



3.



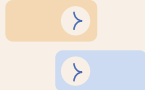

PRACTICAL
IMPLEMENTATION:
DEDICATE YOURSELF
TO YOUR THINGS



3 PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION: DEDICATE YOURSELF TO YOUR THINGS

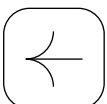
Now it's up to you: in four phases, we'll show you practical exercises and tips on how you can take a mindful approach to decluttering to reduce your consumption in the long term.

Let's go! Click on the headline to jump directly to the desired phase:

			
PHASE 1: CONTEMPLATE Practically explore and reflect on your possessions <i>What things are important to you and why are they important? How do you consume things and what habits do you notice? There is no right or wrong – this is about shedding light on your attitudes and habits related to consumption and possessions.</i>	PHASE 2: CUT DOWN mindfully get rid of thing <i>How can you mindfully declutter and get rid of individual items? There are many different methods. In this phase, you'll consciously declutter!</i>	PHASE 3: PASS ON Give things a new purpose <i>The work is (unfortunately) not over after the decluttering. Now what to do with the things that have been sorted out? Finding a way to reuse them is an essential part of decluttering that is often underestimated.</i>	PHASE 4: STICK WITH IT The art of resisting <i>Learn to get by with less in the long term. How can you manage to buy and accumulate fewer things in the future? How can you learn to make better use of the things you already have and be happy with them?</i>

Here are a few suggestions for using the practical exercises:

INTERACTIVE Think of the exercises as an interactive opportunity to have a dialog with yourself. You can skip an exercise at any time and determine the order yourself.	PRACTICAL Use practical examples from your everyday life to carry out the exercises. In this way, you can better integrate what you learned into your life later.	PERSONAL It's about you, your things and your well-being. Use the guide for your topics and face your challenges.
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3.1

PHASE 1:
CONTEMPLATE

Practically explore and reflect
on your possessions



PHASE 1: CONTEMPLATE

In the first phase, you will look inward. Everything in your home does something to you – some things bring you daily benefit and joy, others take up space and are part of your life without reflecting who you are. What do you own? And how do you deal with your things? Now embark on a journey of discovery through your home. This is the only way to find out how much you own and reflect on what you need.

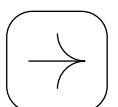
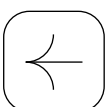
3.1.1 GET AN OVERVIEW: WHAT DO YOU OWN AND HOW MUCH?

Is your home full of stuff and you don't know how to get started? A first step can be to get an overview of your possessions and the number of things you have. Choose a specific area (e.g., bathroom, books, clothes, kitchen, tools...) and open all cupboards, drawers and cellar doors. You can now systematically count and make a list of all your possessions in one area. You may find that the sheer quantity of things makes you think about how much you need.

3.1.2 EXPLORE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR THINGS

Beschäftige dich anschließend mit einzelnen Dingen näher. Nimm jeden Then take a closer look at individual items. Take each object in your hand and take a moment to think about its meaning. Ask yourself, for example: when and why did this object come into my home? Does it bring me joy? Have I used it in the last year? Is it necessary for my daily life? Would I buy it again? This mindful process of reflecting on each thing not only helps you make conscious decisions about what to keep and what to let go of but also reconnects you with your possessions and the stories they tell.

In this step, however, you can also take a critical look at the connection of joy and positive emotions with your things. The relationship with our things is often more complicated than just a simple "I like" or "I don't like". Sometimes things end up straight in the bin without us realizing their true meaning.⁴² This is because objects have many different uses and can trigger very different feelings.



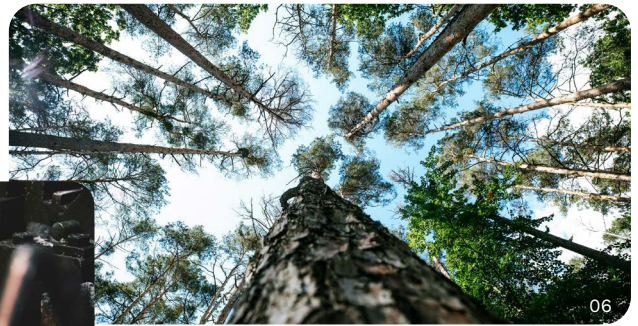
3.1.3 FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF YOUR THINGS

If you want to go one step further, you can think about the journey your things have taken to get to you. Pause for a moment and ask yourself: What material is this item made of? Where did the materials needed to make it come from? Who was involved in the production? How many hands did this object have to pass through before it arrived in my home? How many resources (water, energy, raw materials, etc.) were used to produce it? It's not important to find the objective "right" answers to these questions. Simply looking at the origins helps in gaining a better understanding of the value of each object.

No matter how cheap a product was to buy, a lot of work and resources have gone into it. If you realize this now, you may find it easier in the future to take these aspects into account when buying new things and consume more consciously.



04



06



05



3.1.4 ON THE SIDE: WHAT DOES MINDFULNESS HAVE TO DO WITH SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION?

Everyone is talking about mindfulness – but what is it anyway? Mindfulness means being in the here and now, without judgment. It involves concentrating on your body, mind, feelings and sensory impressions. As the word suggests, you are 'mindful' of yourself. Mindfulness also has parallels with approaches to self-reflection. Mindfulness suggests a strong focus on your well-being but is also important for interactions with others and even for sustainable consumption.⁴³ Do you want to find out why?

- Switch off the "consumption autopilot": Most of the time, our consumption follows unconscious routines and practiced patterns of action: We buy clothes quickly in the app on the way home or throw sweets on the conveyor belt at the checkout without thinking. Mindfulness can help us to recognize unconscious habits, i.e. to switch off the "autopilot" and then change our behavior.⁴⁴
- Be more of who we really want to be: if we consume unconsciously, we may buy things we don't like.⁴⁵ If our behavior doesn't match our attitudes, this can lead to stress. Mindfulness can help to minimize this stress.^{46,47}
- Be in harmony with yourself and intangible values: mindfulness can bring us closer to intangible values, e.g. experiences, relationships, culture or creativity.⁴⁸ For example, it can help us to fully enjoy the moment at an art exhibition.
- Be kind to people and the planet: Mindfulness even has positive effects on social behavior, because being more mindful also makes us more open, generous and kind to those around us.^{49,50,51,52} And did you know? When people are kind to others, it is likely they will also behave in a more environmentally friendly way!^{53,54}



In his studies, the sociologist Hartmut Rosa makes it clear that we feel good above all when we're on the same wavelength as the people and things around us. He calls this "resonance". However, it takes time and mindfulness to experience these resonance relationships. So, the more time we devote to a product, the more likely we are to experience satisfaction from using it. But the more things we own, the less time and attention we have left to really enjoy each individual thing.⁵⁵



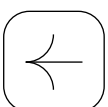
Are you curious? The following exercises offer you an opportunity to practice mindfulness with your things. We also suggest an exercise for documentation.

CONCLUSION

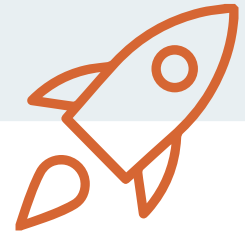
- Your journey through your stuff starts with recognizing how it affects your life – be it in a positive, negative or neutral way.
- The mindful process of reflecting on the origin and value of your objects connects you with your possessions and the stories they tell.

