

MOVE WEEK

Execute the move.
Unpack intentionally.
Give yourself grace
as you adjust to your
new space.



A Note on Timing

This timeline assumes you have the luxury of planning ahead. Not everyone does. health changes, financial pressures, or family circumstances sometimes accelerate the process. If you're working with a compressed timeline, the same phases still apply. They just happen faster and require more support.

The most important thing is to start. Even if you're not ready to move for several years, beginning the sorting process now will make everything easier when the time comes.

THE SORTING SYSTEM

Sorting through a lifetime of belongings is the part of downsizing that stops most people before they start. The task feels impossible because it is impossible, at least the way most people approach it.

You cannot sort your entire home in a weekend. You cannot make hundreds of emotional decisions in a single sitting without burning out. And you cannot keep everything and still successfully downsize.

What you can do is follow a system. A system removes the guesswork and breaks an overwhelming project into manageable pieces.

The four-box method

Every item in your home belongs in one of four categories:

KEEP AND MOVE

This item is coming with you to your new home. It serves a purpose or brings you genuine joy. You use it regularly or it holds irreplaceable meaning.

SELL OR DONATE

This item has value but no longer serves you. Someone else could use it. Let it go with gratitude for what it gave you.

GIFT TO FAMILY

This item has sentimental significance that a family member would appreciate. A piece of furniture your daughter always loved. Photo albums your grandchildren should have. The key here is to ask before assuming. Don't burden your family with items they don't want just because you feel guilty letting them go.

DISCARD

This item is broken, worn out, outdated, or has no value to anyone. Throw it away or recycle it. No guilt required.

Get four boxes or bins and label them. Work through one space at a time, placing every single item into one of the four categories. No "maybe" pile. No "deal with later" pile. Decide and move on.

The room-by-room approach

Start with the easiest room in your house. For most people, this is a guest bedroom, storage closet, or garage. These spaces hold fewer emotional landmines and give you quick wins that build momentum.

Save the hardest spaces for last. The bedroom closet full of your late spouse's clothing. The boxes of your children's artwork. The photos spanning decades. You'll be stronger and more practiced by the time you get there.

Here's a suggested order:

- Guest bedrooms and bathrooms
- Garage, attic, basement, storage areas
- Home office or spare rooms
- Kitchen and dining room
- Living areas
- Your bedroom and primary bathroom
- Sentimental items, photos, and memorabilia

The one-year rule

If you haven't used something in the past year, you probably don't need it. This applies to clothing, kitchen gadgets, tools, hobby supplies, and almost everything else.

Exceptions exist. Holiday decorations. Formal wear for rare occasions. Emergency supplies. But be honest with yourself. That bread maker you've been meaning to use for six years? Let it go.



HANDLING SENTIMENTAL ITEMS

This is where most people get stuck. The item itself may have no practical value, but it represents a memory, a person, or a chapter of your life.

A few strategies that help:

Take a photo. You can keep the memory without keeping the object. Create a digital album of items you're letting go. The photo takes up no space and preserves the sentiment.

Keep one, not twelve. You don't need every piece of your grandmother's china. Keep one place setting or a single serving dish that brings back the memory. Release the rest.

Repurpose the meaningful. Turn a wedding dress into pillow covers. Frame a small piece of your father's favorite shirt. Transform sentimental fabric into a quilt. The item lives on in a new form.

Set a limit. One box of memorabilia per decade of your life. One bin of your children's keepsakes per child. Constraints force you to keep only what matters most.

Accept imperfection. You will let go of something and later wish you hadn't. It happens to everyone. Forgive yourself in advance and keep moving.

The Replacement Test

For items you're unsure about, ask yourself: if I let this go and realized I needed it later, could I replace it? If yes, let it go. If the item is truly irreplaceable (family heirlooms, original photographs, one-of-a-kind pieces), it may be worth keeping. Everything else can be rebought if necessary.

Working in Sprints

Sort for 90 minutes, then stop. Take a break. Come back the next day. Decision fatigue is real, and the quality of your choices degrades the longer you push.

Some people prefer sorting every day for a short period. Others prefer one longer session per week. Find the rhythm that works for you and protect that time on your calendar. Consistency beats intensity.

When to Bring in Help

There's no shame in hiring a professional organizer or senior move manager. These specialists do this work every day. They bring objectivity, efficiency, and emotional support. If you're feeling stuck or overwhelmed, outside help can be the difference between progress and paralysis.

Family members can help too, but choose wisely. You want someone who will support your decisions, not someone who will argue about every item or pressure you to keep things you don't want.