

# Solutions

 FAMILY SERVICES  
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NEWSLETTER

Issue 54

## DOWNSIZING A LIFETIME OF MEMORIES

We furnish our house, receive gifts, tuck away items and keep things –just in case– This accumulation fills our homes and, as we grow older, our memories. How do you downsize forty years of living, a five bedroom house, a lifetime?

This question is difficult for both seniors and for their families. Wading through boxes, closets, and rooms can be overwhelming, stressful, and racked with emotion. With a plan, patience, and empathy, this complex process is manageable and can be a cathartic and positive experience for both, the senior and for family members.

Personally passing on treasures and possessions to family and friends, or donating them to a charity may help a senior to part with items. Knowing that these items will be cherished by someone they care for, seeing the joy they can bring, or knowing that an item can help someone else, may ease the transition.

Make a plan, and, if possible, talk with and listen to the senior's wishes. Involve other family members. Start with the rooms and items that are not used regularly or have not been used for a long time and work from larger items, such as furniture, to smaller ones, such as the contents of a drawer. As you sort items, put them into piles of things to be kept, to be given to family and friends, to sell, to donate and to toss. If it is garbage, put it in a garbage bag at the curb; if it is to go to a family member or charity make arrangements for pick up or delivery as soon as possible.

Be respectful of items that may be personal and of the choices the senior makes. Journals, love letters, or photos may be kept sacred and private. As individuals, we value different items and the importance of them – don't judge or question which items should be kept or be given away.

The task of sorting, packing and letting go is emotionally difficult. Set up reasonable time frames and allow for time to share memories, to reminisce, to laugh, and to cry. This is a time of change for everyone involved, a chance to look back, to recognize and grieve loss and to celebrate a shared past.

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# Downsizing A Lifetime of Memories - Checklist

## □ Where are they moving to?

- Take measurements of the rooms in the new home.
- Compare rooms of a similar size in both homes; it helps to get a feel for the actual size of the new space.
- Downsizing from a house to an apartment, condo, retirement home or assisted living . list the items that are not needed such as the snow blower, rakes, picnic table...

***Knowing the space available helps in deciding what to keep.***

## □ Where to start?

- Work on one room at a time, beginning in rooms not being used; for example, start in a spare bedroom or the basement.
- Look at items that have less sentimental value; for example, cleaning out the Tupperware drawer will probably be easier & quicker than the china cabinet.
- Paperwork and items of sentimental or financial value will require more time and greater attention.

***Items that are not used regularly and/or have less sentimental value may be easier to part with.***

## □ Who can help?

- Make a list & schedule of those who are willing to help including family and friends.
- If there is no one to help, contact a professional %downsizing+or organizing+agency.

***Sharing the workload helps.***

## □ What supplies are needed?

- Make a list of all the items you need to sort and pack . boxes, labels, packing materials, garbage bags, etc.

***The more organized you are the less overwhelmed you may feel.***

## □ What to do with unwanted items?

- Make a list of all items & sort them into categories such as *keep, gift, sell, donate, toss*.
- Try to recycle, reuse, donate or sell if possible.
- Determine if there are items that belong to other people.
- Set a date for family & close friends to meet. This allows the senior a time to %gift+items to others, and to share memories about their special belongings and the home they are leaving.
- Identify charities that accept donations.
- Plan a garage or estate sale.
- Post items in the local paper or online (for example, eBay).

***Finding a new home for items may make it easier to part with them.***

***FSEAP Ottawa*** offers confidential professional counselling services. Assistance is available on a wide variety of personal and work-related issues. For more information call:  
**613-725-5676 or 1-877-725-5676**