It was fun to reflect on my possessions under guidance. When you start by yourself, it's always unsystematic. The list of my possessions really shocked me. Honestly!"

The amount of clothes surprised me. I was horrified because I dug out items of clothing that I no longer knew I had."



EXERCISE 1



WHAT DO YOU REALLY WANT IN LIFE?

Nice vacations, smart clothes, time with friends ... What would you like to have more of in your life? And what would you like less of?

1. Please take some time to think and list up to 5 wishes for your life. Anything is possible here, material and immaterial things.

I WISH TO HAVE MORE OF:

- 01 _____
- 02 _____
- 03 _____
- 04 _____
- 05 _____

2. Now take some time to think about things that should no longer have a big place in your life. List up to 5 things here too.

I WISH TO HAVE LESS OF:

- 01 _____
- 02 _____
- 03 _____
- 04 _____
- 05 _____



EXERCISE 2



WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE ITEM?

There are probably several thousand things in your household. Many of them have no meaning for you and are never or hardly ever used. Other things, however, are particularly important to you AND are used all the time. Which things in your household have a special value to you?

1. Select one or more areas in your household that you would like to focus on more intensively. Write down one thing for the selected area and explain why it is important to you:

My favorite item in the _____ area is _____
because _____

My favorite item in the _____ area is _____
because _____

My favorite item in the _____ area is _____
because _____

My favorite item in the _____ area is _____
because _____

My favorite item in the _____ area is _____
because _____



When writing it down, I noticed that I usually have an emotional connection to my favorite things."



EXERCISE 3



HOW MANY THINGS DO YOU ACTUALLY HAVE?

Many people underestimate the number of things they own. How is it with you? Please do a precise count. Proceed as follows:

1. First, pick an area that you are particularly interested in.
2. Then think about which categories there are in the chosen area. For example: if you choose clothing as an area, there are jackets & coats, T-shirts, socks and many more as categories.
3. Now count and document all the things you own in each category. Beware, this can get very detailed. You don't necessarily have to count each item individually. For example, it is sufficient to count socks as pairs.
4. Count and document unused items – ones that have not been used for at least twelve months or have never been used.

This exercise is a little more time-consuming but is very worthwhile if you want to consume more consciously in the future. It's the only way to get a good overview. You can also combine documenting your things with a [decluttering method \(Exercise 4\)](#).

EXAMPLE:

<i>Clothing categories</i>	<i>Number of items</i>	<i>Of which unused</i>
<i>Jackets and coats</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>3</i>

Now it's your turn:

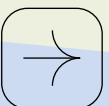
<i>Area</i>	<i>Number of items</i>	<i>Of which unused</i>
Category: _____	_____	_____
Category: _____	_____	_____
Category: _____	_____	_____
Category: _____	_____	_____
Category: _____	_____	_____



3.2

PHASE 2: CUT DOWN

Mindfully get rid of things



PHASE 2: CUT DOWN

In the previous phase, you looked at what makes you happy, what you would like more of in your life and what you could do without in the future. You also learned which things in your environment regularly bring you joy and benefit. This phase now concentrates on applying what you've learned to your possessions. Because, when you clean out mindfully instead of just decluttering, you gain exciting insights about yourself and what surrounds you. Mindful decluttering is about more than just getting rid of excess stuff. It's about making conscious decisions about what you keep and what you get rid of – based on what's important to you. Through this process, you not only create a more harmonious environment but also gain insight into your values and priorities.

3.2.1 WHY IT OFTEN HURTS TO PART WITH THINGS AND HOW YOU CAN DEAL WITH IT

While decluttering, you'll quickly realize that it can be emotionally challenging to part with things. You're not alone in feeling this way – there are well-researched reasons for this. The emotional attachment to personal possessions can be profound as we tend to associate memories and experiences with physical objects. Objects serve as physical manifestations of our history, which can make their removal emotionally distressing. Research has shown that the loss of possessions can have a similar psychological impact to the loss of close relationships.⁵⁶

Objects are often perceived as extensions of one's "self", i.e. identity. Research on the "extended self" shows that possessions flow into the formation of identity and thus trigger a sense of separation.⁵⁷ The endowment principle describes how people attach an increased value to things they own, which leads to the perceived value of these objects being felt as a loss in the event of separation.⁵⁸ This effect can make the process of decluttering emotionally challenging as the sense of loss is intensified when parting with personal items.⁵⁹

"I have more than enough and still cling to the old things."





I have had many things for a very long time. I don't like to part with my beautiful things, even though they no longer suit me."

3.2.2 FROM CONTEMPLATING TO CUTTING DOWN: NOW IT'S TIME TO DECLUTTER

You've now spent a lot of time with your things and reflected on your relationship with them. Now you can start decluttering. There are many different methods for doing this, but they all have the same goal: less unnecessary stuff and more space and order in your home.

If you're tackling a cluttered desk, an overflowing closet or an entire room, it's a good idea to start small. Dedicate yourself to a small area or corner of your room first. This allows you to systematically deal with your things without feeling overwhelmed.

The following methods for letting go of things have recently received a lot of media attention:

KONMARI

Marie Kondo's KonMari method is all about keeping only those items that bring you joy.⁶⁰ Categorize your things first and then deal with the individual categories one by one. Start with clothes, then books, stationery, komono (various items) and finally devote yourself to sentimental items.

MINIMALIST GAME

The Minimalist Game is a fun method of decluttering. Here you get rid of a single item on the first day, two items on the second and so on until a month has passed.^{61,62}

FOUR-BOXES

In the four-box method, you label four boxes with the terms "waste", "give away", "keep" and "maybe keep".⁶³ Pick up your items one by one and decide which box each item should go in.



Sounds interesting? No research has yet been conducted into the extent to which these are sustainable methods that also have a long-lasting effect on consumer behavior. Alternatively, you can also use one of the exercises suggested here. Each method offers a different perspective on the process of decluttering. Find out for yourself which method works for you. Whether you take a structured approach to decluttering or not is not so important. However, you must take enough time for reflection. The more you realize why you are getting rid of something, the more likely you are to resist buying something new in the future.

CONCLUSION

- Decluttering is not only a way to make space in your environment; it's also an opportunity to reflect and understand the role of material possessions in your life.
- By approaching decluttering as a mindful process, you can create a space that truly reflects your priorities and brings well-being.
- Reflective decluttering will save you and the environment from unnecessary new purchases that don't make you happy.





EXERCISE 4

Below you will find three different methods for decluttering your things. Choose one of the methods or combine them according to your needs.

