INSTITUTE FOR CHALLENGING DISORGANIZATION®
Education. Research. Strategies.

FACT SHEET INFO

Contributors to Chronic Disorganization

Chronic disorganization (CD) refers to a persistent difficulty in managing space, time, tasks, or belongings, despite repeated attempts to organize. It often results from factors such as cognitive issues, emotional struggles, health changes, and environmental demands.

The table illustrates common experiences among those affected by CD; however, having contributing factors does not guarantee that someone will develop it. This Fact Sheet aims to educate and offer a framework for understanding CD. **It is not a diagnostic tool.**

Chronic disorganization does not define an individual. ICD®-educated organizing professionals provide personalized strategies, support, and multidisciplinary methods to help people develop skills, reduce overwhelm, and improve well-being at any stage of life.

Contributors to Chronic Disorganization	
Cognitive, Neurological, and Chronic Health Contributors	These factors influence how the brain organizes information, sequences tasks, remembers details, and manages energy. Examples include: ○ Neurodevelopmental traits such as attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD) ○ Learning and processing differences ○ Executive functioning challenges ○ Neurological or medical conditions affecting cognition ○ Chronic health issues impacting stamina, mobility, or mental clarity ○ Mental health influences such as anxiety, depression, trauma responses, compulsive tendencies, or personality disorders *These contributors often shape long-term organizing capacity.*
Emotional and Behavioral Contributors	Emotions and behaviors strongly affect motivation, decision-making, and follow-through. Examples include: ○ Avoidance, procrastination, or difficulty initiating tasks ○ Perfectionism or all-or-nothing thinking ○ Apathy or ambivalence about clutter ○ Emotional attachment to possessions ○ Fear of mistakes or fear of loss ○ Feeling overwhelmed by cognitive or emotional load ○ Limiting beliefs such as "I can't change" or "I might need this someday." *Priority management is particularly influenced by mindset. If a task feels equally urgent or equally unimportant, individuals may experience internal conflict that slows action and disrupts momentum.*

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Skills, Learning History, and Development	Organizing is a learned skill. Many individuals were not taught effective strategies that match the way their brain works. Examples: ○ Never being taught organizing or time-management skills ○ Growing up in chaotic or unstable environments ○ Being taught rigid systems ○ Having inflexible systems that don't match the individual's abilities and skills ○ Difficulty maintaining systems ○ Lack of role models for effective organization ○ Limited opportunities to practice and refine organizing skills *These factors reflect developmental patterns, not external events.*
Cultural, Social, and Resource-Related Contributors	Cultural norms, social expectations, and access to resources shape how individuals understand and approach organization. Examples: ○ Financial/time constraints ○ Cultural or generational expectations around saving, gifts, or legacy items ○ Scarcity preparation influenced by upbringing or environment ○ Social norms around possessions or family roles ○ Limited access to supportive services or tools ○ Housing conditions that restrict functional organization *These influences often form long-term patterns.*
Technology Demands and Digital Overwhelm: The New Frontier	Modern life adds a new layer of complexity to organizing, especially when managing photos, data, and communications on multiple devices and platforms. Common challenges may include: ○ Constant notifications and data flow across phones, computers, wearables (watches, rings, and glasses), smart home devices, security systems, and vehicles. ○ Learning, using, and updating apps, software, and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence ○ Overflowing inboxes, multiple email accounts, subscriptions, logins, and passwords, and second factor authentication ○ Digital files scattered across devices, cloud platforms, portals, and work or health systems ○ Digital hoarding and content consumption ○ Fatigue, reduced focus, and decreased motivation due to long periods spent sitting or multitasking on devices or participating in online video, such as Zoom and social media platforms, for both recreational and business use. *Digital environments can raise cognitive load and may amplify physical disorganization, leading to increased fatigue and making it harder to stay organized.*

Chronic disorganization may not go away, but it can get easier

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