

Preparing the Home: Where to Start

How to downsize, organize, and move forward without overwhelm

WHY THIS PART FEELS SO HARD

Preparing a parent's home is more than just cleaning things out.

It often involves:

- Decades of belongings
- Emotional attachments
- Difficult decisions

Feeling overwhelmed at this stage is completely normal.

TAKE A MOMENT:

It's worth saying out loud: this is hard for your parent and hard for you. The family home holds your history too. Give yourself permission to feel that while still moving forward.

THE BIGGEST MISTAKE

Most families think they need to go through everything before doing anything"

That leads to:

- Delays
- Frustration
- No progress

Momentum matters more than speed.

What's Inside

- A simple system for sorting a lifetime of belongings without getting stuck
- How to support your parent emotionally through one of the hardest parts of the transition
- When to get professional help — and exactly what kind to ask for

You don't need to do everything —you just need to start.

A SIMPLER WAY TO APPROACH IT

Focus on progress, not perfection

Start with:

- the easiest areas
- the least emotional items
- small, manageable sessions

WHERE TO START

Don't start with:

- photos
- keepsakes
- highly emotional spaces

Start with:

- kitchen items
- linens
- storage areas
- duplicate items

THE 4-CATEGORY METHOD

For every item, choose:

- Keep (going to new home)
- Family (given to loved ones)
- Donate / Sell
- Discard

HOW MUCH SHOULD YOU DO?

You do NOT need to:

- Empty the entire house immediately
- Make every decision upfront

Focus on: What's needed for the next step

- Moving soon? → Prioritize essentials
- Selling soon? → Clear key areas first

Let your timeline set the priority

— and don't let perfect become the enemy of done

WHEN TO GET HELP

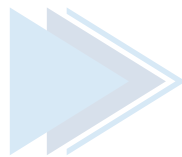
You don't have to do this alone.

Consider help if:

- The home is overwhelming
- Time is limited
- Emotions are slowing progress

Options include:

- Senior Move Managers
- Estate Sale Companies
- Family Support
- Selling the Home "AS IS"



Not sure who to call about the home? Reach out at SeniorMoveRoadmap.com/for-help



"Even a few hours of progress can make a big difference"

Avoid "maybe" piles - they slow everything down.

A note on items of potential value: before donating or discarding furniture, artwork, jewelry, or collectibles, have them appraised or reviewed by an estate sale professional. Families frequently donate or discard items worth hundreds or thousands of dollars during the stress of a move. One phone call to an estate sale company can pay for itself many times over.

Early wins build confidence.

If you're not sure where to start or the moving process feels too large to manage alone, a Senior Move Manager is a professional who specializes specifically in this kind of transition — not a general moving company, but someone trained in the emotional and logistical complexity of moving a senior. The National Association of Senior & Specialty Move Managers (NASMM) maintains a directory at nasmm.org

Some families in time-compressed situations sell "as-is", referring to a home with minimal to no preparations, rather than investing in repairs or staging. Understanding the trade-offs of this option early prevents rushed decisions later.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- Trying to do everything at once
- Starting with emotional items
- Not having a simple system
- Waiting too long to begin
- Not having proper paperwork/authority

Important Reminder

Depending on the circumstances, initiating this process before confirming that legal authority is established (if a financial power of attorney hasn't been finalized) could lead to legal complications regarding decisions about property and belongings.

Refer to Step 3 for further details.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

1. Start with one room or area
2. Use the 4-category method
3. Focus on progress

—**NOT Perfection**

Once the home is ready (or ready enough) the focus shifts to coordinating the physical move itself and handling the home. That's Step 7. The two processes don't have to happen in sequence; many families are managing both at the same time.

**Small progress NOW
prevents big stress
later..**



**"It's worth saying out loud:
this is hard for your parent
and hard for you. The family
home holds your history too.
Permit yourself to feel that
while still moving forward."**

Preparing the Home/Downsizing

Sorting through a lifetime of belongings and letting go of the family home is often one of the most emotionally difficult parts of this entire transition — for your parent and for you. Even if they logically understand it's necessary, the process can bring up powerful feelings.