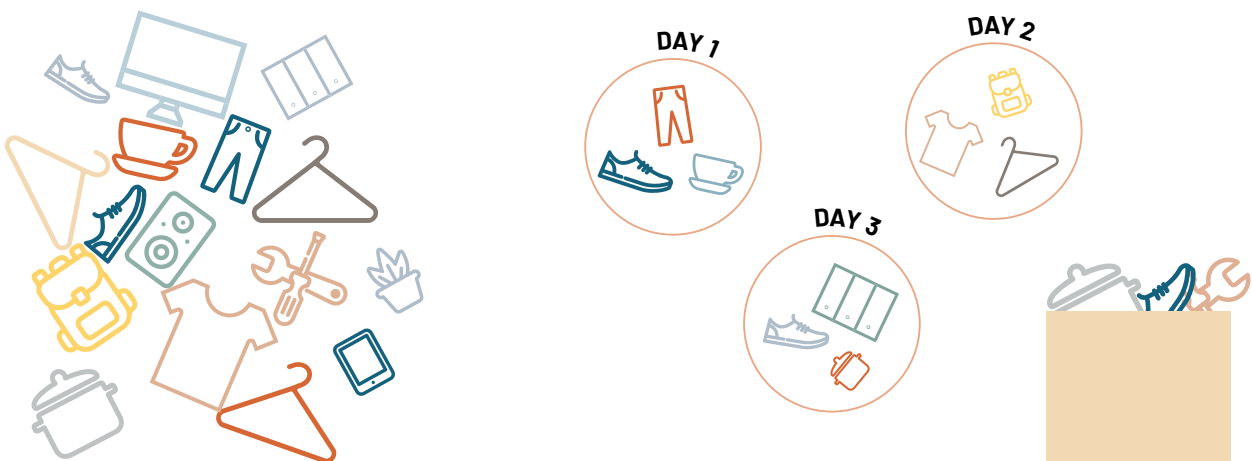
1. METHOD FOR DECLUTTERING: LEAVE-IT-METHOD

With this method, you can declutter about **three things per day** and get rid of unnecessary clutter step by step. Proceed as follows:

1. First steps are always small! To avoid overwhelming yourself, think about which area (e.g., clothes, books, kitchen) you want to declutter first.
2. Set a period (e.g., four weeks starting Monday) in which you want to declutter.
3. Pick out about three things each day from the area you've chosen that you want to declutter.
4. Take a close look at the items and reflect on what things are superfluous clutter.
5. Think about how the things you've decluttered can be reused and make sure that the things you've decluttered leave your home within the next two weeks.
6. Please document how many things you have decluttered.

Week 1 _____ Week 2 _____ Week 3 _____ Week 4 _____

Three things should leave your home every day.



EXERCISE 4



2. METHOD FOR DECLUTTERING: LOVE-IT-METHODE

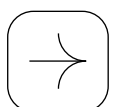
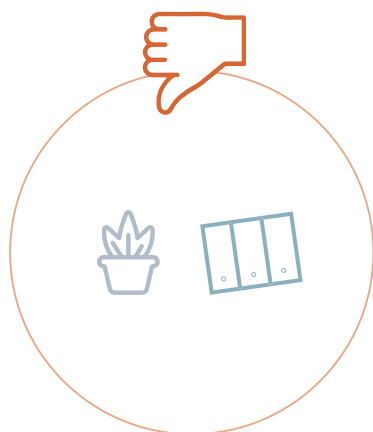
We only use and value a small proportion of the things we own. This decluttering method is about keeping the things that are particularly close to your heart. Everything else can go. Proceed as follows:

1. First steps are always small! To avoid being overwhelmed, think about which area you want to declutter first.
2. Think about how much time you need to go through all the items in your chosen area one by one. Plan the appropriate time to declutter accordingly.
3. Pick up every single item in the area and think about whether it's an item that's particularly close to your heart,
 - because it's useful to you.
 - because it makes you happy.
 - because you associate fond memories with it.
 - because you use and need it often.

Only keep the things that are particularly close to your heart. All other things should be decluttered.

4. Think about how the things you've decluttered can be reused and make sure they leave your home within the next two weeks.
5. Please document how many things you have decluttered in total:

Total number: _____



EXERCISE 4



3. METHOD FOR DECLUTTERING: MIX-AND-MATCH-METHODE

Do you have your own ideas and methods for decluttering? Great, let's get started!

Tips:

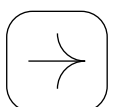
- First steps are always small! To avoid being overwhelmed, think about which area you want to declutter first.
- Use the time to look at the things you're decluttering or keeping.
- Please document how many things you've decluttered. You can document the number of things you've decluttered here weekly or once at the end of the decluttering period:

Week 1 _____ Week 2 _____ Week 3 _____ Week 4 _____

Or total number: _____

With all these things, I ask myself whether I use them regularly or whether they are an important reminder. If neither is the case, get rid of it. Also, an important tip is to just go for it. I was initially worried that I would miss something if I threw something away. That was never the case. And when you have this experience several times, it becomes easier and easier to live lightly."

There is now much more space in my apartment! In rooms like storage rooms, attic and cellar, there are now tables and musical instruments instead of boxes. They are now rooms that are filled with life."





3.3

PHASE 3:
PASS ON

give things a new purpose



PHASE 3: PASS ON

The work is (unfortunately) not over after the decluttering: What should you do with the things you've sorted out? Finding a way to reuse things that have been decluttered is an essential part of decluttering that is often underestimated. It's important to think carefully about how things that have been decluttered can be reused. After all, the throwaway culture has led to large amounts of waste overflowing landfills and contributing to significant environmental pollution. This is also a huge problem in Germany, and enormous amounts of bulky waste are generated every year.⁶⁴ Conscious handling and the targeted passing on of discarded items can help reduce waste and environmental impact.

3.3.1 GOODS IN A CIRCULAR ECONOMY – WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

We accumulate more and more possessions, but we also let go of many things. So, we're only temporary owners of the resources on this planet. This is a natural course of events and an explicit environmental policy goal. The magic phrase is the circular economy. The aim is to make fewer new things and produce less waste.⁶⁵ Instead, products should be designed during the manufacturing process so that they last a long time and can then be reused, recycled or composted.⁶⁶

We can also help to keep things in circulation for longer. This means that fewer resources are needed, the extraction of which puts a strain on the planet. When making purchases, we should buy products that are as durable, repairable, adaptable and timeless as possible. When using things, it's important to treat, care for and repair them carefully so that they can be used for a long time. This prevents things from breaking quickly and (having to) be thrown away. If you do decide to get rid of things, then also pay attention to how they could be reused. This not only extends the useful life of the products but also contributes to lowering demand, which in turn reduces the environmental impact of production, transportation and packaging.


3.3.2 THROW THEM AWAY? BETTER NOT. BUT WHAT ARE SUSTAINABLE WAYS OF PASSING THEM ON?

Have you found something you no longer need? Then the task now is to find a new purpose for it. This is a regular task in the household so that things don't pile up or, in the worst case, become 'hoarded'.⁶⁷ However, research shows that convenience is the top priority for most people.⁶⁸ So, it's not surprising that going to the garbage can is perceived as a particularly easy way to dispose of waste.⁶⁹ Put it in the bin – and the stress associated with disposal is over (at least for you personally). Disposal may be the quickest way to get rid of things, but it's not a sustainable one. This is because binned goods can often not be



recycled as well or only with a great deal of effort.^{70,71} Alternatives to disposal in the garbage are not only more expensive but unfortunately also less well known. This is why many usable items end up being binned.⁷²

There are many sustainable ways to give things that have been decluttered a new purpose. For example, you can repair broken items and donate, sell, give away or swap things. These measures extend the useful life of things and reduce the demand for new consumer goods. In this way, emissions associated with production are saved and resource consumption reduced. The measures also help to create local jobs and thus strengthen local communities. The various options for sharing differ depending on whether they're implemented within the individual's social environment or in a wider context and whether financial trading is involved. We present the different options below.

