

If Your Senior Won't Let Go...

Getting rid of stuff is actually a two-step process: sorting and deciding, on the one hand, and disposing on the other. That's according to 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. But convincing seniors can be a challenge.

Following are strategies if your loved one doesn't want to let go from Katherine "Kit" Anderson, CPO-CD, president of the National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization (NSGCD), and Vickie Dellaquila, certified professional organizer and author of *Don't Toss My Memories in the Trash*.

- 1. ARRANGE AND CHEER SMALL VICTORIES.** Suppose you spend a short time helping your loved one clear off a table. Celebrate the accomplishment together.
- 2. CONDUCT AN "EXPERIMENT."** If your loved one has 150 empty margarine tub containers, suggest donating 15 of those to a school for a painting project. Allow some time to go by and ask how she felt giving those up. Chances are she won't feel as awful as suspected.
- 3. GENTLY APPROACH THE IDEA OF HEALTH AND SAFETY.** Remind your loved ones that too much clutter can actually keep them from being safe in their homes, which could jeopardize their ability to stay at home. They could trip over papers on the floor or lose bills and medications.
- 4. DRAFT AN AGREEMENT.** Agree to box up unused clothing or tools. Carefully list what's in the box and track that for six months. If your loved one does not use the items in that time, suggest they donate them to a charity.
- 5. CONSIDER THE CONTROL ISSUE.** Clutter is all about control, but so is being the one to decide where stuff goes. Remind your loved ones if they don't decide where something will go, someone else will.



For more information, contact the National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization (NSGCD) at www.nsgcd.org or visit www.homeinstead.com. For tips on talking to a loved one about sensitive subjects, go to www.4070talk.com.

If you notice these characteristics about your senior loved ones or their homes, clutter could start creeping up on them.

1. Piles of mail and unpaid bills.
2. Difficulty walking safely through a home.
3. Frustration trying to organize.
4. Difficulty managing activities of daily living.
5. Expired food in the refrigerator.
6. Jammed closets and drawers.
7. Compulsive shopping.
8. Difficulty deciding whether to discard items.
9. A health episode such as a stroke or dementia.
10. Loneliness.

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.