



Downsizing Tips from Bright Oaks Group.

Moving can be exciting, if not stressful. Have you always lived in the same town? Perhaps one of your parents had a career that had you moving all over the place, even internationally. Each scenario brings challenges and opportunities. If you have lived in the same house for decades, chances are you have accumulated a LOT of “stuff”, as well as photos, papers, family heirlooms, and so much more. If you moved a lot over the years, you may not have accumulated as much, but moving to a smaller location can make even the most “minimalist” wonder what they are going to do with all their possessions.

Being organized is the key to preparing to move. Even if you are not planning on moving into senior housing nor helping your parents decide what the “next step” will be, understanding the necessary steps and being prepared will make moving day go much more smoothly. As a “Navy Junior,” I not only moved every 3-4 years during my childhood, but have also moved multiple times as an adult. In addition, my father moved into an independent living apartment 3 years ago, leaving his 1800 square foot home of 35 years for an 1100 square foot apartment.

- 1) **Be prepared with supplies.** There is nothing more frustrating than starting to clean out a closet, basement, or other room and realizing that you don’t have boxes, tape, bags, or other packing materials. Go to a local moving company, home improvement store like Lowe’s, Target, or Wal-Mart and pick up some supplies. Most places will take back unused or unopened items; so don’t be shy about picking up plenty. You may want to purchase:
 - a. Small boxes
 - b. Newspaper print for wrapping breakables
 - c. Tape
 - d. Markers (permanent markers are the best) for marking boxes
 - e. Heavy duty black construction bags
- 2) **Ask family and friends to help.** It is a big job and many hands make light work.
- 3) **Begin with your storage areas:** Basement, attic, closets. The key is to finish each area before starting another. Otherwise, you will find yourself frustrated with a mess all over the house! And remember: Only Handle It Once (OHIO). This is advice most downsizers will give you to avoid going round and round about whether to keep something or not.
 - a. Label 3 bags or boxes: Keep/Toss/Give Away
 - b. As you fill the “throw away” and “give away” bags or boxes, move them to a central, labeled location in the house. The garage is probably the best bet, as it will be closer to the car and make it easier to take it to the dump! Tacking a paper



sign on the wall over the piles will help you and your helpers know where to place the bags.

- 4) **One room at a time....and finish it!** After you have cleared out the storage areas, start with your least used rooms. Once they have been reviewed and cleaned, don't go back in unless you are taking things to give or throw away. I find that closing the door with the knowing that space is completed to be very satisfying. It helps to know you are one step closer to finishing.
- 5) **Be brutal!** If you haven't worn it/used it/seen it in a year or more, get rid of it. If it is chipped, torn, stained, or otherwise damaged—Toss It.
- 6) **Pace Yourself.** Going through years of possessions can be physically and emotionally tiring. Each item can bring forth memories, so allow yourself to remember and share with your helpers. Don't get TOO far down memory lane, and remind yourself there is yet another room/closet/dresser that needs to be sorted and reviewed.
- 7) **Pictures.** We all have TONS of pictures; I know I cannot identify people in a good number of mine. Go through them, separate out those your family may want, and toss any that have no meaning to you. You can ask a grandchild to scan the remaining ones into a computer, or take them to a store that will do that for you. When my father was downsizing, I bought him a slide converter. We spent several hours going through each slide, and talking about what was happening at the time. It was a wonderful bonding experience for both of us.
- 8) **Furniture.** Post It Notes are a great way to mark furniture. Choose a color for pieces you want to keep, toss, give away, or sell. Ask your children and grandchildren to mark the pieces they would like to have. My sisters and I actually took pictures with our phones and sent them on to our kids as we were packing to see if they wanted any of the things we were not going to keep.
- 9) **Hire a moving consultant.** A downsizing specialist can be a huge help when you are going through this process. Be sure they are members of the National Association of Senior Move Managers (www.nasmm.org). They will provide you with an objective and organized approach. My sister hired a consultant/designer who helped pick what went into my dad's apartment. Her team packed and unpacked everything, placed the furniture, and hung the pictures. When he arrived that afternoon the place was ready for him!
- 10) **Use the space you are looking to move into as a guide:** Be sure that you get the dimensions of the space to which you are moving. The moving consultant can help you decide what will go and what will not.
- 11) **Donating and Selling-Where do you go?**



- a. Goodwill, Salvation Army, and Am Vets are all great charitable organizations that will pick up your donations at your home. Call in advance to make sure they will take your larger items, and set up an appointment for them to come
- b. Selling can be a challenge. It is hard to know which items are of value and what should be given away or sold through the papers or other avenues.
- c. Have an estate sale. An appraiser will be able to tell you if any of the items you have are valuable and appropriately price them for you. They will usually take a percentage of what you make as their fee, but it's worth it. One estate appraiser I spoke with shared with me that one of her clients had a chair she was going to put on consignment. Turns out it was a VERY old and valuable piece of furniture that the appraiser was able to sell for \$5,000 instead of the \$250 that was initially suggested by someone else.

12) Moving Day. Hire a reputable mover, and better yet...have them pack your valuable things for you. Be sure to get "replacement value insurance". While this adds a little to the overall cost of the move, things do get damaged, and without the insurance you will only receive pennies on the dollar from the moving company, as the insurance is based on the weight of the item. When my husband and I were first married we moved to the South. Several items were broken or damaged. Two of my mother's crystal glasses were broken, and we were very surprised they were worth \$75.00 a piece. If we had not added the insurance, we would have gotten very little if anything for the items.

There are several other resources for movers, both locally and nationally. Please be sure to check out reviews for downsizing and moving companies. Use a reputable appraiser for your more valuable possessions.

Additional Resources:

National Association of Senior Move Managers: <https://www.nasmm.org/>

Moving for Seniors: A Step-By-Step Workbook: <http://amzn.com/0967123909>

Don't Toss My Memories in the Trash-A Step-by-Step Guide to Helping Seniors Downsize, Organize, and Move Moving: <http://amzn.com/0978818938>

Moving Workbook: <http://amzn.com/0978818946>

Anne Kempself is the Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Bright Oaks Group, Inc., an innovative Assisted Independence and Memory Care company.