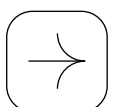


For me, it's not just about decluttering and owning too much, but also about reusing things. That's a great motivator for me."

3.3.3 PASSING ON TREASURED THINGS: HAND DOWN, GIVE AWAY OR SWAP

Objects can be reused by a change in ownership. Most people pass things on within their household, family or circle of friends. For example, grandma's old cutlery is handed down, an older cousin's winter jacket is given away, or a bracelet is swapped with a friend. In addition to these traditional forms of passing things on, there are also opportunities to swap things on a larger scale, for example at clothes swap parties. These are events where each person brings along unused items of clothing to swap for other items. It's also possible to give away or donate items via certain organizations or platforms on the Internet. For example, many second-hand platforms or local neighborhood platforms offer the opportunity to give things away.

You can also donate your old items to charitable organizations. When donating, it's important to check the transparency and impact of the charities to ensure that the donations do not become a burden on other communities or end up in countries where they do more harm than good. In terms of the environmental impact of long journeys, the most sustainable option is to pass on your discarded items locally online. The advantages of giving things away online are that it's simple and involves few obligations.⁷³ It's also a way to get and stay in touch with other people.⁷⁴





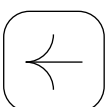
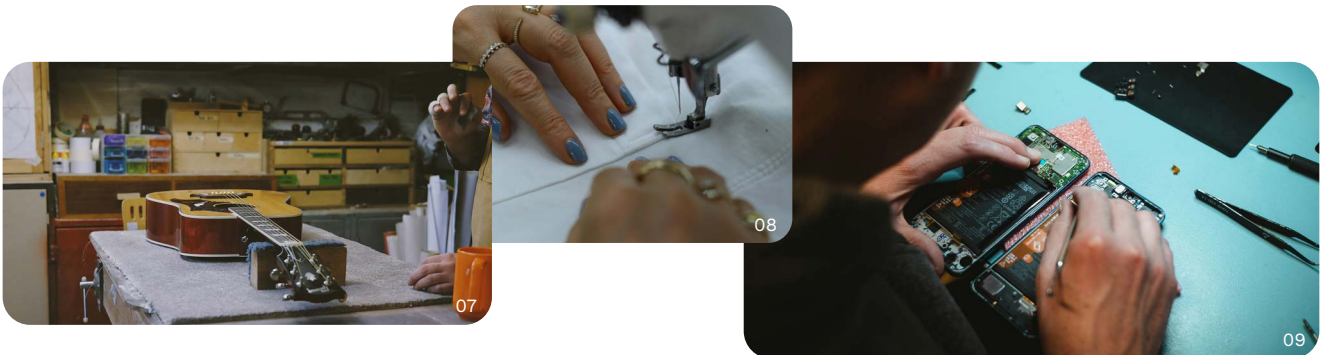
I had way too much stuff and now I feel liberated after being able to pass on some things too."

3.3.4 TURNING DISCARDED THINGS INTO MONEY: SELL OR LEND

Of course, you can also turn your discarded items into cash if they're still in good condition. If you don't use an item very much but don't want to part with it for good, you can also temporarily lend or rent it out.

You can sell your old items yourself in second-hand stores, social department stores or at flea markets or have them sold by others on your behalf. For example, selected second-hand stores buy items that are in particularly good condition and pay you a fixed percentage of the proceeds. In addition to these analog variants of selling or lending, there are now countless platforms on the Internet through which old things can find new owners. In addition to second-hand platforms, there are also some specialized platforms for selling electronics (e.g., decluttr), books (e.g., BookScouter), clothing (e.g., Sellpy or Vinted) or antiques and art (e.g., Pamono). There are also some good platforms for lending (e.g., Nextdoor or Facebook Marketplace).

Selling or lending items involves more work compared to other options. Studies show that people find planning sales, following up and processing requests time-consuming.⁷⁵ On the other hand, there are financial benefits when items of value are sold.⁷⁶



3.3.5 TURNING OLD INTO NEW: REPAIRING, RECYCLING AND UPCYCLING

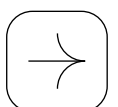
First, you should take care of your items, clean them regularly and, depending on the product group, have them serviced. In the event of a defect, there's often the repair option. Careful handling can significantly extend the life of your items. Continuous care requires some time, effort and sometimes also knowledge or (repair) skills.⁷⁷ However, it can also be a lot of fun once you've acquired the necessary skills. Do you have items that you no longer have any use for but are not in the best condition to give away or sell?

Objects do not necessarily have to be preserved in their original state. Upcycling can also be used to create something new from old materials.⁷⁸ In contrast to recycling, where materials are often shredded or melted to transform them into new products, upcycling retains the original form or structure of the material and gives it a new use or function. For example, old furniture can be upgraded and converted into new items, bags can be sewn from old tarpaulins or candle holders can be made from old bottles. There are no limits to creativity when it comes to upcycling and most people see it as a fun and enjoyable leisure activity.⁷⁹

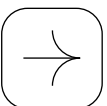
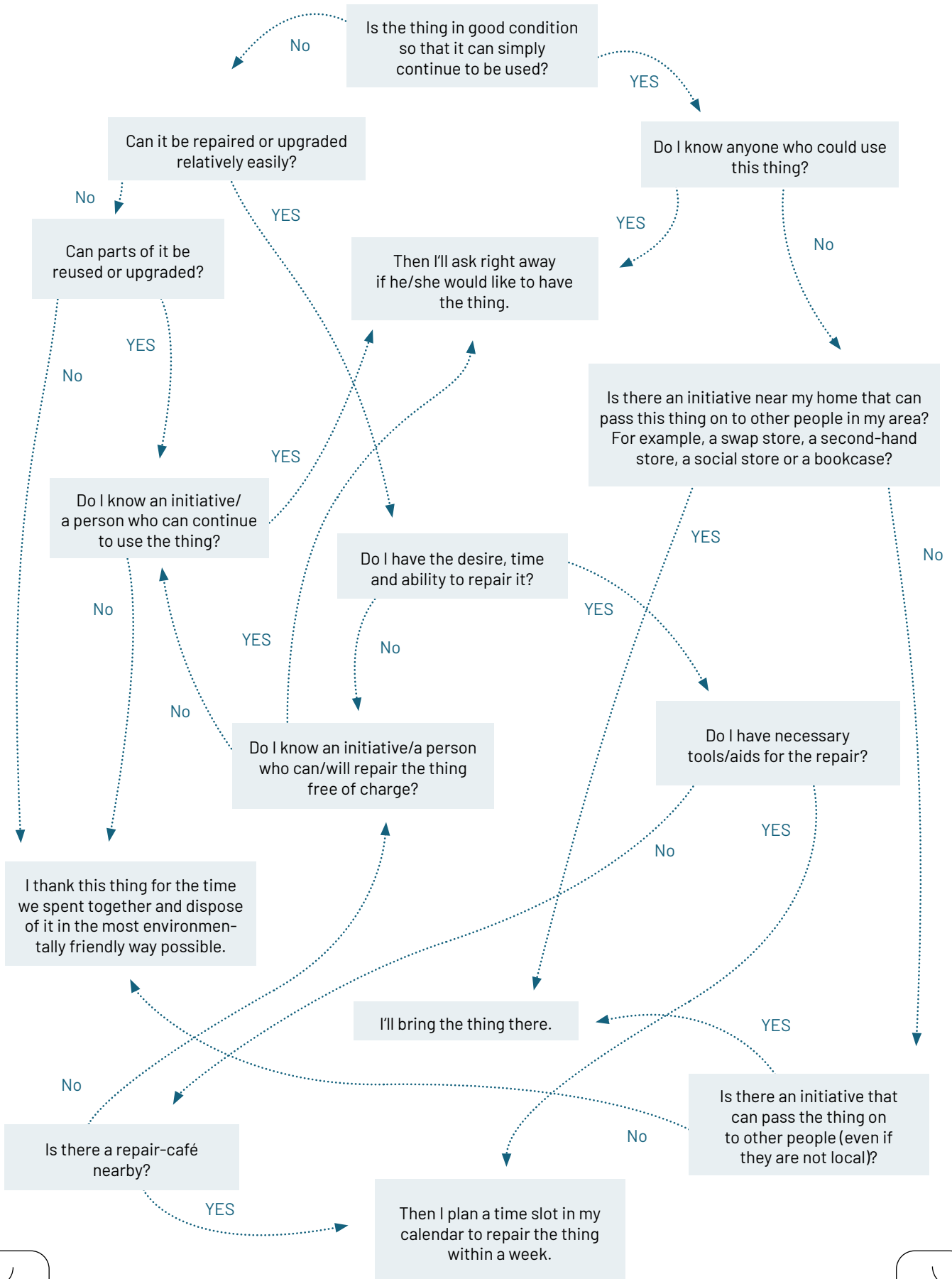
If you need more specific tips on how to reuse discarded items, just take a look [here](#) and let yourself be inspired.

