



Labelling boxes for different destinations such as family, charity and auction is useful when preparing to downsize.

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Downsizing shouldn't wait until you're forced to move

IT'S MUCH EASIER TO CLEAR THE CLUTTER BEFORE YOU FIND A DEADLINE STARING YOU IN THE FACE

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For many people, downsize is a dirty word.

They look at packed-to-the-brim closets, overstuffed drawers and can't face the onslaught of decisions required to make things more manageable. They put it off for another day and accumulate even more things. Then, sometimes unexpectedly, circumstances change and they have to move into a smaller space. The daunting task that had simmered away on the back burner for years is suddenly a top priority, often with a deadline attached.

This is why it's never too early to start downsizing, even if you don't need to move. It is much easier and less stressful to spread the process out over several weeks or even months than be forced to deal with it all in a few days. Done gently and with the right help, the process can even be satisfying and pleasant.

Imagine rediscovering clothes and shoes you forgot you had, some of which may still fit. Imagine what that closet, attic



or basement would look like cleaned up and rearranged so you can see what's in there and open the door without a sense of dread. Imagine the pleasure of turning up old letters or photographs you haven't seen for years. Imagine giving family keepsakes to loved ones yourself rather than leaving them in a will. In fact, downsizing is the perfect thing to do just before family visits because it gives you a chance to tell your children and grandchildren the stories behind the treasures.

How and where to start

The best place to start is wherever you feel the least intimidated and will have the most success. Wherever that is, you will need to sort things into categories — usually keep, discard, sell, donate and give to family. It helps to keep activities small and frequent, no more than an hour at a time. Box things up and remove them as soon as you can to clear space.

Also consider involving family and friends in the downsizing process. They can provide

support as well as objectivity. Grandchildren in particular can be helpful in selling things on online classified sites. They may also be setting up their first apartment and need some of the things you are getting rid of. For people who don't have family or friends available, there are companies such as Changing Places that can help.

If you're moving

If a move is in the works, it helps to think of downsizing as part of the creation of a new

home and a new phase in your life. Think of moving as the perfect opportunity to take stock of what you have and think about your future needs.

Useful questions to ask yourself during this process include: When was the last time I used this? Will I need it in my new home? If I want to keep it but there's no room, is there somewhere I can store it? If I don't want to keep it, where could it go — to family or a charity? Could I sell it? Does it need to be repaired?

Many people feel good about giving things they don't need to charity, knowing they are helping someone else. Downsizing also helps realtors stage a house if it is on the market. Finally, selling things you no longer use often helps cover the cost of the move.

In the end, you gain peace of mind knowing the things you love will come with you to your new home, making it comfortable, safe and familiar. You'll know how that new home will look and that everything will fit.

As for the things that don't come with you, it is comforting to know that they have been passed on to the best new stewards — family, charity, auction or the recycling bin — and that you have released them with a blessing.

Jane Dewing and John Verster run the Changing Places moving and downsizing service in Victoria and Metro Vancouver.