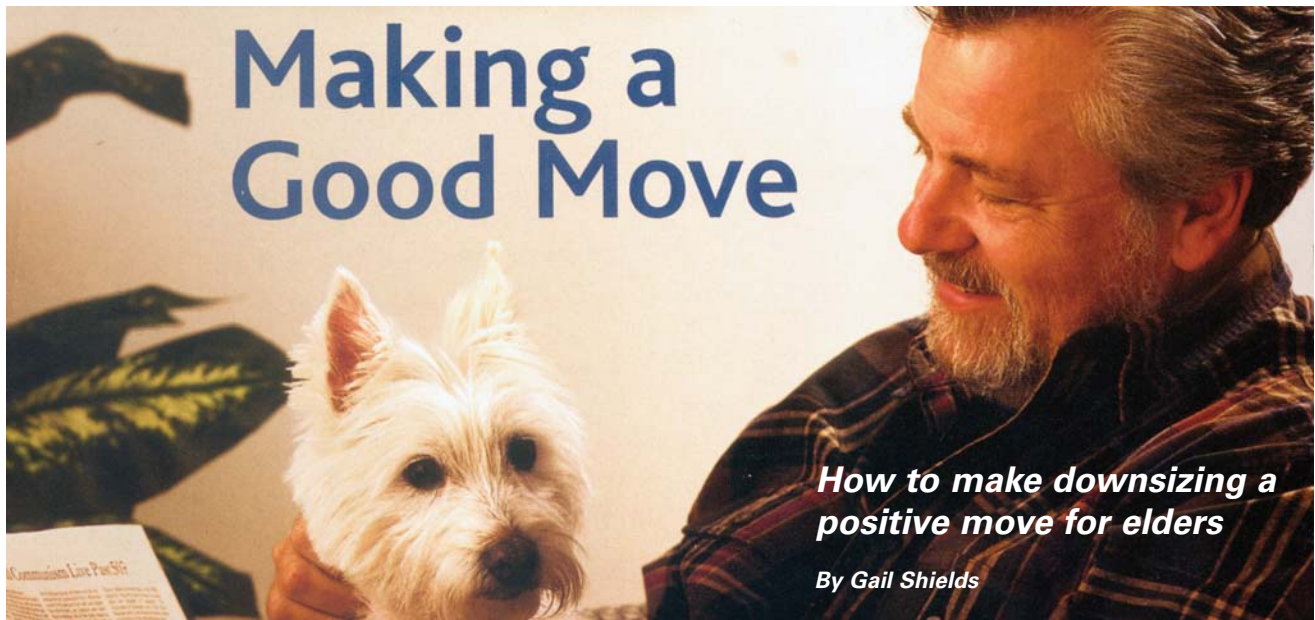


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# Fifty-Five Plus

MAGAZINE

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## Making a Good Move

*How to make downsizing a positive move for elders*

*By Gail Shields*

**M**oving ranks in the top 10 of life's most stressful events for anyone, but the stress is compounded for seniors who are reluctant to leave their house behind.

Many seniors are forced to consider a move due to health problems or physical impairments. Often there is a great deal of fear creating impetus for the decision — fear of being alone in a big house, fear of falling, fear of forgetting things. Sometimes it is the death of a spouse that triggers a need to downsize. Frequently, it is concerned children who are asking an elderly parent to move.

Whatever the reason, moving is typically a very personal and deeply emotional issue for an elderly person. Thankfully there are some effective ways to help a parent move, which can reduce stress and increase happiness for everyone involved.

One of the biggest mistakes that families make when moving an elder is letting emotions and old family dra-

mas rule the day. Even with the best of intentions, it can be very difficult to gain distance and objectivity during a move. This is where a professional organizer can help by providing an unbiased perspective on the whole project. A professional organizer also help family members avoid the stressful details of a move:

- By recommending a real estate agent, lawyer, mover, auctioneer and other professionals.
- By helping the family disperse belongings in such a way that everyone feels fairly treated.
- By arranging and supervising the move.
- By helping the elder unpack and settle into his or her new place.

### **Paring down possessions**

To achieve the best possible sale price for a house, you want it to be appealing to potential buyers. Clutter is a huge no-no that can turn off buyers, so the first step in preparing a

house for sale is to get rid of a lot of the contents. There usually isn't room for all of the items in the senior's new home anyway, so the de-cluttering actually serves two purposes: to spruce up the house for buyers and to pare down in preparation for the new place.