CONCLUSION

- Passing on and reusing items that have been decluttered is important in reducing the amount of waste and the environmental impact.
- Repairing, donating, giving away or swapping things helps to reduce waste.
- Creative activities such as upcycling are not just sustainable ways of transforming old objects into something new; they can also be fun.



Tips: What can I do with things that have been decluttered?



Tips: How can I dispose of things in an environmentally friendly way?



Before disposal:

First consider whether the things you are throwing out can be repaired, upgraded and/or passed on (e.g., as second-hand goods, donations or gifts). Avoiding waste is always the best solution.

If you're sure it isn't possible to reuse things, then dispose of them as sustainably as possible.

Waste separation and recycling at home:

When disposing of waste, make sure you use the correct waste containers. You can find helpful information here:

- [InterZero](#) – *Correct waste separation – a winner for climate protection*

Drop off at a recycling center:

Broken clothing, old electrical appliances, products with harmful ingredients (e.g., paints, cleaning agents, energy-saving light bulbs), bulky waste, garden waste, waste wood and pressure vessels must not be disposed of with household waste but should be handed in at municipal recycling centers. Find out about the return options at your local recycling center before you plan to simply bin your waste.

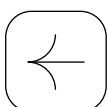
Return to the dealer:

Old electrical appliances, lamps, batteries and rechargeable batteries can be handed in to some retailers.

You can hand in old batteries and rechargeable batteries wherever batteries are sold, e.g., at supermarkets, drugstores, electrical or DIY stores.

Further disposal initiatives & recycling collection points:

- [The Salvation Army](#) – *Reuse and recycle Protect the earth, transform lives*
- [call2recycle](#) – *Leading the charge for recycling*



Tips: How can I reuse things and pass them on?

CROSS-DIVISIONAL INITIATIVES AND PLATFORMS



Repair things yourself:

These initiatives offer voluntary meetings where participants repair their broken things alone or together with others:

- [Repair Café](#) – *Throw it away? Think again!*
- [International Repair Day](#) – *Put repair in spotlights during International Repair Day*



Donate Items:

You can find local charity shops here:

- [Oxfam](#) – *Shop-Finder*
- [Red Cross](#) – *Donate clothes and goods*



Sell or give things away – on site or online:

Platforms for selling or giving away second-hand items:

- [Shpock](#) – *Buying & selling – quick & easy*
- [eBay](#)
- Groups on social media such as Facebook using names such as “for free”, “selling” or “Free your Stuff” in your area

DIVISION-SPECIFIC INITIATIVES AND PLATFORMS



CLOTHING

Repair clothing yourself:

You will find advice on how you can repair here:

- [Repair what you wear](#)

How you can creatively stuff holes in your clothing:

- [Our Hands](#) – *How to repair clothes with Japanese sashiko mending*

Let your clothes be fixed here:

Nearby:

- Visit your local tailor or shoemaker

Upcycling of clothing:

- [Gathered](#) – *34 upcycling clothes ideas*
- [DIY Candy](#) – *Upcycled Clothing Ideas 30+ Ways to Reuse Old Clothes*

Donate clothes:

Overview of drop-off points with a welfare aspect:

- [PlanetAid](#) – *Nonprofit organization championing textile reuse to fund sustainable change*
- [Kleiderstiftung](#) – *Collecting and sharing clothes fairly*



Tips: How can I reuse things and pass them on?

Selling or giving clothing:

Platforms for second-hand clothing:

- [Vinted](#) – *Ready to declutter your closet?*
- [Etsy](#) – *Find things you'll love. Support independent sellers. Only on Etsy.*



READING & WRITING GOODS

Upcycling of reading & writing materials:

You can find an idea for upcycling books at:

- [Pinterest](#) – *Upcycling Ideas for Old Books and Other Book Crafts*

Donate Reading and writing goods:

The Pens and Pencils initiative collects items such as pens, pencil cases and rulers:

- [Pens for kids](#) – *Donate to Pens for Kids*



KITCHEN

Upcycling of kitchen goods:

You can find some ideas for upcycling kitchen items at:

- [Pinterest](#) – *Kitchen Utensils Upcycled*



TECHNOLOGY AND ELECTRONICS

Repair electronic items yourself

Here you will find instructions for repairing various electrical or electronic devices such as tablets, smartphones or games consoles:

- [iFixit](#) – *Your first repair? You can learn to repair. You can do it!*

Alternatively: search on YouTube for a repair manual with video guidance.

Hand it in for repair:

- Visit your local repair shop to get your phone repaired.

Sell electronic items:

This platform offers to buy your devices:

- [Decluttr](#) – *Sell Your Tech & Electronics*



3.4

PHASE 4:
STICK WITH IT

the art of resisting



PHASE 4:

STICK WITH IT

You've now gotten to know your needs better, gained an overview of your possessions and passed on things you've decluttered. Now it's time to live with less in the long term. How can you manage to buy and accumulate fewer things in the future? How can you be happy with the things you already have?

3.4.1 THE POWER OF (CONSUMER) HABITS

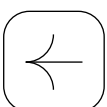
Habits are powerful. Habits are deeply ingrained patterns of behavior that make up a significant part of our daily lives. Habits are formed when we often repeat individual behaviors and are rewarded for doing so. Our consumption patterns are behaviors regularly triggered by external stimuli and rewarded with immediate satisfaction. For example, shopping behavior is often repeated and usually takes place in the same places. In addition, we're exposed to countless consumer stimuli every day through advertising or the media, which teaches us that consumption is part of social and cultural participation in our society. After a few repetitions, the brain forms neuronal connections that enable actions to be carried out automatically and with minimal effort.⁸⁰

Once a habit has been developed, external stimuli can quickly activate a need to consume without a conscious decision being made.⁸¹ So you may go shopping after decluttering and fall back into old buying habits without meaning to. It's up to you to identify these consumer stimuli at the right moment and resist the power of habit.

