

Downsizing Doesn't Have to Be a "DOWNER"

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In Its Place



Transitioning to a smaller living space can be a scary, overwhelming, and even depressing prospect. It can be especially difficult for elderly homeowners who have lived in the same house for the majority of their adult life, or when the move is not voluntary. However, there are things you can do to assist your parents or other loved ones with moving - and moving on - to the next phase of their life so that downsizing doesn't have to be a "downer".

Whether moving into a ranch style house, a two-bedroom condo, or an assisted living facility, it is helpful to obtain a floor plan of their new home that shows the overall square footage and room dimensions. Your parents can think about which items and pieces of furniture they really want to keep around them, and the floor plan can be used to determine which of those items will realistically fit. Making cutouts of their furniture to scale and arranging them on the floor plan can be used to figure out ideal placement before moving day.

It is very likely that not everything your parents currently own will fit in their new home. But just because the physical reality of the situation seems black and white doesn't guarantee your parents' acceptance on an emotional level. Having to part with items that remind them of particular family members, friends, and times in their life can be very difficult, especially if they have issues with chronic disorganization or hoarding. Providing alternative solutions may help to ease the pain of having to let go of things. Perhaps a younger friend could use some of the furniture, or a granddaughter would be thrilled to have the china that she remembers using as a child at grandma's house. Sometimes thinking outside the box can enable them to keep a particular piece of furniture that they truly don't want to part with. For example, a corner cupboard could be used in the bedroom as a headboard. Donating to a favorite charity or other organization can also be comforting, knowing that the items will be used by someone else.

It is important to acknowledge your parents' concerns and fears and to be as patient as possible while helping them deal with the impending changes. Taking pictures of belongings or furniture pieces that just won't fit in their new home allows your parents to hold onto the memories associated with those pieces once they are gone. You can take it a step further and create a photo album, scrapbook, or memorabilia box to hold small treasured items and pictures of things that were too big to keep. Then, document or have them write stories describing where particular pieces came from, how they were used, and anecdotes about their life that revolved around those items.

Without diminishing their emotions while dealing with this change, have them consider the flip side of the loss they may be experiencing. Downsizing can hold hidden benefits, such as no longer having to maintain a large space and all the things in it. It can create joy as their loved ones receive handed-down treasures. And it can provide an opportunity to connect with family members by sharing their life history, as well as fun and important tidbits of knowledge that might otherwise have been forgotten.