

Organizing for Seniors

Jennifer Gittins-Harfst
Professional Organizer
NoFrillsOrganizing.com



Overview

- It sounds simple, but **one of the greatest gifts you can give your adult children** is having your home and records in order
- What is an orderly home?
 - Clean and free of random piles
 - Items in boxes/bins are known and labeled
 - Organization and intentionality to visible and stored items
- What are orderly records?
 - Centralized listing of all household/personal accounts
 - All paperwork/records are organized, and updated regularly
- Be aware that decluttering can be an emotional process:
 - Parting with possessions can trigger anxiety, frustration, anger, or depression
 - Acknowledge the emotions, work through them, and the results will be worth it!



Benefits



- Benefits to you:
 - Peaceful surroundings and reduced stress
 - Find items easily; don't waste \$\$ ordering duplicates
 - All information accessible to make best decisions
 - Properly honor cherished mementos
- Benefits to your children:
 - Quickly find necessary information in an emergency
 - Ease of mind about your daily environment
 - Greatly reduced physical, emotional, psychological burden when settling your estate, and afterward

Organizing: Records

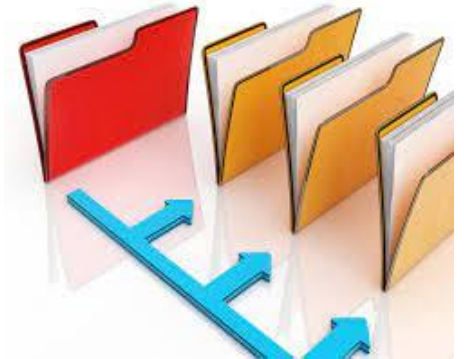


- Types of household records to list:
 - Credit/debit cards (note recurring charges)
 - Bank accounts (note automatic deductions)
 - Investments, pensions, annuities, social security
 - Insurance for items (car, house, rental, etc.)
 - Insurance for people (health/dental, long-term care, life)
 - Health care providers (create separate documents with results trends, medical conditions, significant events, medications, etc.)
 - Utilities (gas, electric, water, Internet, TV, etc.)
 - Rewards programs and store loyalty cards
 - Physical items (car title, tax returns, social security card, birth certificate, passport, mortgage documents, wills)
 - Personal accounts (email, social media, cell phone access)
 - Personal contacts (family, friends, activities, close neighbors)
 - “Who Does What” (lawyer, electrician, plumber, tax preparer, lawn)
 - *extra* Household inventory (data, photos, and video)

4 TIP: May want to include “final wishes” (e.g., disposition of items, burial/cremation preference, funeral music, who to notify, preferred pallbearers) as precursor/supplement to will

Organizing: Records (cont'd)

- Information to include in list:
 - Account number
 - Contact information
 - Location (if physical document)
 - ID/Password (store separately)
- Method of storage:
 - Electronic (password-protected)
 - Paper printout, hidden but known
- Updating frequency:
 - Be sure to update as information changes (e.g., new credit card number, change in cable TV provider, etc.)



Organizing: Household

Why do people hang on to stuff?

- Item was expensive
- Not sure what to do with item
- Don't want to hurt someone's feelings
- I might need item
- Item holds memories (see p.7)
- Pressured by (extended) family to keep it
- Stuck (fear/uncertainty/guilt/regret/shame)
- Childhood with clutter; no role model for purging
- Childhood with no stuff; overcompensate
- Childhood with loss; comfort from stuff no one can take away



Organizing: Household (cont'd)



How to Address the Emotions in Sentimental Items

(taken from Simply + Fiercely)

- Some say: “Your memories live in your heart, not in your belongings. It’s just stuff.”
- But really: “**Your stuff is NOT just stuff**” ...almost everything tells a story.
- Stories aren’t physically in our items, but denying their existence altogether only shames people who struggle to get rid of stuff, which makes decluttering even harder.
- Example -- grandmother gave you a vase:
 - Name the emotion (guilt/time, her support, nostalgia for that ‘you’)
 - Address the emotion (forgive yourself, get/give support, mourn/rejoice)
 - Choose appropriate sorting pile (see p. 8)
 - Decluttering can lead to personal growth and a more harmonious space
- If you keep the item, be deliberate/honor: display, “Me Box”, choose a place
- If you get rid of the item, you may wish to take a picture and write the story (PBS’s “Legacy List” show). But, don’t overburden family with your discards.
- To help your family, make a list of everything with significance to you, so they can avoid the ‘crying-about-the-unknown-at-the-dumpster’

