



Helpful Tips for Downsizing in Retirement

One of the main reasons older adults put off downsizing or moving to a retirement community is dealing with all the “stuff” that has accumulated over the years. Yet, if done right, the process of downsizing may not be as daunting as you think. It may even be enjoyable or refreshing at times. A lot of the physical work can be done by others, so your main role is to *categorize, organize, and direct*.

Start now

If you are thinking about moving, whether to a retirement community or to a smaller home, then now is a good time to start the process of downsizing. Do not wait until you are ready to move because it can be overwhelming at that point and you will have other things that require your attention. Even if you ultimately choose not to move, at least you have done your family members a big favor because there will be less stuff for them to deal with one day.

Recognize that you cannot keep it all

In order to know what items you can and should purge, you first need to know which items you absolutely cannot part with. But, here is the key: after you have created the initial list, pare it down even further. This can be a tough exercise, but the reality is that some of the things you think you need to save may not be necessary to keep after all. For example, that sport coat or blouse in the closet that you have held onto for 15 years because you are sure you will wear it again...it's probably time to part ways. That stack of magazines with holiday recipes dating back 10 years?... those can go too. Your most cherished recipes will not be hidden in a tall stack of magazines anyway, right?

Your kids may not want your stuff

Another popular reason for hanging on to various items is the idea that the kids or grandkids will want them. But many people eventually discover that the things they *thought* would be coveted by their adult children were not so desirable after all. To help sort this out, consider inviting your children over for a day to go through your things and find out what they *actually* want.

Sort by large and small

Once you know what you want to keep, make a list of big and small items. The big items are anything that will not fit in a regular size moving box, such as a sofa or table. As you consider these items, be sure to think about the dimensions and style of your new home so you will know if they will fit. Many CCRCs have move-in coordinators who can help you with this.

Obviously, it could be tough to list out every single smaller item, but you want to think about your most utilized items first. Consider things like silverware, pictures, kitchenware, books, etc.



Sell, donate, or discard?

Once you have decided what items are no longer needed, it is time to decide what to do with them. Create a separate list with three columns: Sell, Donate, and Trash. As you consider what you want to sell, remember that items rarely bring in the amount of cash that the owner thinks they will. In some cases, it may simply be easier to donate or discard an item than to go to the trouble of trying to sell it.

However, if you feel sure it would be worth the time to try to sell some of your belongings, then there are a number of ways you can do this. You could try to sell them online with sites like Ebay or Craig's List. (Please take caution if you use Craigslist or a similar website. If possible, meet the buyer in a public place and take someone with you.) Sometimes a good old fashioned yard sale could do the job, but you will want to get someone to help you with the set up and break down. Alternately, if you have more than a few valuable items, there are sure to be any number of local companies that will administer an estate sale for you.

Hauling the junk

Finally, after you have gone through the above mentioned steps, there will probably be a lot of junk left over. This would include things that have piled up in a garage or crawlspace over the years, such as old paint cans. There are many national companies that will come by and haul these things away for you. All you have to do is point to the items you want removed, and they will recycle or trash the items accordingly.