

Helping Your Parents Downsize Their Home

Over the years, your aging parents have probably acquired numerous mementos, cherished possessions, and valuables in addition to a fair share of random power cords, old electronics, books, kitchenware, and other odds and ends. Sometimes, the work involved in arranging and organizing—or throwing out—these belongings can prevent them from wanting to move to a smaller home.



Many adult children think downsizing their parents' home starts when they show up with work clothes, cardboard boxes, and dust masks to clean out the garage, closets, and attic. Ideally, the process should begin long before that day arrives.

Parting with possessions can be challenging for older adults—even if they know the items are unnecessary. Decluttering, however, becomes essential during a move to a smaller home.

Tips for a Smooth and Stress-Free Transition

Begin the downsizing process early and take a proper, gentle approach to give your loved one a sense of control over their belongings—and reduce stress for you and the entire family.

Here are some tips to help your senior parents downsize their home while minimizing anxiety and stress for everyone:

Introduce the Idea Early

Downsizing should always start with a conversation—or several conversations—that occur in the months or weeks leading up to a

clean-out event. Talk to your loved one about their belongings and work with them to make a plan that addresses your concerns while honoring their wishes.

Handle with Sensitivity

Manage the process with compassion. As people age, they experience many losses—including the death of friends and family members, declining health and mobility, and reduced independence. Your parents may feel parting with their possessions is one more loss, making them cling even tighter to their belongings. Recognizing certain items have sentimental value and trying to understand the reasons behind their reluctance can make the process go more smoothly.

Discuss “Opportunities”

When discussing downsizing, frame the conversation in terms of “opportunities”—such as the chance to assist their children with cleaning out while they are still healthy enough to help, the opportunity to experience the joy of giving cherished belongings to family members, or reminiscing with loved ones as they go through family mementos.

Make it Easy and Convenient

When the “clean-out day” comes, make it as convenient as possible. Create three separate bins or boxes labeled “Keep,” “Donate,” and “Toss” so your loved one can easily categorize and organize items. Offer to ship or deliver items to family members, transport donated items to the local community collection center, sell items online or at a garage sale, or dispose of discarded items.

Take Your Time

As you go through things with your loved one, go at their pace—even if it's not as fast as you prefer. Give your loved one a chance to reminisce and make an unhurried decision about whether items should be kept, donated, or discarded to help them feel in control, valued, and respected.

Compassionate Support for Your Loved One

Visiting Angels caregivers can provide valuable assistance by offering companionship and a listening ear for your aging parents as they share memories and stories about their belongings.

Our professional caregivers can also help ease the emotional burden by providing gentle encouragement and assistance with sorting, organizing, and decluttering. With their support, your loved one can navigate the downsizing process with greater comfort and peace of mind.

Refer to the last page of this newsletter to find contact information for your local Visiting Angels agency and schedule a no-cost, no-obligation in-home consultation to learn how professional senior care can support you and your loved ones.