Organizing: Household (cont'd)

METHODS



- There is no one 'correct' method!
EASY – Evaluate, Action, Sustain, Yearn
SPACE – Sort, Purge, Assign a home, Containerize, Equalize (by Julie Morgenstern)
- Place into sorting piles:
 - Keep
 - Give Away/Donate (see p. 15 for sources)
 - Toss
 - Recycle/Reuse (see p. 16 for sources)
 - Sell (see p. 14 for sources)
 - Specialty: Lost & Found; "Dilemma/Hold Box" "Me Box" (by GAoSDC)
- "10 for 5": 10 minutes of cleaning, 5 days/week, for 5 weeks
- Schedule time: make an appointment with yourself
- Start small: small project or area of room; success begets success
- Set goals: break down into achievable tasks/projects

Organizing: Household (cont'd)

TIPS



- Everything should have a 'home'
- Group similar items together
- Be realistic (\$\$ value, clothing sizes, desirability, 'someday')
- Ask your children what they do/don't want; consider giving now
- Create a place for incoming items (and process quickly)
- Take a picture, write the story (PBS's "Legacy List" show), let item go
- Share significance of special items you are keeping
- Get creative with storage (binders for wrapping paper pieces, shoe boxes for cords). Don't stress over not having matching containers!!
- Ask yourself, "What makes me happy? What am I sick of dealing with?"
- Seek out unused space for storage (on closet doors, vertical above desk)
- Corral/divide smaller items (small bins for binder/paper clips, batteries, and to separate underwear/socks)
- Ask for help
- Remember: slow progress is still progress & will look worse before better

PRO ADVICE: "Clutter is nothing but delayed decisions" (by Messie Condo)

"Don't put it down; put it away" (by Shira Gill)

Senior-Specific Suggestions



- When choosing where to store something, don't put it too high, because of the risk of falls; don't put it too low, because of the difficulty of bending over.
- “Thinning out possessions on a regular basis and living in an organized manner helps avoid both the physical and emotional trauma of having to do it all at once.” (by Vickie Dellaquila)
- Clear clutter from steps and entryways; mount a basket to the wall to hold the items you want to take up- or downstairs.
- Keep a three-tier cart on the main level of your home, to house the things you'll use that day.
- Get rid of useless items that could be dangerous - broken mugs/ glasses, unused electronics and wires, broken/unused appliances, old or broken chairs/couches, old medications.
- Keep valuables out of sight when home repair contractors come over.
- Post the magnetic “File of Life” on your refrigerator door (free at fire depts.)

Senior-Specific Suggestions (cont'd)



I like that idea

- Be mindful of what you buy...don't overbuy to fill loneliness:
 - Will I use it? Where will I store it? Do I need it? Do I have something similar? Can I afford it? What emotions am I feeling when I make the purchase?
- “If you haven't by now, you probably never will”...consider purging collections of ‘someday’ project/craft items
- To help minimize accumulation of ‘stuff’, encourage friends and loved ones to buy you non-tangible gifts, for example: (based on list by Vicki Dellaquila)
 - Tickets to theatre, sporting events, movies, lectures, trip/tour (even for local)
 - Registration fees paid for a class at a senior center, rec center, comm. college, LLI/OLLI
 - Professional services, such as cooking, cleaning, organizing, transportation, errands
 - Car-related care, such as oil change, car wash
 - Gift cards for restaurants, drug store, coffee house, department/big-box store
 - Self-care experiences, such as beauty salon, spa
 - Treats, such as specialty teas/coffee, unique wine/beer, gourmet gift basket, Edible Arrangements, subscription to fruit/cheese/cookie-of-the-month
 - Flowers or plants

Maintaining



- “Do it now” vs. “I’ll get around to it”
- “Clutter is sticky” (mess attracts more mess)
- Know your trouble spot(s) and stay vigilant!
- “The perfect is the enemy of the good.”
- Always consider the trade-offs.
- Know your peak times for energy to do tasks.
- Know your productivity pattern (easy or hard first).
- Make (comprehensive) to-do lists.
- Constantly re-evaluate/re-assess need for an item.
- New habits take time, but it does get easier!

