

# HELPING HANDS

## and your Elderly Parents

Helping other people declutter can be tricky. If they are a friend, sibling, partner, parent, or your adult child there are relationship dynamics to manage, different clutter thresholds, different organisation styles and perhaps you're a "right handed declutterer" and they're a "left handed" one.

So what's the best way of helping others? Well there are both some consistent themes that apply to all, and some variations based on age and relationship. In this new series I'll take you through a different group each month. This week I'm focusing on possibly the trickiest one: elderly parents. So if you want to know the role of brutal honesty when helping your ageing loved ones declutter or downsize read on.

### **Olive branch or stick**

The first thing to clarify is whether they want your help or not. Even though from your perspective it may be a dire problem in need of fixing, they may have another viewpoint. No matter how far or how close your perceptions align with theirs, it's still their home and their life. If they don't want your help, then forcing the issue may harm your relationship. Clutter is not worth damaging your connection.

Make the offer. Respect the answer.

Understand it may just be a "no for now" and that they may come to you for help at a later time when they feel ready.

### **Mind your Ps and Qs**

Assuming you have offered help and they have gladly accepted it, the next thing to be aware of is your attitude.

Are you willing to stay curious, compassionate and kind to preserve your connection with each other throughout what can be an emotionally draining process for everyone?

Be brutally honest with yourself about your capacity at the moment. Will you be able to maintain a positive and caring outlook? Do you have strategies in place to help you with that?

Perhaps your own bandwidth is low and this will be one burden too many. If you find yourself only able to focus on the thoughts like "I'm doing them a big favour" or "they should be grateful for my help" or "they should want to sort this out" or "no-one else will help them with this", perhaps now is not the best time for you to focus on decluttering with them.

It's kinder to you and it's kinder to them if you can sort out your own mindset before you start so that resentment doesn't creep in. It's wise to build in support for yourself because your mindset and attitude will inevitably be challenged through the process.

### **Slow and steady**

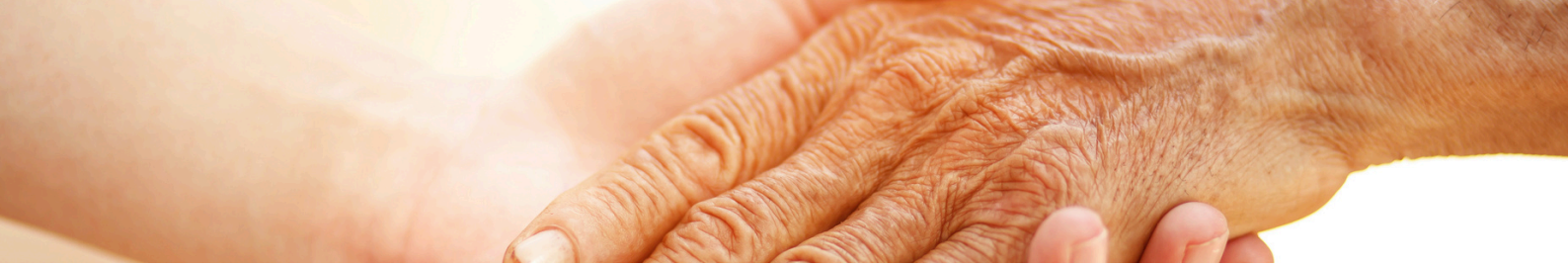
Your parents may be of an age where they are slowing down physically and mentally. That can be scary for them and make the task seem more daunting.

They may also find it emotionally challenging to confront a lifetime of belongings with all the sentiment, hopes, dreams and grief that may be attached to them.

If they are unwell or are facing the loss of family and friends through death there is an added weight to decluttering their home and confronting their own mortality. Being aware of what's going on for them can help you show up for them the way you want to: with a patient, kind and loving heart.



# BRUTALLY HONEST



### **About your teddy bear**

Many of us use our parents home as a free storage facility. A first step can be clearing out any of your own items that your parents have held onto for you. That way you're approaching the home as a clean slate and with your own decluttering credibility intact.

Even if you haven't been using your parents home to store boxes or furniture of your own, you may still come across your own items while you declutter. If so avoid getting yourself sidetracked from the main task at hand. Instead box your things up and take them away to deal with at your own home.

### **Diving in**

Clearing clutter can be overwhelming and physically demanding for anyone, let alone elderly and potentially infirm parents. With your parents it's even more important to break decluttering down into small sessions with small or micro zones, and to allow some days or weeks between sessions for them to restore their emotional, mental and physical bandwidth.