3.4.2 RESISTING THE TEMPTATION TO BUY THROUGH MORE SELF-CONTROL

Our consumer society is characterized by an abundance of temptations. An opportunity to consume something lurks on every corner. At the same time, there are very few consumer-free places in our cities. A new piece of clothing is already lurking around the next corner. The price is too high, you only have a little money left for the month, and you don't need any new clothes? So, you shouldn't buy it. But it seems to scream out loud that it would make you happy? This is a common conflict between short-term desires and self-control.⁸²






Self-control plays a crucial role in resisting buying stimuli. But what does it actually mean? Self-control is the ability to control your own actions. But it's also the ability to resist these many short-term temptations, for example in the form of sweets or that new piece of clothing, i.e. to postpone rewards.⁸³ Self-control makes it possible to bring behavior in line with long-term goals and one's own norms and values.



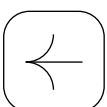
Why does our self-control fail so often? One reason is that we have different goals that we have to reconcile.⁸⁴ On the one hand, you've had a stressful day, and one goal is to do something good for yourself through a purchase. Another goal is to save some money this month. Not so easy! A second reason why we don't always manage self-control so well is that we don't track our behavior.⁸⁵ Last Wednesday, for example, you bought new sneakers, but a week later you've almost forgotten about them. And finally, your self-control may be exhausted if you've already had to say "no" to sweets at the office that day or have already completed a sports program.

The good news is that self-control is like a muscle. If it's used a lot, it can become exhausted in the meantime. But you can train it specifically to build up more energy for self-control.

AND HOW DO YOU DO THAT?

-  **Set clear targets:** Set yourself specific and clear goals for your consumption, e.g., a fixed monthly budget for consumer spending or a maximum number of purchases per week.
-  **Track your behavior:** Make a note of when you bought which things that go beyond your daily food requirements. This way you can track your consumption and assess more easily whether you have reached your personal goals or not.
-  **Practice deferring rewards:** Practice deferring short-term rewards. Start with small steps and refuse to make any impulse purchases for a week. You can then slowly increase the duration.
-  **Identify triggers early on:** There are usually specific triggers that lead us to make impulse purchases. For some, it's the upcoming vacation, for others the stressful week of events and for others the Instagram ad that tempts them to buy. If you identify the triggers early on, you can prepare for them, take a deep breath at the right moment and distract yourself with other activities.
-  **Lower your stress level:** Consumption provides a brief dopamine rush. You'll miss this at first if you limit your consumption. Sport, meditation and sleep help many people. All of these can improve self-control and brain health.

In the long term, you can use these techniques to train the muscles of self-control. You may even enjoy applying this skill in other areas of your life.



3.4.3 LEARNING SUSTAINABLE HABITS IN DEALING WITH THINGS

In order to buy and accumulate fewer useless things in the future, it's important to unlearn old consumer habits and adopt new, sustainable habits. For example, this could mean spending more time with the individual items in your household. Or practicing patience and looking into the possibility of repairing something before buying a replacement. For example, you could finally learn to darn holes in your sweater yourself or simply have the battery in your smartphone replaced. These aren't just technical skills you can learn and turn into habits, they're also about taking care of things in general.⁸⁶

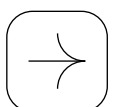
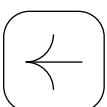
So how can new, sustainable habits be created when dealing with things? The short piece of advice is to repeat an action regularly in the same context. If you want to take a more systematic approach, you can follow the following procedure:⁸⁷

- **Initiate:** The formation of new habits begins. First, decide on a goal you want to achieve. Then choose a simple behavior that will help you achieve the goal. Now, plan exactly when and where you'll perform this behavior.
- **Learning:** The next step is to repeat the behavior regularly in the chosen time and place context to strengthen the connection between the behavior and the context. You perform the behavior each time at the chosen time and place.
- **Stabilize:** Over time, it'll get easier and within 10 weeks you'll find that you're doing the behavior automatically without thinking about it. The habit has reached its full strength.

There are several rumors circulating about forming new habits. For example, you often read in the media that it takes 3 weeks for new habits to form. In reality, however, current research shows that it takes an average of around 2 months for a habit to become firmly established.⁸⁸ So, the most important tip is to be patient with yourself. To make the process even easier, you can start the new habit when you are in a period of upheaval anyway (e.g., when you move house or change jobs).⁸⁹

3.4.4 IT'S EASIER TOGETHER

Unlearning old consumer habits and learning sustainable habits – it all sounds exhausting and a lot. However, these changes are often much easier to implement than you think if you have a social environment that supports you in your efforts or actively participates. After all, people aren't loners but almost always unconsciously orient themselves towards the behavior of fellow human beings to be accepted or liked in different groups.⁹⁰ Especially in new, uncertain situations, the behavior of other people can be helpful as an anchor.



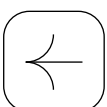
HOW CAN OTHER PEOPLE HELP YOU SPECIFICALLY?

- **Position yourself:** Tell your family, friends and acquaintances about your efforts to resist consumer stimuli in the future. This requires openness. But once you've taken the first step, your social environment can support you.
- **Role models:** Look for role models who've already taken the path towards less consumption. Ask your role models about their experiences and what has helped them.
- **New communities:** Look around for groups in your city or neighborhood that also focus on consuming less or more sustainably. This could be a local environmental initiative, a bartering ring, a repair café or an online exchange platform, for example. Take part in an event, workshop or discussion forum and talk to the people there. Perhaps you'll meet like-minded people.

Are you looking for specific ways to consume less in the long term and focus on interpersonal encounters and experiences instead? Then look at the following exercises and tips.

CONCLUSION

- To get by with fewer things in the long term, it makes sense to set yourself clear goals and defer rewards to strengthen your ability to control yourself.
- New, sustainable behaviors must be repeated regularly in the same context so that they become habits.
- Social support plays an important role in developing sustainable habits.



EXERCISE 5



Challenge yourself with a "consumer detox": treat yourself to a consumption detox in which you don't buy anything within a set period of time (everyday consumer goods/food are of course excluded).

Here's how it works:

1. Plan the consumption detox period consciously: determine the period during which you'll not buy anything (e.g., from Monday onwards for 8 weeks) and enter this in your calendar.
2. Do you want to do a complete detox or a detox in a selected area?
 - a. Complete detox
 - b. Detox in a selected area: _____

Tip: Get your friends/family involved and think together about how you can have a good time without additional consumption.

A detox means resisting the many consumer stimuli over and over again. This can sometimes feel challenging. Therefore, use the following questions for an accompanying diary.

Preparation

Think about which things will be easy for you to detox from and which will be difficult:

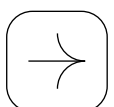
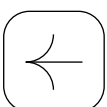
Easy:

Hard:

Implementation

In which situations do you find it particularly difficult to resist? What helps you in these situations? Write down your thoughts during your consumption detox:

Continues on next page...