Maintaining (cont'd)



- My specific maintaining tools for items:
 - lock box for important papers
 - charger organizing station
 - bins on entry hall table
 - shelf unit above washer/dryer
 - over-the-door hooks (closet & laundry)
 - desk vertical stackers
 - large accordion file for blank greeting cards
 - nails/screws organizing drawer box
 - shelves/rack on basement landing walls
 - corner coat rack for totes, hats, gloves
- My maintaining tools for records:
 - accordion file for current year tax papers
 - list of home-related purchase and maintenance dates (e.g., “pressure-wash July 2023”)
 - standardized grocery shopping list (functional groupings, e.g., veggies, drinks, breakfast)
 - standardized packing list for trips (e.g., sleepwear, personal care items, food to bring)
 - household cleaning dates list (e.g., clean the oven, blinds, vent covers, sink stoppers)
 - catch-all binder for frequently used info and odds-and-ends (dates lists above, new stores to try, medical lists, hard-to-find grocery locations, brand ongoing evaluations)
 - purchases printout folder (household items bought, for replacing/buying again)
 - household repairs folder (invoices for all repairs done)
 - list and documentation of all improvements to house (for basis when selling)

Sources - Sell



You Sell On-line

- *eBay* (or hire someone to do it) - *Facebook Marketplace*
- *thredUP*: clothes - *Chairish*: furniture, home decor
- *Poshmark*: clothes, electronics, home goods

They Buy Remote or Pick-Up

- *Gryphon Estate Silver* - *Book Bliss* (pickup)
- *Mid-Atlantic Military Antiques* (pickup)
- *Beanie Babies*: Sell2BBNovelties, Sell4Value (also Lladro); or donate to World Help thru Linda Wheeler, (703) 475-5347, LindaWheeler79@hotmail.com
- *decluttr*: books, DVDs/CDs, iPod/iPad, consoles/games, laptops
- *Kaiyo*: furniture and décor (pickup)
- *Orion's Attic*: estate liquidation
- *Paradigm Experts*: fine art, silver/serveware, coins, jewelry, entire estate (may pickup)
- *Second Story Books* (pickup for big amount)
- *Replacements Inc.*: glass-, dinner-, flat-ware
- *Amazon* (for gift card): audio, Kindles, tablets, home security, wireless routers
- *Best Buy* (for trade-in): mobile phones, cameras/camcorders, laptops, gaming...also do in-store
- *Target* (for trade-in): mobile phones, tablets, smart speakers, gaming, MP3, wearables...also do in-store

They Buy On-Site

- *Antiques*: Mom 'n Pop Antiques, Capital Antiq. (fine items)
- *Books*: Reston Used Books, The Company of Books, Second Story Books, McKay Used Books, 2nd & Charles
- *Coins*: Ffx Coin & Collectibles, Penny Pincher, US Penny&Coin
- *Comics*: Amazing Comic Shop, McKay
- *Flags* (old U.S.): Fairfax Coin & Collectibles (also silver/gold)
- *Furniture and accessories*: Eisenhower Consignment
- *Gold/Silver Jewelry*: many local, look on-line
- *Rugs and other home goods* (consign): Evolution Home
- *Scrap Metal*: Potomac Metals, RRT Metals -- appliances (except dishwashers), copper, A/C units, brass plumbing/radiators, aluminum siding/window, car battery
- *Vinyl Records*: Vienna Music Exchange, CD Cellar, Som Records, Records & Rarities (and video)
- *Collector's World*: movie/sports memorabilia, comics, cards
- *Game Stop*: video games/consoles/ accessories
- *McKay Used Books*: games, puzzles, CDs/DVDs, video games/consoles/accessories, Beanie Babies
- *Tyson's Watch & Jewelry Exch.*: jewelry, watches, purses
- *2nd & Charles*: collectibles, toys/figures, vinyl/CDs/DVDs, games, video game-related, small electronics, musical instruments

Auction On-Site (Indiv. items and/or Estate)

- Quinn's Auction Galleries, Alexandria Auctions, Prime Auction Solutions, Alex Cooper Auctioneers, Weschler's Auctioneers (indiv. fine items only); estate only: Fair Auction Company, MaxSold (not in Virginia)