It's also important to leave the sentimental items until the end. Allow them some time and space to build their decluttering muscles before they tackle those memories.

Following the Progress Only Five Step method is critical because it means that if your parents need to stop mid session, nothing is left in a worse position than before you started. There's no mess to clean up and no piles to address. If they're tired they can simply stop in the knowledge they have made some progress. Grab the free Step by Step resources on the site.

Remember when you are following the Five Steps you don't make the decisions, your parents do. You can agree on decisions ahead of time with some categories, but take their lead.

Your parents may not want to risk disappointing you by asking for a break so keep an eye out for signs of decision fatigue or any slowing down of energy. When they've hit decision fatigue it's best for them to rest and re-set for another session, so take the lead and call it a day.

### **Rebuilding your energy reserves**

During a session stay hydrated and consider taking mini breaks after each Step or each micro zone if you are doing a few in a session.

After a session of decluttering you may not have the energy for cooking and cleaning your own place. In the days leading up to a decluttering session consider making some nutritious meals to put in the freezer for a simple re-heat, and maybe one for your parents too. While it's cooking consider even a ten minute walk in nature to help rebalance and refresh, particularly if the session was a mentally and emotionally demanding one.

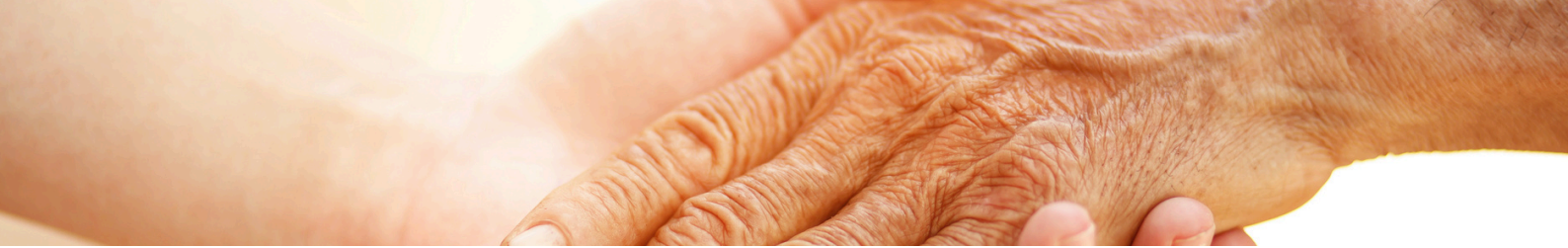
Try to maintain a regular sleep schedule and good sleep hygiene for optimal recovery.

### **Misty coloured memories**

When you do get to sentimental items it can help your parents if they can tell you some of the stories behind the items and photos so you understand why they have been important or significant items in their lives. That can help clarify whether they want to keep the item, and it can help clarify whether it might be something you want them to pass onto you, and that you want to keep.

Remember you are under no obligation to accept items or to keep forever any items they may pass onto you. We all have space and energy constraints that impact what we can prioritise keeping and managing.





### Go gently with yourself

Helping your parents declutter is a generous act and can be an incredibly bonding time. Shared laughter and tears as you relive memories and tell stories of people and events.

It can also be as emotionally draining on you as it may be on them, particularly as you confront the reality of your parents ageing in this winter of their life.

Feelings of frustration may arise as you watch them move at a pace that may be slower than you'd like, or watch them make decisions you may not agree with.

Or perhaps you're happy with the pace, decisions and progress, but still feel that mix of gratitude for the time with them, relief that the downsizing is happening now, and pre-emptive grief or sadness for what the future holds for them and for you.

These are natural reactions to a huge task. Give yourself the breaks you need.

Decluttering is a marathon not a sprint. If you want to rest, scream, cry then allow yourself the time, space and grace to do that.

You don't have to be a saint.

Just human.

### Resources

The Clear Space page has a number of resources to help you declutter, including:

- Five Step Progress Only overview
- Five Step Progress Only Step 1
- Five Step Progress Only Step 2
- Five Step Progress Only Step 3
- Five Step Progress Only Step 4
- Five Step Progress Only Step 5
- Restorative Rest series | Sensory Walk
- I Breathe series | Breathing for Calm
- Your Clear Head Space series | Thought Downloads

### Help

You may benefit from professional holistic decluttering support with the technical, mental and emotional aspects of the process. Or your parents may be better off with professional help, rather than solely relying on you.

If you're not sure, book in a Pick My Brain session and let's talk about the best approach for your whole family.

# GO GENTLY

