

# Controlling Clutter for Newlyweds

Janet Kozak has some advice for entering marriage clutter-free.



For a newlywed couple moving in together for the first time, paring down items that may be awkward or unessential to an adult married relationship can be a difficult task. For Muslim couples whose relationship starts at the nikah, there is no adjustment period of getting to know a person's personal habits until the days immediately preceding the wedding. Many couples, then, are essentially thrust into situations that they must make the most of in order to survive and thrive in their marriages.

What, then, can couples do to make the process of merging lives, spaces and an abundance of life's accumulation of stuff easier? I consulted two professional organisers to learn their tips and advice for not only clean and organised living spaces, but for reduced conflict in marriages as well. For some couples, it can come as an unwelcome surprise that they are not 'cleanliness-matched' in their marriages. To bridge that gap and create a space that both partners feel comfortable in, there are some basic principles that will help ease discomfort on both sides.

## Purge before the wedding

If possible, it's highly recommended to do a thorough purge before moving in together. When each half of the couple takes the time to go through their own things before marriage, it saves a lot of embarrassment and head-butting after the wedding. Take stock of what you own, and assess how essential it is to bring it into the new relationship. Larger items, like furniture and other appliances, should be pared down from both households to remove duplicates before moving to the new home.

One of the best suggestions of a wedding gift I've heard of is the gift of time with a professional organiser to ensure the couple starts off with their best foot forward. Shelina Jokhiya, owner of DeClutter Me and a professional organiser living and working in Dubai, normally works with the wife-to-be before she leaves her family home, helping her sort through her clothes and other personal items. However, the service is equally as important for grooms to take advantage of. Even if a bride is moving in with her in-laws, the

bedroom and living spaces still need to be reassessed and a clean, safe and serene space needs to be made for the new wife and her belongings.

Newlyweds need to make a concentrated effort to start off uncluttered when merging their lives together. The beginning of the marriage will set the tone for years to come and become the model which children, if any, observe and imitate. Starting off with a clutter-free space and sound organisational systems will go a long way towards creating marital harmony and success.

## Take stock of the situation

Tour your home area by area, and talk to your partner about what does and doesn't work in each space, then create a task list or complete a weekly planner so that you both know what your goals and organising targets are as a couple.

Shelina recommends, "When you are [moving into] a 'family home' first get used to the home. Don't try and change the systems and order immediately as it will cause tension for all. Get used to your new life for a few days or weeks and then talk to the family. Maybe have a group discussion about how the home is organised and suggest how [systems can be improved] moving forward. If some generations, such as the grandparents, are reluctant to discuss this matter, don't push them. They will see from the rest of the family being organised what the new systems will be and start following them [insha Allah]."

## Show respect

Everyone has some special or prized possessions no one else understands the value of. Handle and refer to your partner's items with care. Show respect for both your partner's belongings and unique family culture. Amber Taggard, owner of The Organizer Chicks, explains that every marriage is a multi-cultural marriage, "The way your family handled things like birthdays, disagreements, household chores and organisation all contributed to that household's culture." She suggests talking about, and respecting, the culture from which your spouse comes. She explains, "Everyone seeks the comfort of their 'normal' and that normal is taught to us in our [families] of origin." If your 'normal' is different than that of your partner, you will need to seek common ground.

## Communicate

Talk to each other about how you want to manage and utilise your spaces. Amber suggests planning a specific time to sit down with your spouse and discuss your reasons for asking him to make a sincere effort to keep the home more orderly. She stresses that it's important to also "express love and appreciation for things he's already doing that make you happy. For many people, this conversation about disorganisation and clutter can be uncomfortable and hard to hear, but making a 'compliment sandwich' (compliment > grievance > compliment) makes the request both easier to deliver and to receive."

## Take action

Plan a time, as you would any other important family appointment, to physically organise and declutter alongside your partner.

Support each other in creating an ordered system in your home. Work steadily on your own goals and also be sure to acknowledge when your partner has been successful in completing theirs. Amber recommends working no more than four hours at a time on any given project "in order to keep the workload from becoming overwhelming and feeling like a punishment." She suggests, "Do your best to keep the time fun - open the windows to let a lot of light in [...] and have favourite snacks on hand to keep the task feeling as fun as possible. Even a few hours of work can be good quality time as a couple!"

## Hire a professional

Tackling larger tasks can be overwhelming and intimidating. Hiring a professional organiser removes some emotional and procrastination elements of the cleaning and organising process. Having a paid professional there to keep you on task, and nudge you forward when you feel like giving up, will help you accomplish your goals and ensure you implement logical and easy to use systems. Professional organisers are also not as emotionally invested in the stuff or the marriage partners. Shelina explains, "Clients or their partners can yell and scream at us (which happens sometimes) but we won't ask for a divorce. We will ask for a break and usually a glass of water, but that is our limit." When you take the emotion out of the project by hiring a professional, more gets accomplished, and there is less tension and resentment within the marriage itself.

Applying these tips will help a couple bridge the culture gap when it comes to creating a home environment filled with peace and order. By purging before marriage, crafting a solid plan of action, and making the time to tackle the target areas as a couple with mutual love and respect, you can strengthen your marriage bond and create a space that will serve as a model for future generations.

## About the advisors:

Amber Taggard has a Master's of Science in Clinical Mental Health and is the owner of The Organizer Chicks. She and her husband of 14 years have two sons and a daughter on the way, and live in Northwest Arkansas. Please visit her website at [theorganizerchicks.com](http://theorganizerchicks.com)

Shelina Jokhiya was born and raised in Kent, England and moved to Dubai in 2005 to start her life there. After spending 13 years working as an in-house solicitor for large corporations, she switched career tracks to launch DeClutter Me in Dubai, making her the first professional organiser in the U.A.E and GCC region. To read more about her and access additional articles on home and office decluttering and organisation, please visit her website: [declutterme.com](http://declutterme.com)

*Janet Kozak is passionate about creating spaces that are organised and inviting and allow our energy to be channeled into more creative pursuits. Join her crowdfunding campaign to support The Muslimah Guide for Impactful Living and encourage sisters who are looking for free daily support in their short and long term goals to check out her project and see what it's all about! [www.TheMuslimahGuide.wordpress.com](http://www.TheMuslimahGuide.wordpress.com)*