Sources – Give Away/Donate



GENERAL

SPECIFIC

- *Friends/Family* - *Church Sales*
 - *Thrift Shops* that benefit local organizations
 - *Theater Groups* (high school and community)
 - *FreeCycle & NextDoor*: in-person at your home
 - *BuyNothing*: same, via Facebook or app
 - *Salvation Army* (will pick-up free)
 - *Goodwill*: drive-up/drop-off @Fairfax (pick-up for fee)
 - *Unique Thrift*: drive-up/drop-off, @Falls Church
 - *Savers Thrift*: @Fairfax & Woodbridge
 - *ACCA*: household items @Annandale
 - *ALIVE!*: housewares @Alexandria
 - *Central Union Mission*: household items, linens, clothes @DC
 - *CHO*: clothes, small furniture @Vienna
 - *ECHO*: small appliances, linens, rugs, clothes, household, kitchen items @Springfield
 - *Passion for Community*: household goods and small furniture @Chantilly (may pick-up)
 - *Suited for Change*: fem. work clothes @DC
 - *A Wider Circle*: same as *ECHO*, plus TVs (<30") and mattresses @SilverSpring
 - *Women Giving Back*: fem./kids clothing @Sterling
 - *Large items and junk hauling* (for a fee): Donation Nation, 123 Junk, 1-800-GOT-JUNK, and Junk Maven will try to donate and recycle
- NOTE: Green Drop and Pickup Please will pick-up but items are usually sold, not used for the needy, or sometimes bulk-sold (good for stained/holes fabric)

- *Art supplies*: school art departments, UpCycle Creative Reuse Center (they also take a variety of odd things...check website)
- *Bicycles*: Robbie Pruitt Bike Ministry, Wheels to Africa, Bikes for the World, Phoenix Bikes, Gearin' Up Bicycles
- *Blankets/towels/heat pads*: veterinarians, animal shelters/day care
- *Books*: Better World Books (drop box, all books), Turning the Page (DC charity, pickup lg), Freeman Store drop-off, Zappos for Good (prepaid label, for charity), (bookmooch.com (can trade-in), libraries)
- *Cars*: The Car Ministry, refurbishes for needy
- *Cell Phones* (for victims): DC Metro Police Dept, Secure the Call, Big Sky, Verizon HopeLine
- *Eyeglasses*: Lions Club, Mom's Market, eyecare providers
- *Furniture pick-up*: ACCA, A Wider Circle, ALIVE!, NoVA RAFT (small), Homes Not Borders, Salvation Army, Goodwill
- *Habitat for Humanity Restore, Community Forklift*: house elements, appliances, building materials, household goods, furniture (pick up)
- *Historical Societies*: local/regional memorabilia, photos, books, maps, yearbooks (or to the school)
- *Mattress/Box Spring* (in good condition): NoVA RAFT, A Wider Circle
- *Medical Equip.*: DC Shares, Equipment Connection, Medical Missionaries, loan closet (Lions, ALS, fire dept)
- *Musical Instruments*: OrchKids (BSO), Hungry for Music
- *Office Supplies*: Unique Thrift Store
- *Pianos*: PianoFinders.com, Pianos for Education and American Piano Center (pick-up), PianoAdoption.com, assisted living/sr. center
- *Sports Equipment*: for giving to children...Leveling the Playing Field (dropoff), Let's Play It Forward and All Kids Should Play (by mail); or just take to Goodwill/Salvation Army
- *Stuffed Animals*: Stuffed Animals for Emergencies (by mail), Goodwill, Salvation Army; can try day care, shelters, doctor's offices, fire and police departments (poor quality take to Helpsy drop boxes)
- *Textbooks*: Better World Books, Books for Africa, Brother's Brother, Bookfriends Int'l; or just Goodwill, Pickup Please, Green Drop
- *Trophies/Medals/Plaques*: Lamb Awards, Medals4Mettle

Sources – Recycle/Reuse (can be broken/dirty items)



MISC

Appliances: **FCSWRC
Automotive Fluids: **FCSWRC
Batteries (vehicle): Auto Zone (gift card), Advance Auto, **FCSWRC, ^^YOP
Batteries (all household): Staples, Batteries Plus, **FCSWRC
Calculators: Staples, Best Buy
Christmas Tree Lights: **FCSWRC, Mom's Market
Clocks: Best Buy
Coffee Brewers <40 lbs: Staples
Curling Irons/Straighteners: Best Buy
Fans: Best Buy
Hair Dryers: Best Buy
Hangers: dry cleaners, Salvation Army
Ink/Toner: Staples, Best Buy, Office Depot, ***eAS
Label Makers and Laminators: Staples
Light bulbs: CFL/LED at Batteries Plus, Lowe's, Home Depot, **FCSWRC; fluorescent at Batteries Plus and FCSWRC (incandescent can go in trash)
Luggage: Helpsy drop boxes
Mattresses (in bad condition): **FCSWRC
Medications: pharmacies or police stations
Microwaves: ***eAS
Paint and Thinner: **FCSWRC, ^^YOP
Pesticides/Herbicides: **FCSWRC, ^^YOP
Shoes: Mom's Market, outdoor donation boxes
Tires: **FCSWRC, ^^YOP
SHREDDING: for a fee -- PROSHRED will come to you; or take to Staples, BestBuy, UPS, and Office Depot
***CC = Computer CORE** in Alexandria; includes data destruction (refurbish for disadvantaged)
****FCSWRC = Fairfax County Solid Waste Recycling Center.** Fee to recycle some items.
*****eAS = eAsset Solutions** in Falls Church.
^^YOP = Yuck Old Paint (pick-up for a fee)