EXERCISE 5

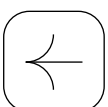


Reflection

Document which things and objects were easy for you to detox from and which were difficult.

Easy:

Hard:



EXERCISE 6



CHALLENGE: CREATE A NON-SHOPPING LIST

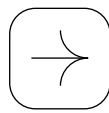
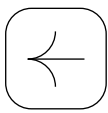
We often buy things we hardly use or don't use at all later on. Sometimes we even get annoyed about our purchases because, looking back, they seem like a waste or a mistake. How can we avoid this?

Here's how:

- First, reflect on the things you regret buying.
- Now make a list of things that you no longer want to buy in the future.
- Plan a fixed period (e.g., from Monday onwards for 8 weeks) in which you consciously don't buy the things you've listed. You can always update the list and add more things to it.
- Check regularly whether you're sticking to your no-buying list.

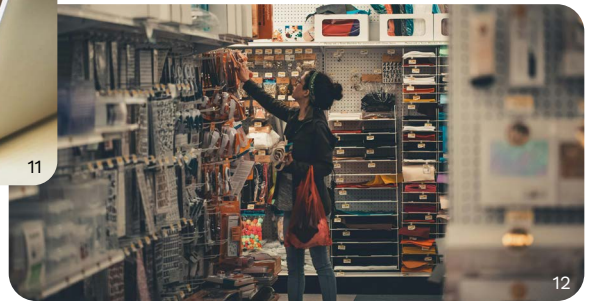
<i>Example: Non-shopping list</i>		
<i>Clothes</i>	<i>Supermarket</i>	<i>Online shopping</i>
<i>Socks, T-shirts</i>	<i>Various tees</i>	<i>No online shopping for 2 weeks</i>

Non-shopping list		



Tips: How can I avoid impulse buying?

Do you know this too? You go into the supermarket to buy a packet of oatmeal and leave with lots of things you didn't want to buy. Too many rash impulse buys are not only bad for your wallet; they're also bad for you and the environment. Every new thing in our lives costs us valuable resources in the form of money, time or space. In addition, everything consumes energy and raw materials in production and transportation, and impulse purchases are quick, spontaneous and ill-considered. The easiest way to avoid impulse buying is to pause and reflect on your purchasing decisions.



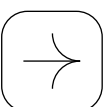
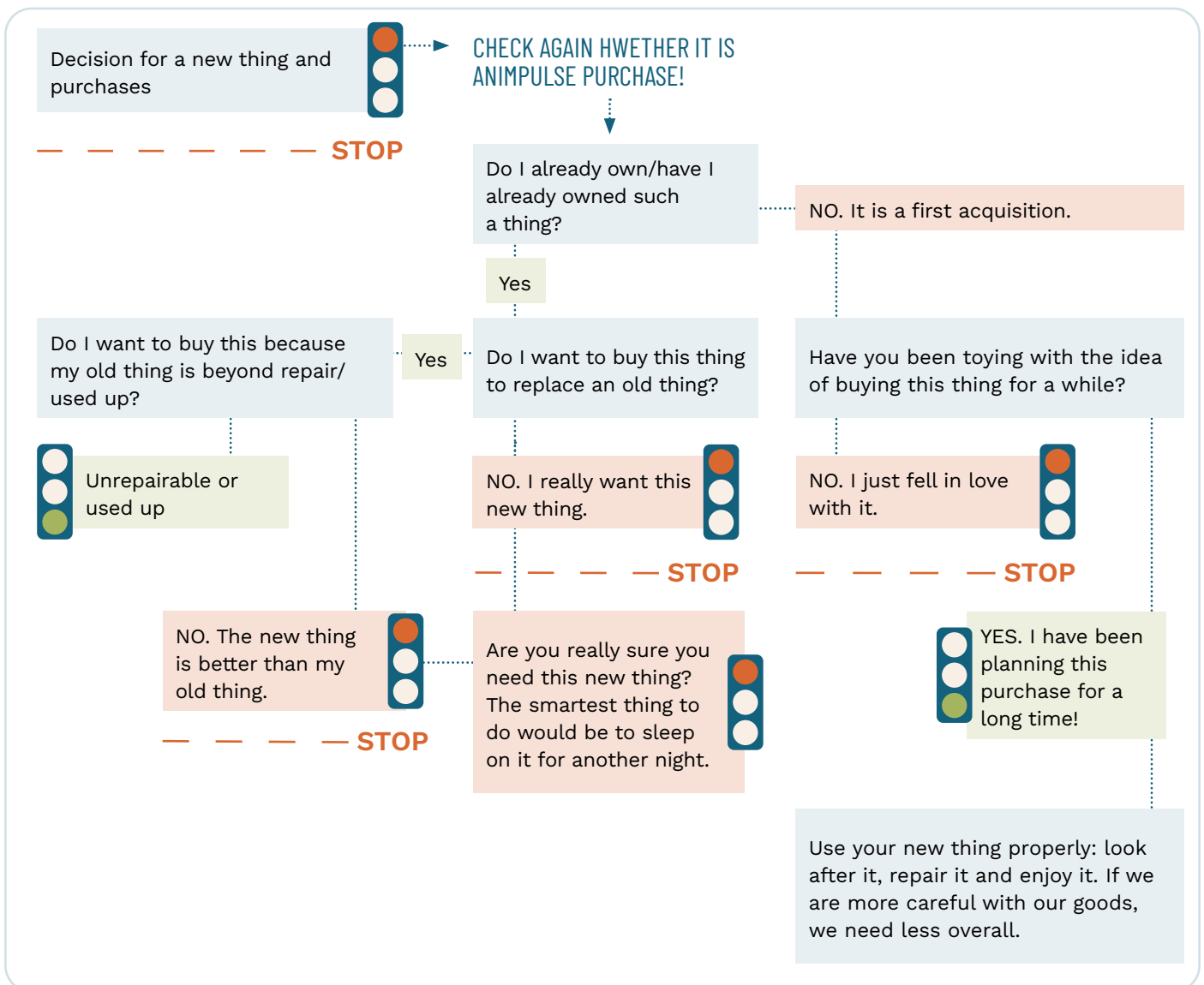
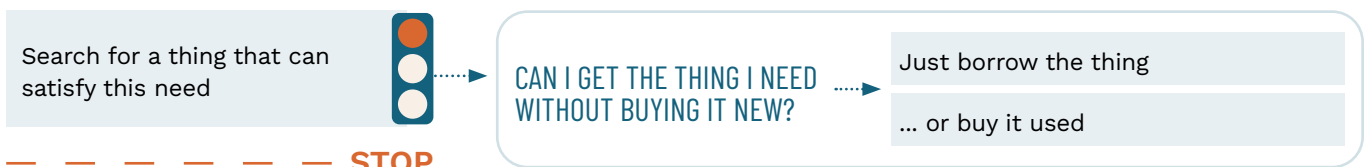
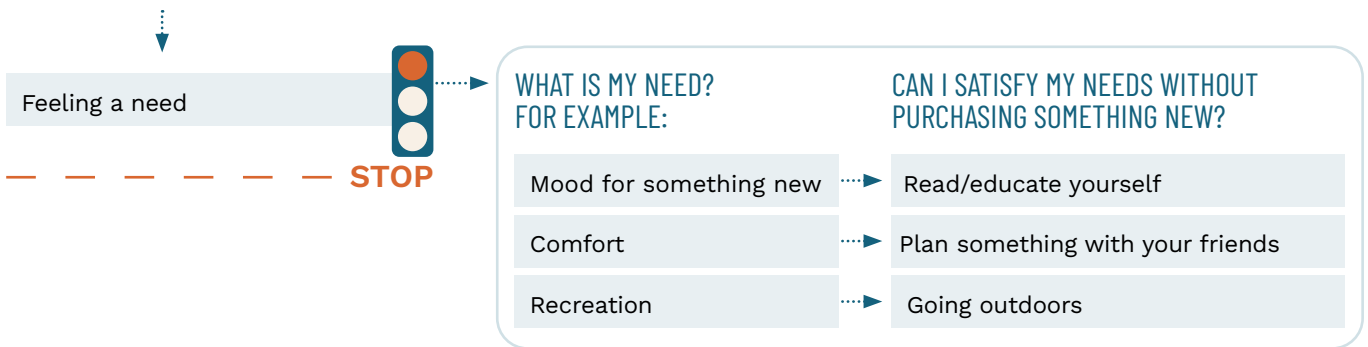
Below you'll find a decision tree along the consumption process to help you avoid impulse buying.



