

10 Reasons Seniors Hang On To Stuff And What To Do About It



Following, from the Home Instead Senior Care® network and Vickie Dellaquila, certified professional organizer and author of *Don't Toss My Memories in the Trash*, are 10 reasons seniors can't or won't give up their stuff and what to do about it.



- 1. THE SENTIMENTAL ATTACHMENT.** The beloved prom dress represents the history and memories of the event; it's not the dress itself. Save only a piece of the dress to make a quilt or display in a shadow box. Scrapbooking and converting photos to DVDs are other ways to save treasured keepsakes without all the extra mess.
- 2. THE SENSE OF LOYALTY.** Older adults who've received gifts from family and friends may be reluctant to part with them. Encourage your loved one to give unused gifts back to the giver or grandchildren.
- 3. THE NEED TO CONSERVE.** Seniors are the original green people. Appeal to a senior's desire to help others. "You went through the Great Depression, now it's time for you to let go and help someone else." Counter a senior's inclination to conserve by appealing to their desire to give back.
- 4. THE FATIGUE.** A home with a lifetime of memories can easily become too much for an older adult to handle. Help seniors manage clutter by establishing online bill paying. Also, get your senior off junk mail lists, which can put them at risk for identity theft, and buy them a shredder.
- 5. THE CHANGE IN HEALTH.** Seniors who have suffered a brain trauma or stroke, who are wheelchair bound or who are experiencing dementia may no longer be able to manage household duties, which could contribute to clutter. If you see a health change, encourage your senior to visit his or her doctor and consider a professional organizer and caregiver to help your loved one.
- 6. THE FEAR.** Seniors often fear what will happen if they give up their stuff, like the older adult who saved three generations of bank statements. Use logic and information to help seniors understand it's O.K. to let go.
- 7. THE DREAM OF THE FUTURE.** Those clothes in the closet don't fit anymore, but your loved one is sure that some day she'll lose enough weight to get into them. Ask seniors to fill a box with clothing they don't wear much and make a list of the items in the box. Agree that if they have not gone back to the box in six months to wear the item, they will donate that to charity.
- 8. THE LOVE OF SHOPPING.** Today's seniors have more money than any other previous generation of older adults and they love to shop. Clutter can become so bad seniors can't find things and they repurchase items they already have, contributing to the clutter cycle. Try to convince seniors to cut back and to say "no" to free stuff.
- 9. THE HISTORY AND MEMORIES.** Keepsakes represent history and memories. Encourage seniors to take old photos to a family reunion and share with several generations. Let seniors know they can contribute to the history of their time and leave a lasting legacy by donating to museums and historical societies, a theater and library, or churches and synagogues.
- 10. THE LONELINESS.** Stuff can become a misplaced companion. Loneliness may also lead to depression, which makes it difficult for seniors to get organized. Consider the services of a professional organizer and caregiver. For more information, go to the National Association of Professional Organizers at www.napo.net, or visit www.homeinstead.com.

Other experts contributing to these tips include Katherine "Kit" Anderson, CPO-CD, president of the National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization; University of Kansas Professor Dr. David Ekerdt, who is coordinating a "household moves" project to determine the role that possessions play in older people's housing decisions; and University of New Mexico Researcher Dr. Catherine Roster.

National Association of Professional Organizers | www.napo.net

Find a professional organizer near you.

National Association of Senior Move Managers | www.nasmm.org

For assistance helping older adults and their families downsize, relocate or modify their homes.

National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization | www.nsgcd.org

For various resources on combating clutter. This non-profit organization features fact sheets, a clutter-hoarding scale for professional organizers to help assess their clients, and a questionnaire to determine if someone is a chronic disorganizer. Chronic disorganization is defined by the group as ongoing (chronic), interfering with the ability to get things done or with relationships, and a history of failed self help.

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Dr. Roster is a clutter researcher who serves as research director for The National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization. She is currently working on a clutter self-assessment tool that will help clutter collectors get to the root of their issues.

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Dr. Ekerdt is coordinating a “household moves” project to determine the role that possessions play in older people’s housing decisions.

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To get seniors off of junk mail lists

www.dmachoice.org, www.catalogchoice.org, www.optoutprescreen.com.