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## Spring cleaning: What do I do with all my stuff?

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Now that spring is here, do you have the urge to start getting rid of things - or is it just me? One of the ways to keep your house from becoming overstuffed is to schedule a regular decluttering session a few times a year (exciting . I know). Usually, I schedule these sessions after the holidays and strategically before my free trash pickup (because it's free!).

Who knew that we even needed to schedule decluttering sessions. I'll tell you who . me. Why? Because I work with clients all the time to downsize their belongings. Approximately 90% of my downsizing clients have lived in their homes for at least 30 years! When they find themselves faced with moving to a smaller home or community, they are often overwhelmed by the vast amount of belongings they have accumulated and have no idea where to start (tip: I know where to start).

The interesting thought here is that many families park their expensive cars in the driveway so they have space in the garage to store stuff that they don't even use. It might not make financial sense, but 60% of people do this. Why? Delayed decisions. It's too hard to decide what stays and what goes (and of course, where it goes) so they put off the project altogether.

Where the heck do I start?

Before you begin, it's very important to know your end goal. Whether you are downsizing for a move or just spring cleaning, it's important to decide what you want your life to look like after you declutter. Defining your goal will help you through this often exhausting and emotional process.

Next, your items need to be sorted to decide what to donate, sell and keep. I suggest that you start with non-emotional categories such as tools, kitchen items, linens or clothes. Often, many similar items are spread throughout the house, multiple closets and the garage. Gathering all of the items (of a category) in one place is helpful because you

will see the quantity you have. Give yourself the gift of letting go!

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I always suggest taking photos of meaningful items before you start the downsizing process so they are preserved for future generations.

Heirlooms - I recommend that you keep a small number of items (5-10) to represent the generations past and present. Passing on an intentional legacy of items is a way of keeping ourselves and our family's memories alive even after we are gone. It's your family legacy and the value is determined by you!

Photos - Photos are a reminder and history of you and your family. So how do you decide what to keep? I suggest removing any duplicates, anything blurry, and anything without a person that you know in the photo. Note: After you identify the photos that you want to keep, put a description on them so the next generation knows the significance of the photo. I use the 20/80 rule here. Keep 20% of your photos, enough to fill a couple of boxes and recycle 80%.

You might want to consider digitizing your photos as well if you don't want to discard them quite yet. There are also digital services such as Legacybox that you can try as well as the app Photomyne.

Where will it go?

All of the items that will not stay with you will need to go somewhere. Here are a few options:

1. Family (or friends)
2. Consignment/Sell
3. Donation
4. Recycle/Trash

Family (or friends): There are probably many items in your home that have been passed down through the ages as well as items you have been keeping for your children - furniture, grandma's china, artwork, etc. Talk with your children or other family members about the items you are keeping for them and see if they want them. If your adult children have not landed in a permanent home, they may be reluctant to take extra stuff right now.

Consignment/Sell: If you think your item(s) have value, start researching. Look on the internet, call auction houses and send photos, or check with your local consignment store. If you have a household full of valuable items, ask an estate sales company to come out for an estimate. You can also list your items on Nextdoor, Amazon Marketplace, or Ebay.

Keep in mind that selling your items can be very time consuming and you will need to decide if it's worth it. I recommend that you pick a monetary value for items that will be worth your time to try to sell. You also need to consider that someone buying your item will need to pick it up. If you live alone and the buyer needs to come into your home, be sure to have someone at your house during the pickup time.

Donation: There are many charities where you can donate your items. You will need to call the charity to see if they are accepting donations and what categories of items they accept. Next, you may need to hire someone to transport the items to the charity (very few charities will pick up your items). Here are a few charities and other groups that might accept donations:

Habitat for Humanity

Hospice

Freecycle

Nextdoor

Buy Nothing groups on Facebook in your community

School or local libraries

Be sure to research your charities, make sure they are registered as a nonprofit to be considered for a tax write-off (check with a CPA).

Recycle/Trash: Most municipalities (Lamorinda included) have a once or twice a year free extra trash pickup. Many of them also have a reuse day. These extra pickups are a great way to get rid of a lot of items all at once. Many trash services also offer an additional free pickup each year that you can schedule at your convenience.

You can do this!

Take a deep breath, this can be an emotional rollercoaster. Give yourself permission to know that your reasons for keeping items might not be rational but they are all understandable. As they say, it's never about the stuff, it's the emotions that are tied to the stuff.

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[back](#)

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