

Out with the Old, In with the New – Managing Clutter for your Senior Parent

It's that time of year - Time when we pull out decorations, dust off old collections, and look forward to the giving and receiving of the season. The only problem is that when your aging parents need assistance in this area, helping them deal with all of the actual "stuff" can feel overwhelming. As you get ready to help them decorate their home, you realize the amount of possessions they have really has grown out of control. They simply cannot use all of it anymore, and yet are unwilling to give any of it up. The idea of having anything additional coming in as gifts for the holidays adds stress for you. Where are we going to put it? So much really does need to go. The home is beyond cluttered, disorganized, and even borderline unsafe because they cannot keep up with it anymore.

You broach the subject, asking if they remember the expression, "Out with the old, in with the new," in hopes of opening the discussion of how to begin the practice of clearing out. But you are met with a mom and/or dad reluctant to let anything go. Photos, collectibles, old clothes, books, glassware, china, furniture... a lot of the items they've gathered over the years would be great to pass on, have a garage sale, or sell online on Craigslist or eBay. So what can you, the adult child, do to get the process going so that they don't end up on the T.V. show "Hoarders"?

We have **4 tips** to get you started, and offer solutions to dealing with their clutter. In a relatively short time, their space will be noticeably more organized, and more importantly safe and comfortable for them.

4 Tips to Manage Clutter

1. Start with the refrigerator. – Seniors frequently struggle to "manage" their refrigerators. It may be that it is difficult for them to clean this large appliance and keep track of items inside. Look for spoiled food that you can remove so that they don't accidentally eat something that could be making them sick. This will also reduce odors, mold and bacteria. Bag up the old or rotten items, and get them out of the house to cast away in the garbage or dumpster.

2. Target one room first. – Depending on what is in this room, how full it is filled, and the purpose it serves, target what you would like your parent to go through, and set an estimate of time to keep it manageable. If it is chalk full of "stuff", start small. Choose a shelf on a bookcase, or look to one corner. Then have several different empty bags or boxes that you can categorize as: trash, donate, sell, give-away, keep. As you look through the items, identify which box/bag they need to go into. Expect your mom or dad to resist. These possessions may hold sentimental value, stir emotions or memories. Allow for a little time to reminisce and share these moments with your loved one.

3. Enlist help. – This sorting and clearing process can be a lot for one person to take on with their parents. Try to get help from siblings or close friends or another relative who can help support you and keep your parents on track. Or if you don't have a brother or sister, or another relative who can step in to help, consider hiring a professional organizer. Besides the fact that she will likely have the skills to work through the space much more quickly and efficiently than you, some seniors will be more receptive to the pro's suggestions since the emotional connection between the two of them is not there.

They will be able to assure your parents that they will not throw anything away without their permission. The professional will come in and have the proper questions to guide your parents through the process of identifying what they can let go of, give to others, and find ways to make use of or store items they will keep.

4. Go through medications. – It's not uncommon for the elderly to have a multitude of medications they take for a variety of ailments. If they are slowing down, or getting weaker as they age, they may not be tracking their medicines as well as they should. If they are given a new prescription before finishing another, or have doctors working on dosages to regulate them, they can end up with unfinished bottles of medications. The more medicine they have collected over time, the greater the chance for making a mistake in consumption, or creating confusion. It's a good idea to go through their medicine cabinet with them on a regular basis to stay on top of the situation. In so doing, you could discover that they have been taking wrong medications or in the wrong order. If this is the case, you can catch the error and contact the doctor to inform him and get your parent safely back on track.

Complimentary Assessment

Dealing with mounting clutter and an environment that is potentially unsafe for your parents is challenging. But helping them reduce the amount of "stuff" will improve their living conditions, and allow for more pleasant visits when you aren't worried about what is growing out of control around you.

For more information or to help with any questions you may have, please visit us online or call us now at 1.707.763.6600. If you are at all concerned about your parents' well-being please do not hesitate to [schedule an in-person complimentary assessment](#). We will contact you within 24-hours to complete all the arrangements.

Gabriella Bio:

Gabriella has been involved in caring for others for over 30 years, beginning as a Nurse's Aid in a nursing home in Italy, her native country. After graduating from the University Hospital Nursing School in Padua, she worked for several years as a Registered Nurse in the Emergency Rooms and the Intensive Care Units of two major Italian hospitals. Gabriella first moved to the United States in the 1980's and earned her BA in Biological Sciences from Rutgers University. She then returned to Italy where she pursued a career in Marketing with the international branch of Baxter Healthcare Corporation, becoming European Marketing Manager for a major product line. She returned to the United States in the 1990's and earned a Master's degree in Marketing from Golden Gate University.

Gabriella has served on the Board of Directors of CASA – Court Appointed Special Advocates. She also has served on the Advisory Council of Area Agency on Aging of Sonoma County. In 2009 she received the Women in Business Award from the North Bay Business Journal. Gabriella Ambrosi is the co-founder, President, and CEO of Sequoia Senior Solutions, Inc., a company that has been providing in-home care

for the elderly since 2003. Sequoia Senior Solutions employs compassionate caregivers who are bonded, insured, trained, and supervised. Since its inception, the company has made it possible for more than 1000 seniors and younger needy adults to remain at their place of residence, even when faced with disabilities.

Prior to owning Sequoia Senior Solutions Gabriella had worked for many years in the health care industry. Her education includes a Registered Nurse degree from the University Hospital of Padua, Italy, a BA in Biological Sciences from Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ, and a MS in Marketing from Golden Gate University in San Francisco, CA. She lives in Petaluma with her husband Stanton Lawson and their 3 children, Cody, Conrad, and Martin.