

# How to Manage Downsizing and Decluttering

During the pandemic, accomplishing everything from home has become the norm, and it sometimes seems that life outside the house has been canceled. All these months of being at home have given me a lot of opportunities to observe and evaluate my home environment, and I've decided I have too much stuff. In particular, I have too many things I don't need or use.

## Dösädning, aka Death Cleaning

Around middle age, some Swedish people follow a cultural tradition called dösädning, or "death cleaning." They start downsizing their belongings and giving them to family and friends so that their relatives will not be left with the burden of sorting out their personal items when they die. This idea really appeals to me. I already realize that I need to pare down my possessions, and I hate the thought of leaving that chore to someone else. By doing this, I can decide who should have certain possessions and see them enjoyed, while also having a less cluttered home.

Right now I feel overwhelmed by my possessions and want to take action. I feel the need to do a dösädning to simplify, control my chaos, and promote peace in my home. Others may need to downsize or clear an entire house for a whole host of reasons, like a divorce, an empty nest, a move to assisted living, or a death.

## Game Plan for Dealing With Your "Stuff"

Dealing with the "stuff" in your house or someone else's may seem like a daunting task and can also be emotionally difficult. We all need a game plan! Whether you're decluttering and organizing your own home, downsizing, or clearing a loved one's home after death, these tips can help you tackle that (seemingly overwhelming) task. If you are cleaning out the home of a deceased loved one, you should look at the deceased's will or identify the heirs if there is no will. It may be a good idea to get advice from a lawyer about how to handle the property.

## 7 Steps for Decluttering/ Downsizing a Home

1. **Formulate a realistic plan.** It took years to accumulate the belongings, and it may take several weeks or even months to review thoroughly.
  - Make a list of priorities
  - Set a reasonable timeline
  - Divide the work into manageable chunks, like tackling one room at a time
  - Set aside periodic blocks of time to work, but the rest of the time focus on your everyday life
  - Create momentum by starting with easy stuff that isn't emotionally charged – like the pantry or the garage
2. **Pile sort.** Assess each item and sort them into categories.
  - Keep: Items that are useful or make you feel good. Consider the following:
    - When was the last time it was used?
    - Is there space for it?
    - Does it have more than one purpose?
    - Are there multiples?
    - Do you like it?
  - Sell or appraise:

- Set aside items that may have a high value and consider having the items appraised
- Be selective in this category. Generally household items, clothing, and furniture have very little resale value
- Use eBay, Everything But the House, Letgo, or social media marketplaces to find a buyer
- Donate
- Recycle
- Trash
  - Throw away broken items, worn out clothing, and expired food
  - Rent a dumpster or hire a company to haul away discards
- 3. **Examine everything.** Before selling, donating, or discarding something, check all the nooks, crannies, pockets, and hiding places – you may find cash, jewelry, or other valuable items.
- 4. **Review papers and photos.**
- Identify and retain important documents such as:
  - Wills or trust documents
  - Real estate documents
  - Tax documents
  - Financial documents
  - Insurance policies
  - Stock certificates or bonds
  - Paperwork related to valuable items like art or jewelry
  - Birth and death certificates and social security cards
- If you don't need the originals, scan the documents and retain only electronic copies
- Shred unnecessary documents that contain confidential information like social security numbers
- Document the people in photos and get rid of photos if no one can identify the people
- 5. **Decide what to do with sentimental items.** Remember that it is not the item that is meaningful, but the memory associated with it.
  - Pick a few special or meaningful items that are associated with positive memories and showcase them
  - Don't keep things associated with a negative memory
  - When there are a lot of similar items, for example a collection, pick a few favorites and get rid of the rest
  - Photograph items and make a memory book
  - Make a quilt from t-shirts or scraps of special articles of clothing
  - Give yourself space to grieve when sorting sentimental items
- 6. **Be fair and understanding.** Decluttering or clearing out a house can be an emotional task, so try to be understanding of your family members.
  - Include everyone, whether you're decluttering your own house or a loved one's home
  - Create a fair method of divvying up items, such as drawing or taking turns choosing items
  - If the items are part of an estate, make a record of who received each item and its value
- 7. **Hire a professional.** If you are overwhelmed or can't bring yourself to get rid of things yourself, hire a professional organizer, liquidator, or trash hauling service.

*If you have questions about decluttering or downsizing an estate, please reach out to me, [Rebecca Miller](#), or another member of our [Estate Planning team](#).*