

A FREE WILLOWBARROW FAMILY GUIDE

The Gentle Downsizing Checklist

A smaller home can still hold comfort, memories, and the things that matter most.



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Questions? Write to hello@willowbarrow.com - or get matched, free, at willowbarrow.pages.dev/get-matched/

Begin early, gently, and together

Give yourselves more time than you think you need. Downsizing is easier when it happens in small steps, with breaks, rather than in a rush.

Start with kind conversations about what will make the new apartment feel safe, familiar, and welcoming. Focus on what your parent wants to bring into this next chapter, not just what needs to be left behind.

Try working in short sessions and stopping before anyone feels worn out. It is normal for grief, relief, and uncertainty to show up side by side.

- Pick one room or one category at a time.
- Set a simple goal for each session.
- Take photos of rooms before you begin, if that feels meaningful.
- Pause when emotions rise and come back later.

Sort with a simple keep, share, donate, let-go system

Use a clear sorting method in every room so decisions feel less overwhelming. Many families find it helpful to label boxes or areas: keep, share with family, donate, and let go.

The goal is not perfection. The goal is choosing the items that support daily life, comfort, and joy in the new home.

If a decision feels hard, make a temporary maybe box and revisit it later. A little distance can make choices easier.

- Keep: favorite furniture, daily essentials, meaningful photos, treasured décor, comfortable clothing.
- Share: family heirlooms, extra dishes, books, tools, holiday items.
- Donate: good-condition items that no longer fit the new space or lifestyle.
- Let go: broken, expired, duplicate, or unused items.



Go room by room

In the kitchen, keep the dishes, mugs, utensils, and small appliances your parent truly uses. Most senior-living apartments need only a smaller set of practical favorites.

In the bedroom, focus on comfort and ease. Keep well-fitting clothing, favorite bedding, everyday shoes, and a few personal touches that make the room feel familiar.

In the bathroom, keep only current toiletries, easy-to-use storage, and the items used every day. Safely dispose of expired products and ask the community what is provided.

In the living room, choose seating, lamps, photos, and décor that fit the new layout and support everyday routines like reading, visiting, or watching television.

For closets, garage, attic, and storage areas, expect these spaces to take longer. They often hold duplicates, old paperwork, and items saved for someday.

- Start with easier spaces before tackling sentimental ones.
- Use laundry baskets or bins to carry sorted items out right away.
- Remove donations and trash regularly so progress stays visible.

Measure the new apartment before choosing furniture

Get a floor plan if one is available, and measure key walls, windows, doorways, and walking paths. Also measure the furniture you hope to bring.

A senior-living apartment usually works best with fewer, well-loved pieces rather than trying to recreate every room from the old house. Leave space to move around easily and safely.

Think about daily routines. A favorite chair by the window, a small table for tea, and easy access to the bed and bathroom may matter more than bringing many extra pieces.

- Measure bed, dresser, nightstands, sofa, recliner, dining table, and bookcases.
- Check whether the apartment includes any furniture or window coverings.
- Plan for clear walkways and easy reach to frequently used items.
- Bring a few meaningful pieces of art or photos instead of many small objects.



Handle sentimental items with dignity

Some belongings carry a whole life inside them. Slow down for these decisions. Stories, memories, and family history deserve care.

Ask your parent to share the story behind special items. You can write it down, record a voice note, or label the item for the next generation.

Not every meaningful object has to be kept physically to be honored. Photos, scanned letters, or a small memory book can preserve what matters while reducing clutter.

If family members want keepsakes, choose a calm process. Offer clear deadlines, take pictures of available items, and keep the focus on respect rather than urgency.

- Create one memory box for letters, medals, recipes, and small keepsakes.
- Photograph collections before parting with them.
- Keep a small number of favorite holiday or family tradition items.

- Let your parent make final choices whenever possible.

Gather paperwork and make a calm move-in plan

Keep important documents together in one clearly labeled folder or portable file box. Bring only what is needed and store it in an easy-to-find place.

Before moving day, confirm the apartment number, move-in window, parking or elevator details, and any items the community asks families to label. Ask what is welcome to be delivered ahead of time.

Pack an open-first bag or suitcase for the first day and night. This helps the new apartment feel settled quickly, even if boxes are still arriving.

On move-in day, keep the schedule simple. Set up the bed first, then the bathroom, then a comfortable chair, medications and daily essentials, and a few familiar decorations. Save extra organizing for later.

- Gather identification, insurance cards, legal and contact documents, medication list, and community paperwork.
- Pack first-day essentials: phone charger, toiletries, change of clothes, pajamas, favorite blanket, important papers, glasses, and basic snacks if allowed.
- Label boxes by room and priority: open first, bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, décor.
- Plan easy meals and rest breaks for everyone.
- Expect mixed emotions and a lighter schedule for the next few days.



Leaving a long-time home is a big emotional step, and no family has to sort it out alone. If you would like support, Willowbarrow can help you get matched for free with senior-living communities that fit your parent's needs, preferences, language, and budget.