TECH

Adapters: Staples, ***eAS
Antennas - TV: Best Buy
Antennas - USB: *CC
Battery Backups: Staples, Best Buy
Binoculars: Best Buy
Boombboxes: Best Buy
Cameras: Staples, Best Buy, ***eAS (and lenses)
Cases for tablets and phones: Staples
Cassette Players: Best Buy
CB Radios: Best Buy
CD/DVD/Blu-ray Players and Discs: Staples, Best Buy
CD/DVD Drives: Best Buy
Chargers: *CC, Amazon, Best Buy
Computers & Hard Drives: Staples, Best Buy, *CC, ***eAS
Connected Home Devices: Staples
Copiers: ***eAS
Cords/Cables: *CC, Cox, Staples, Best Buy, ***eAS, **FCSWRC
CPUs: *CC, ***eAS
Dashboard Cameras: Best Buy
Digital Projectors: Staples
DVDs/Blu-Ray Players: Best Buy, ***eAS
DVRs: Best Buy, ***eAS
E-readers: *CC, Amazon, Staples, ***eAS, Best Buy
Earbuds: Staples
Electronic Toys/Games (small): Cox
Fax Machines: Staples, Best Buy, **FCSWRC, ***eAS
Fitness Trackers: Amazon
Flash Drives: Staples
GPS Devices: Staples, Best Buy, ***eAS
Hands-free Headsets: Best Buy
Headphones: Cox, Staples, Best Buy
Heart Monitors: Best Buy
Home Security: Amazon, Best Buy

Keyboards/Mice: *CC, Amazon, Staples, Best Buy, ***eAS, **FCSWRC
Laptops: Staples, Best Buy (& batteries), *CC, ***eAS, **FCSWRC
Memory: *CC, Best Buy, ***eAS
Modems & Routers: ***eAS, Cox, Staples, Best Buy
Monitors: *CC, Staples, **FCSWRC, Best Buy,; ***eAS (fee)
MP3 Players: Staples, Best Buy
Pedometers: Best Buy
Phones (landline): ***eAS, Best Buy
Printers: Staples, Best Buy, **FCSWRC
Projectors: Best Buy
Radar Detectors: Best Buy
Receivers (stereo, cable/satellite): Staples, Best Buy, ***eAS
Remotes: Cox, Staples, Best Buy
Ring Lights: *CC
Satellite Radio: Best Buy
Scanners: Staples, Best Buy, ***eAS, **FCSWRC
Set-top Boxes (DirecTV and internet TV): Best Buy
Smart Home: Amazon
Speakers (audio): ***eAS
Speakers (Bluetooth/small wireless): Cox, Amazon
Speakers (computer/MP3) & Speaker Systems: Best Buy
Surge Protectors: Best Buy
Tablets: *CC, Amazon, Staples, ***eAS, Best Buy
Televisions: Best Buy and ***eAS (fee), **FCSWRC
Turntables: Best Buy, ***eAS
Typewriters: ***eAS
Vacuums (robot, stick, and upright): Best Buy
VCRs: Best Buy, ***eAS
VHS Tapes (not cases): **FCSWRC
Video Gaming Consoles/Peripherals: Amazon, Staples, Best Buy
Video Streaming Devices: Staples
Weather Stations: Best Buy
Webcams: Staples, Best Buy

NOTE: Haul Away with Recycle (\$200) at Best Buy, for washer/dryers and kitchen appliances

Can You Get to 10?

- How long would it take you right now to find the following 10 items?
 - Birth certificate
 - Tax return from three years ago
 - Car title
 - Marriage license
 - Social security card
 - Will (and other end-of-life legal documents)
 - Spare car key
 - Spare house key
 - Passport
 - Mortgage pay-off documentation

Wrap-Up

- As a senior, it's important to be intentional about what is in your home and where, including what you bring in.
- Creating a records list is not hard...you already have the information; it just needs to be compiled.
- It's no gift to leave this work to your children.
- It's never too late to start creating an organized home...or to improve upon what you've already got!



Contact me at Jennifer@NoFrillsOrganizing.com