



Tips for Family Members

When Your Aging Parent is Moving to New Housing

Whether you're helping older adults move to a smaller home, a senior facility, or moving them into your own home, here are ways to take extra care when supporting them through what can be a difficult and traumatic time.

- 10 reasons why seniors have a difficult time parting with their belongings
- 10 tips to help them declutter and downsize
- Are you letting your parents down if you do not want their stuff?

10 reasons why seniors have a difficult time parting with their belongings

1. **The Need To Conserve**

If your parents lived through hard times at any point in their lives they will most likely be very conservative. Things like re-using a tea bag more than once, keeping an old pot with a broken handle (cause it still kinda works), holding on to that 50lb vacuum cleaner even though they can't push it around any more, etc. It's difficult for them to give away something that still works. The solution here is to donate these items to a specific local charity (home for battered women, homeless shelter, etc.) If your parent(s) feel that they are helping someone else, they are more likely to part with these things.

2. **The Sentimental Attachment**

We all have sentimental attachment to things, that's natural and very human. The best way to deal with this issue is to minimize the space these items take up. So, instead of boxes of photos, frame a few great ones and digitize the rest. Instead of keeping an entire set of never-used china, just keep one plate and give away the rest.

3. **The Sense Of Loyalty**

There's a reluctance to give away an item that was a gift. The solution here is to encourage re-gifting to pass it forward. Knowing that they are helping someone else may make it much easier for them to get rid of something that was given to them.



4. **The Fatigue**

It's overwhelming when there is so much clutter around. It's hard to know where to start. One factor that contributes greatly to this is mail. Older adults tend to receive a lot of junk mail, solicitations, catalogs and much more. You can work on keeping this clutter down by switching to online statements and unsubscribing them from catalog and junk mail lists. Also, a shredder is a wonderful thing to have these days. It should certainly help to protect against identity theft which is so very common amongst the elder population.

5. **The Change In Health**

It's natural for most seniors to experience some decline in health as they grow older. It can be anything, a shoulder injury, a stroke, dementia, etc. This change of course makes it much more difficult to keep up with daily household chores. The solution here is to hire help or seek help from family members. There are professional organizations such as Care.com where you can search for help in your area but you can also talk to friends, church members, etc. about anyone that may be available to help.

6. **The Fear**

Change is frightening for most people, but especially for seniors. Giving up what they have and what they are familiar with can provoke anxiety. The solution here is to be as pragmatic as possible and to remove items slowly.

7. **The Dream Of The Future**

Many individuals who hold on to things will usually say something like "But we may need that in the future." The solution here is to agree on a reasonable window of time that the item should be used in order to keep. For instance, if you agree on a window of a year, then if an item hasn't been used in a year then it will be donated.

8. **The Love Of Shopping**

Many seniors can't turn off the "buy" switch even when they no longer really need anything. If your parent keeps buying and adding to their clutter, you should have a candid one-on-one with your parent about problem. The more extreme action would be to take away their credit cards but that is something that the family will have to decide on.

9. **The History and Memories**

Items that represent specific memories and/or have a history such as family heirlooms should be kept but they don't necessarily have to be kept in your parents' home. Encourage them to give these items to other family members or if they have historical significance to donate them to a museum.



10. **The Loneliness**

Loneliness can easily lead to depression and anxiety. It's certainly not uncommon for anyone who is lonely to compensate by surrounding themselves with lots of things, new and old. The solution here is to help your parent by encouraging them or enrolling them in outside activities or have frequent visits by family and friends arranged – to alleviate the loneliness.

10 Tips to Help Them Declutter and Downsize

1. **Get Them Involved**

To the extent possible, discuss options with your senior and let them tell you what would be important to them. Allow them to ask questions, voice concerns. Honor the senior's preferences and allow them to maintain some control over their transition. If you have access to the new home, take your parents there, introduce them to the new space. Do this on their own time, when they're ready. Let them tell you how they'd like it to look and make a plan to prepare the space accordingly.

