



ALTERNATIVE CHALLENGE: UNFINISHED BUSINESS

While the 'core curriculum' of challenges all focus on what we can do for the planet and those with whom we share it, the alternative challenges are all about what we can do for ourselves. It's really hard to help anyone else if you're feeling utterly drained and overwhelmed. These challenges are designed to refill your tanks.

This challenge looks at how having a ton of unfinished projects lying about your house can really add to your mental load. We might not realise it, but all those little chores start weighing us down mentally.

This month, the challenge is very simple. Just go through all the rooms in your house/garden/workplace and identify all the unfinished projects you have lying around within sight. Make a list of them and then, put them all out of sight except for one. Complete that project. Then, and only then, can you bring another project out where you can see it.

Without you even being aware, your mental load could be full of things like:

- A shelf of unread books
- A pile of clothing to be hemmed/altered
- A busted lightbulb that you need to change
- A missing button

This simple method of getting these things done or out of sight means that you'll be living or working in a place free of mental clutter. It's literally a weight off your shoulders.



Anxiety and clutter often go hand-in-hand. Clutter doesn't necessarily mean your home is a mess - it can just mean that you have a load of little projects scattered about. Every time you see them, your poor brain unconsciously adds them to your mental to-do list. Research suggests that this sort of visual clutter has a real impact on mood.

One 2009 study, published in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, concluded that clutter sometimes translates to a homeowner feeling more depressed¹, especially if visitors comment on the mess. Other research, published in 2011 in the *Journal of Neuroscience*, found that clutter often means there are too many stimuli in your environment, which in turn makes it hard to focus².

This month, take the time to clear some of these items piled up in your mental load, either by getting them out of sight, or by actually doing them. I know - crazy, right?!

¹ <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0146167209352864#articleCitationDownloadContainer>

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21228167>