DECISION TREE TO AVOID IMPULSE PURCHASES

PURCHASE DECISION:

This decision-making process goes through your head during a purchase



Tips: What can I do to consume less in the long term?

Only go shopping when you really need something

It's best to write a list of the things you need so you can focus on what you need when shopping and avoid impulse buying.



Take your time

Another effective way to avoid impulse buying is to wait. Waiting can often overcome the initial impulse to buy. For example, write a wish list and take time to actively think about which products you need. After one, two or even several weeks, you can make a well-considered decision.

Imagining ownership

We tend to overestimate the impact of purchases on us. Imagine exactly what it would be like to own the product you want. This will help you find out whether you need the product. Only buy what fully convinces you.

Create awareness of the costs of consumption

Make an overview of your consumer spending to find out what you spend your money on every month.

Buy sustainable and high-quality

When you consume, you should make sure that the products have been produced ecologically and ethically. The higher the quality of a product, the longer you'll enjoy it. Pick quality over quantity.

Reduce the influence of advertising

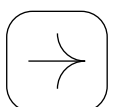
You can minimize advertising influences by using „No advertising!“ stickers on your letterbox, implementing adblockers in your browser or unsubscribing from catalogs or email newsletters and thus avoid implicit requests to buy.

Conscious perception of advertising

In today's world, it's almost impossible to completely avoid advertising. However, by consciously analyzing advertising offers, you can slow down the sometimes implicitly awakened desire to buy.

Invest in experiences instead of goods

The mere purchase of products often only makes us happy in the short term. The actual use and enjoyment of products or experiences, on the other hand, make us feel happy for longer. So consciously take time to experience and perceive things.



4.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL?



4 ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL?

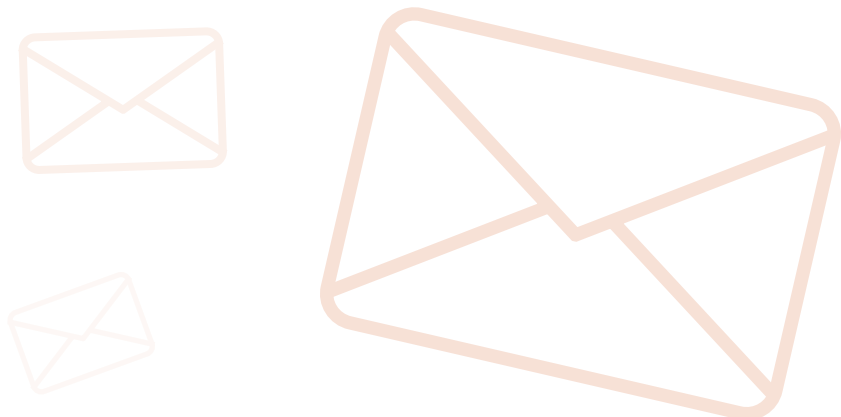
Congratulations, you've been on a journey through your consumption world and have now arrived here. Breathe out briefly and deeply again, you've made it!

4.1 AN AGREEMENT WITH YOURSELF

After the theoretical background and the many practical suggestions for decluttering and sustainable consumption, you're sure to have many thoughts, insights and wishes buzzing around in your head. To save these thoughts for the future, you can write a [letter to your future "self"](#).

IN THE [LETTER TO YOUR FUTURE SELF](#), YOU COULD ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS, FOR EXAMPLE:

- What motivated you to read the guide?
- What have you been able to implement from the exercises and tips?
- What insights did you have into your relationship with your things?
- What has decluttering done to you?
- What have you learned about your ownership of goods and your consumer behavior?
- What are you looking for in your future consumption?





4.2 YOUR CHANGE IN CONSUMPTION AND YOUR SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Have you resolved to change or reduce your consumer behavior in the long term? Great! In everyday life, however, these changes can conflict with our social behavior. In many situations, you're not completely autonomous but dependent on or even responsible for other people. So, the final question for you is this: How can you communicate your changes in consumption sensitively to your social environment?

HOW CAN YOU COMMUNICATE YOUR CHANGES IN CONSUMPTION SENSITIVELY?

- **The right time:** Don't force the conversation. Let the topic of consumption come up naturally or wait until you're asked a question about your new habits. Those around you will react better if they bring up the subject.
- **Know your counterpart:** Adapt your message to the other person. Briefly put yourself in the other person's shoes: How might they perceive your attitude?
- **Conversations, not lectures:** Have a conversation, don't give a lecture. Be friendly, listen and ask questions. Your new habits must first be absorbed and processed by the other person.
- **Show empathy:** An empathetic way to start the conversation is to tell your own story. Talk about your journey to more sustainable consumption.
- **Let your behavior speak for itself:** Show your counterpart specifically how you keep track of your possessions and consume less.





5.
BACKGROUND



5. BACKGROUND

This guide is based on the results of the research project "MeinDing! – Ich bin was ich (nicht) habe" (My Thing! I am what I (don't) have).

The citizen science project was funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and is running from April 2021 to September 2024. It is one of 15 projects aimed at advancing cooperation between citizens and scientists in terms of content and methodology and providing answers to social challenges.

In the project, measures for reflecting on and reducing possessions have been researched together with project partners and citizen scientists. We wanted to find out whether and to what extent targeted decluttering combined with reflection exercises can contribute to living resource-light in the long term.

We would like to thank all the citizen scientists who took part in the "MeinDing!" project. Thank you also for the valuable support of our practice partners.

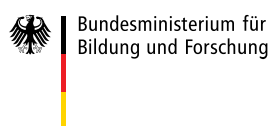
PROJECT PARTNERS



PRACTICE PARTNERS

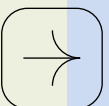
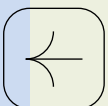


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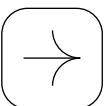
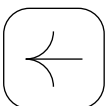
DIRECTORIES



6. DIRECTORIES

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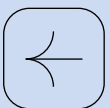
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6.2 LISTING OF FIGURES

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7. IMPRINT



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