2. **Be Kind**

Being kind may seem like a given. When helping to sort and pack their things, keep in mind that their eyesight and an inability to do everything they used to do can result in poor housekeeping habits. Offer to clean as you pack and try not to criticize. Remember that it's difficult to change the older we get and moving is a huge change for everyone. Be patient. Ask how they're feeling and let them know that you're there to help.

3. **Be Patient**

Allow your parents time to say goodbye. If they take longer to clean out the desk drawer because of a stack of pictures they found, let them take the time to remember. This is a very important part of the process. Be patient. Listen to their stories. This can be a nice opportunity to remember the stories and incidents that are part of your history and that make each family unique.



4. Obtain a Room Layout of their New Place

Find out before you move, how much space the new place has. If your parents are moving from a three-bedroom house to a one-bedroom condo, then together you'll need to decide what will fit and how much can be kept. Offer to keep the pieces they can't move or try to keep them in the family if possible.

5. Give Them Time

If possible, allow enough time that your parents don't feel rushed. Sorting through years of stuff is difficult and sometimes emotionally painful. Give them time to absorb the change.

6. Safe Guard Their Personal Possessions

Help make a safe folder and/or box for items they might be stressed about losing track of : important documents, medications, jewelry, and other valuables.

7. Help Sort

Like all of us, seniors tend to keep things they don't necessarily need or will ever use. Be gentle when suggesting to get rid of possessions. Ask them if they use the item and if they would mind if you donate it. If it's a treasure or something they'd like to keep, but the new space can't accommodate it, suggest keeping it in the family by giving it to a grandchild or another sibling. It's often easier to give away items if they're going to a good home.

8. Take Pictures of the Inside of Their Home

As close as possible, try to place objects in a similar way so that their new home will feel much like the old one. Be as detailed as you can from arranging the bedroom furniture to placing the family pictures on the bureau. This will help make the new place feel like home.

9. Start Small

Take a day to spend with your parents to talk about the move and what to expect. Give them small tasks to do, such as going through a desk drawer or a box from the attic. Ask them to spend only 15 to 20 minutes a day on one task. Let them decide what they'd like to do and what they might find hard to do. Taking small steps will help your parents get used to the idea of moving.



10. Pick a Room That Has Less Sentimental Attachment

Have your parents start sorting through the bathroom or kitchen drawers; a place in the house that doesn't hold the same emotional attachment as the bedroom or living room or a photo box kept in the attic.

Nobody Wants Their Parents' Stuff

Another factor in dealing with sentimental clutter is the emotional guilt that YOU feel when your parent(s) have full expectations that you are going to want their Lenox china or dining room set or collection of Hummel figurines. If you truly want these items, hoorah! However, if you do not want certain items (or any) then you are confronted with deciding whether to just take them and do something with them on your own at a later date, or to have the honest conversation with them.

That decision is a personal one that you need to make.

We have to remember that in the post World War II era, as young couples married and moved to the suburbs – things like china, silverware and crystal were wedding gifts that were intended to be held onto for life and to be passed on to the children. But these items do not hold the same value and sentiment today. The time when these kinds of possessions showcased a level of success has passed.

Today, it's more about tiny houses, downsizing, minimalism and enjoying life with friends and family vs. collecting things. The things that are bought today are considered disposable and easily replaceable.

If you decide you should have the conversation with your parent, the best way to handle this situation is to have an honest conversation with him/her about what you can and cannot take. If you end up having to take that set of Lenox china then you can negotiate and "spread the love" by sharing it with other members of the family (or your own children).

Hire Outside Help



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Sometimes it's easier for your parents to work with an outside party than with their children, especially when it comes to sorting and packing. Senior Move Managers provide unique services and support for older adults and their families, and minimize the chaos and stress associated with these transitions.

If you would like to talk about how Lighter Moves may provide assistance, please contact us at lightermoves.com or call us at 802-595-5550.