An elderly person usually has a lot of stuff! Most people are very attached to their belongings because they represent a lifetime of memories and experiences. It's crucial that you acknowledge these attachments if the move is going to be a happy one.

The worst things you can do are to force an elder to get rid of a beloved object or to dispose of items behind his or her back. I have seen heartbreaking cases of seniors in their new homes who constantly ask, "Where's my...?"

The elder who is moving must be personally involved in letting go of the contents of the house and should be allowed to discuss each item as it goes. I call this process Reminiscence

Therapy. The elder draws up the memories that each item holds and shares them with someone who listens attentively. It's like saying goodbye to an old friend, and it brings closure. It's then much easier to let go of the object, and there are far fewer regrets later.

Reminiscence Therapy can take weeks to complete in a large house but it's worth the time. I've had clients say that the process lifted a lot of fear and sadness from their shoulders and helped them look forward to a happy life in their new home.

### Options for getting rid of contents

Once the elder has said goodbye to many of his or her possessions and chosen which ones to keep, there are four main ways to disperse the remaining contents.

*1. Give items to family members.* To avoid disputes, some families prefer to allow the elder to choose who gets what and the family respects his or her wishes. Others like to have a family meeting and decide on a fair way to share the belongings. One method that has worked successfully for several families is to provide each person with coloured stickers and invite them to indicate their choices by attaching a sticker to each item. When there are multiple stickers on a single item, an open discussion may reveal the reason for its popularity and make the choice clearer. Often the elder is surprised to find that nobody wants his or her treasures. That may be disappointing at first but it makes it easier to move on to other disposal options.

*2. Sell the items.* There are many methods available to all of us for selling household items that have some value. Used furniture buyers, consignment stores, online sales,

auctions and contents sales can all produce money that will support the elder in his or her new home. Calling in the professionals will ensure you get good prices for the items and will simplify the process.

*3. Give items to charity.* Some things just aren't appropriate for sale but may still be helpful to someone else. Many charities will come to your door to pick up large lots of items, which can save you the hassle of hauling them yourself.

*4. Throw it away.* The garbage pile is a last resort but sometimes there are items that just aren't salvageable.

### Preparing the house for buyers


We've already noted that getting rid of clutter will help fetch a better price. It's also important to give some thought to the remaining layout. It sounds strange but a house that has been depersonalized will sell better, as it will be easier for buyers to imagine their own possessions inside.

Keep it simple and clean. Consider hiring a professional home stager to provide ideas and spruce up any areas that need attention. Sometimes a fresh coat of paint and a new throw rug can work wonders. The fees charged by a home stager usually pay for themselves many times over in a much better sale price — and a much shorter time to sell.

### Settling into the new home

After getting rid of possessions and selling the house, it seems like much of the moving work is done, but careful attention should be paid to settling the elder in the new environment. Be there to supervise the movers and the unpacking — it can be an exhausting and overwhelming job for a single person.

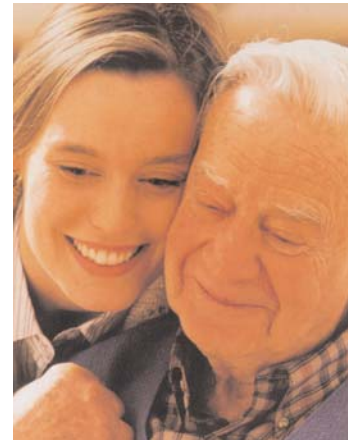
Make the new home as much like the old home as possible. I always say that "familiarity breeds content" and it will help the elder feel comfortable sooner. Make sure he or she has a support network. If necessary, and if you are not able to do so yourself, hire someone to periodically check in with the elder.

Moving can be very stressful but by taking the right approach you can make the event as smooth and as positive as possible. 

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*Gail Shields is a Certified Senior Advisor and a professional organizer. She is the president of All the Right Moves, a company that helps seniors move to new homes.*

*Gail can be reached at (416) 757-0319 or [gail@alltherightmoves.ca](mailto:gail@alltherightmoves.ca).*



**alltheRightMoves**  
Moving Made Easy For Seniors

Phone: (416) 757-0319

Email: [info@alltherightmoves.ca](mailto:info@alltherightmoves.ca)

[www.alltherightmoves.ca](http://www.alltherightmoves.ca)

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