Your parent will likely experience a mix of these common emotions:

- Grief and sadness over leaving a home filled with decades of memories
- Overwhelm and anxiety when faced with sorting through a lifetime of belongings
- Fear and resistance about letting go of possessions and established routines
- Guilt or loss of identity tied to no longer being a homeowner
- Relief and then guilt about feeling relieved. Some seniors reach a point where they are genuinely ready to stop managing a home, and feel guilty about feeling that way. Acknowledging this openly removes a layer of shame that doesn't need to be there.

Why these emotions are so strong

The family home usually represents far more than just a house — it holds memories of raising children, family holidays, achievements, and a lifetime of security. Downsizing can feel like losing part of their identity and history. The physical act of sorting, deciding what to keep, and letting go can be mentally and emotionally exhausting.

Helpful Things You Can Say

- “I know this house holds so many precious memories for all of us. It’s okay to feel sad about leaving.”
- “We don’t have to decide everything at once. We can take this one step at a time, and I’ll be here to help.”
- “You’ve taken care of this home for so many years. Now it’s our turn to help take care of you.”
- “Nothing will replace the memories we made here, but we can bring the most meaningful things with us so your new place still feels like home.”

What You Can Do

- Go through the house together at their pace — don’t rush the process
- Take photos of rooms and special items before packing to preserve memories
- Create a “memory book” or digital album of the house
- Focus on what they get to bring rather than what they have to give away
- Break the downsizing into small, manageable sessions instead of trying to do it all at once
- Celebrate small milestones along the way (e.g., “We finished the kitchen today”)

Tools to Move you Forward

This is one part of The Senior Move Roadmap

A 7 Step System to help families move a parent out of the home and into the right next stage—without delays, confusion, or costly mistakes.

THE SENIOR MOVE ROADMAP™

A 7 Step System to help families move a parent out of the home and into the right next stage—without delays, confusion, or costly mistakes.

Senior Move Roadmap™
Family Edition

Step 1: Is it Time?

- Signs it's time
- What happens if you wait
- First steps

Download Now

Step 2: Have the Conversation

- How to approach
- Common Objections
- Handling Sibling Disputes
- Follow Up
- Ideas to move forward

Download Now

Step 3: Make the Plan

- Create a Timeline
- Move-first vs Sell-first
- Emotional Support
- Coordination
- Finding Support

Download Now

Step 4: Understand the Costs

- Types of facilities
- Costs associated with each
- How it's paid for
- Next Steps

Download Now

Step 5: Choose the Right Place

- Comparison tool
- Questions to ask

Preparing the home is one step in a larger plan to help families move a parent safely and smoothly. It's normal to go back and forth between the steps.

Decide – Recognize it's time to act

Plan – Create a timeline and approach

Choose Care – Find the right living option

Understand Costs – Know how it will be funded

Prepare the Home – Downsize and get organized

Move – Coordinate the transition

This guide will help you take the next step—preparing the home without feeling overwhelmed



Is it Time?



Have the Conversation



Make the Plan



Understand the Costs



Choose the Right Place



Prepare the Home



Make the Move

Download all seven guides free at SeniorMoveRoadmap.com

Want guidance delivered to your inbox?

Subscribe to The Senior Move Roadmap - Family Edition at SeniorMoveRoadmap.com/newsletter



Resources to keep in mind

Most families try to handle everything themselves at first.

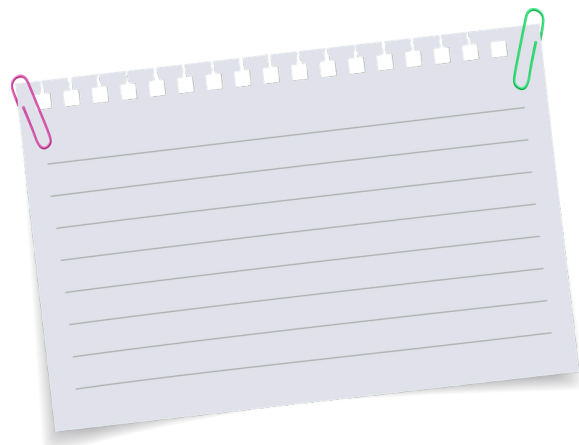
Having the right people involved early can save time, reduce stress, and prevent costly mistakes. Feel free to record other team or family members that you can count on to help.

