****

**Tips for Downsizing delicately**
A move for an older adult is often an emotionally charged event. The downsizing process can be especially difficult since it will involve long walks down memory lane and having to part with much-loved possessions. But done correctly — and in enough time — the process can be less painful and more productive. Here are some tips to help your parent or loved one pare down.

* **Division of Assets:** Decide who gets what early on. Way before there’s even talk of a move, sit down with your parent or loved one and decide who in their circle will receive anything they plan to pass down. Put this in writing or tag which pieces are to be distributed to which family member. Do not wait until a week before the move to begin this process. It’s can be stressful as arguments sometimes surface over who gets what.
* **Clear Out Kid Clutter:**Work with any siblings, or children of your loved one, to clear out their childhood treasures once and for all. Parents often get stuck with prom dresses, letter jackets, schoolbooks and other mementos when their children fly from the nest. As a result, attics and basements get cluttered with all the left-behind belongings. Well before the move, organize a distribution of these items back to their rightful owners.
* **Establish a Sorting System:**Before digging into bins, boxes and closets come up with a system by which to sort. Designate areas in each room for items to be kept, tossed, donated and passed on. Then begin the downsizing derby. *Keep:* Any items needed in your loved one’s new home, jewelry, important keepsakes, heirlooms, etc. *Toss:* Anything that hasn’t been used or worn in over a year and has little to no value financially or sentimentally. *Donate:* Any clothes and furniture in good condition that someone less fortunate may need. *Pass on:* Keepsakes, heirlooms, furniture, etc., that are not following your parent or loved one to their new home.
* **Focus on Lesser-used Rooms First:**Begin the downsizing process in rooms not in use or rooms used the least in your loved one’s home. This will keep clutter and piles of unsorted items out of their everyday space and help to keep stress to a minimum.
* **Start Big:**With each room, start sorting the biggest items first. Not only will this get bigger items out of the way more quickly, you and your loved one will also feel like progress is being made sooner than if you start with smaller pieces.
* **Don’t Bury (or Throw Out) Treasures:**In the haste to downsize, valuable items — both financially and sentimentally — can be lost, tossed or hidden away in the bottom of a box. Be sure to set special pieces aside in a safe place so they don’t inadvertently get thrown in the trash or into a box marked for donation. Also mark all boxes with their specific contents and where they are to go – towels to the new bathroom, pots and pans for the new kitchen, etc. This will make it much easier to find something and to get the items to their new location.
* **Take Notes:** Often, special pieces of furniture, artwork, jewelry, even books, have special stories. These stories are what help make up family history so take note of these tales so they can be passed down for years to come.
* **Make It a Daily Task:** Work in short blocks of time over the course of a few months rather than 10-hour shifts during the week before the move. This will cause less exhaustion and provide your loved one with ample time to sort and deal with any emotions that come along with the downsizing process.
* **Be Understanding of Emotions:** Pictures, yearbooks, home movies, old greeting cards and love letters have a way of tugging at our heartstrings. Understand that your parent or loved one may have emotional moments while sifting through bins of old keepsakes and close-to-the-heart assets. It’s just as important to allow them time to sort through these emotions as it is to sort through the material possessions that trigger them.
* **List Keepsakes**: If you plan to hire outside help or enlist the help of family and friends during the downsizing process, make sure to alert them about which items — big and small — are to be kept. Doing this in list form is one idea or marking them with a sign or sticker so nothing gets mistakenly thrown out is another.
* **Slow and Steady Wins the Race:**Your loved one took years to accumulate all of their precious things. Taking time to properly sort, emotionally detach and pare down is crucial to both the process and to the wellbeing of your loved one. Don’t rush them through it or beautiful treasures and long-forgotten memories will be lost in the process.
* **When in Doubt, Hire Out:** If the downsizing process ends up being too much for you or your loved one to handle, there is help. Professional organizers and senior move managers can assist in paring down. Visit the [National Association of Senior Move Manager’s](http://www.nasmm.org) website to learn more.

**Disclaimer:** \*Julie Mills, CPO is owner of All Squared Away, LLC, a Morgantown-based business that provides Business and Residential Organizing, Downsizing, and Productivity Services to clients.  All Squared Away and its representatives are a limited liability company within the state of West Virginia.  WVU Retirees Association has engaged this speaker for our members for educational purposes only and does not endorse, nor is responsible and/or liable for their content, performance, or services.