

# 9 Decluttering Tips for Seniors



Clutter can be a challenge for many older adults after a lifetime of collecting cherished belongings. However, too much clutter isn't just inconvenient—it can create serious safety risks, such as tripping hazards, pest infestations, poor air quality, and even fire dangers. Blocked entrances and exits can also make it difficult to escape or receive help in an emergency.

**To create a safer, more comfortable home, here are nine practical decluttering tips to help seniors clear out excess while keeping what matters most.**

## **1** Make a plan.

Identify the specific areas of the home to be decluttered and prioritize them. Make sure the goals and timeline are realistic and attainable.



## **2** Start small.

Begin with a single area, room, or even a single shelf or drawer. To boost confidence, consider starting with an achievable goal that can be completed quickly. Or start with items that are less emotional, like perhaps clothing.



## **3** Be collaborative.

Respect your loved one's choices and feelings and make sure they have the final say on decisions made during the decluttering process.



## **4** Listen and support.

Truly hear your loved one's feelings about their possessions and be respectful and nonjudgmental.



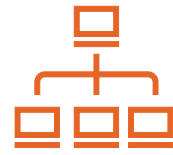
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### **Categorize items.**

Create clear categories of “keep, donate, recycle, and discard” to use when deciding the fate of a belonging.



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### **Show empathy.**

Your words matter. Referring to your loved one’s belongings as junk or trash can be hurtful and may cause them to lose trust and feel disrespected and misunderstood.



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### **Focus on safety.**

Instead of a total cleanout, focus decluttering tasks toward improvements to preserve safety and dignity.



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### **Recognize setbacks.**

Progress may not be linear. Occasional regressions may occur, which is normal. Identify these setbacks and adjust the plan accordingly. Reinforce that you are there for your loved one and will remain available to help.



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### **Ask for help.**

In cases of severe clutter or hoarding, consider working with a professional organizer who has experience with strategies to help. Consulting a mental health professional may also help the hoarder understand the underlying issues and learn coping techniques.



It may take a spouse, sibling, other family member, friend, or professional caregiver to recognize when living conditions have gotten unsafe or unhealthy due to excess stuff. But with ongoing support, an older adult can change their behavior, reclaim their home, and improve their quality of life.



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