1. Real Estate Specialist

- Can provide multiple avenues to sell the home in addition to a traditional listing such as buying it directly and/or multiple finance options. Can coordinate selling the home AS IS, allowing the family to take valuables, keepsakes, and personal items and leave the rest.
- Not all agents understand senior transitions or offer creative timing and financing solutions. Look for someone who can present multiple options — not just a traditional listing.

2. Downsizing / Move Manager

- Helps sort, organize, and reduce overwhelm
- Coordinates packing and logistics
- A certified Senior Move Manager helps sort, organize, and reduce overwhelm — and brings experience in the emotional complexity of moving seniors specifically, not just the logistics. Search nasmm.org for certified professionals.



Downsizing Checklist by Room

BEDROOM – PRIORITIZE COMFORT & NECESSITY

✓ Keep:

- Bed frame & mattress (if suitable for new space)
- Essential bedding (2-3 sets of sheets, 1-2 comforters)
- A small selection of seasonal clothes (use the one-year rule: If you haven't worn it in a year, donate it!)
- Nightstand & reading lamp

✗ Donate/Discard:

- Extra or unused furniture (dressers, chairs, bedside tables)
- Excess linens, blankets, and throw pillows
- Old or unused clothing, shoes, and accessories
- Bulky or duplicate items (like extra lamps or nightstands)

KITCHEN – STREAMLINE TO EVERYDAY ESSENTIALS

✓ Keep:

- A small set of dishes (2-4 plates, bowls, mugs, and glasses)
- Basic cookware (1-2 pots, 1-2 pans, baking sheet)
- Everyday utensils (silverware, a few serving spoons)
- 1-2 appliances used daily (e.g., coffee maker, microwave)

✗ Donate/Discard:

- Specialty kitchen gadgets rarely used (waffle makers, bread machines, etc.)
- Excess cookware, plates, and glassware
- Expired pantry items and spices
- Large or duplicate appliances
- Excess Tupperware with missing lids

LIVING ROOM – KEEP IT FUNCTIONAL & COZY

✓ Keep:

- Comfortable seating (downsized sofa or favorite armchair)
- A few sentimental decor pieces (framed photos, heirlooms)
- A small bookshelf or storage unit for organization
- TV or entertainment system (if used regularly)

✗ Donate/Discard:

- Large, heavy furniture that won't fit in the new space (china cabinets, oversized coffee tables)
- Excess decorative items (vases, figurines, artwork)
- Extra furniture that won't serve a purpose in the new home
- Outdated media (DVDs, CDs, VHS tapes)

BATHROOM – DECLUTTER & ORGANIZE FOR EFFICIENCY

✓ Keep:

- Everyday toiletries (limit to one of each item)
- Essential towels (2-4 bath towels, 2 hand towels, 2 washcloths)
- Small first-aid kit
- A few storage bins for organization

🚫 Donate/Discard:

- Expired medications and skincare products
- Old or unused makeup and beauty supplies
- Worn-out or mismatched towels and washcloths
- Excess travel-size toiletries from hotels

HALLWAY / ENTRYWAY – REDUCE CLUTTER & IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY

✓ Keep:

- A small console table or key holder
- Coat rack or hooks for outerwear
- A daily use bag or purse
- Walking cane, mobility aids (if needed)

🚫 Donate/Discard:

- Old or unworn coats, hats, and shoes
- Stacks of unread mail and paperwork
- Decorative clutter (extra vases, small furniture)

LAUNDRY ROOM – ONLY KEEP THE ESSENTIALS

✓ Keep:

- Laundry detergent, fabric softener, and stain removers
- 1-2 laundry baskets
- An iron and ironing board (if regularly used)

🚫 Donate/Discard:

- Old, worn-out cleaning rags
- Expired cleaning supplies
- Extra or broken hangers

STORAGE SPACES (GARAGE, ATTIC, BASEMENT, CLOSETS) – DECLUTTER DEEP STORAGE

✓ Keep:

- Important paperwork (store in labeled folders)
- Essential tools (hammer, screwdriver, flashlight)
- Sentimental items (limit to one small box or digitize)

🚫 Donate/Discard:

- Old holiday decorations that aren't used
- Extra tools, sports equipment, and duplicate hardware
- Boxes of "someday" items that haven't been touched in years
- Old furniture, broken appliances, outdated electronics