Keep, Sell, Give, Release

A gentle guide to sorting a lifetime of belongings

Sorting a parent's home is not just clearing a house. It is harvesting the story of a life. You don't have to do it all at once. *Begin with one room, one decision, one handful.*

Before You Begin

1 Gather the stories first

Before the estate sale, the realtor, or the donation truck, ask:

- Who owned this before you?
- Why does it matter to you?
- Where did it come from?
- Who would you like to have it?

Write the answers down. Record your parent talking, if they're comfortable.

2 Check who can decide

While your parent is living, it's their home and their call. Let them decide at their own pace.

After a death, nothing leaves the house until the executor or trustee confirms it can, especially if a trust owns property or promises were made.

3 Agree on how to choose

Decide the method *before* anyone carries boxes to the car:

- Your parent decides
- Take turns choosing (draw names for order)
- Agree on values and balance the shares
- Everyone makes a wish list, then talk through overlaps

The Four Piles

KEEP

What belongs here: what your parent needs in the new home first; then what they most want to keep for sentimental reasons; then items family members have asked for.
Ask: Will this be used or truly treasured? Is there room for it?
Remember: adult children often don't want the china, crystal, or big furniture. That isn't ingratitude. Their homes and lives are different.

SELL

What belongs here: items with real resale value and local demand.
Options: an estate sale for a full house of goods; consignment, auction, or a specialty dealer for a few valuable pieces.
Ask: Will what we net be worth the time and the percentage? Compare offers, check references, and meet strangers safely.

GIVE

What belongs here: heirlooms for children and grandchildren, and useful things that can bless someone else.
Before you load the car: check what each charity actually accepts and whether they offer pickup.
Church families, shelters, and neighbors may need exactly what you're ready to let go.

RELEASE

What belongs here: things that are broken, worn out, or have little value to anyone.
Ask: Would a photograph hold the memory? Could one representative item stand in for twenty?
Letting go of an object is not letting go of the person who owned it.

"A parent who hesitates over a piece of furniture may not be resisting furniture. She may be resisting the loss of a season of life."

After a death, confirm with the executor or trustee before removing, selling, or donating anything from the estate.

Family Wish List

Write down every request before anything leaves the house. For valuable items (jewelry, firearms, collections, art), make sure the wish matches the estate plan.

Item	Who asked for it	Parent's wish	Decision

Room by Room

Room	Stories gathered	Sorted	Out of the house	Notes
Kitchen	☐	☐	☐	
Living and dining rooms	☐	☐	☐	
Primary bedroom	☐	☐	☐	
Other bedrooms	☐	☐	☐	
Bathrooms and closets	☐	☐	☐	
Attic	☐	☐	☐	
Garage or workshop	☐	☐	☐	
Shed or storage unit	☐	☐	☐	
Papers and files*	☐	☐	☐	

*Set aside wills, deeds, titles, insurance policies, and financial statements as you find them. The free File Box Checklist (BeckyFields.com/filebox) shows what to look for.

When to Call for Help

If the house has mold, pests, sewage, animal or human waste, needles, or severe hoarding, **don't dig in with household gloves and trash bags.** Professional cleanout and remediation companies exist for exactly this. Ask what they're trained and insured to handle, and how they'll set aside anything valuable or sentimental they find.

Story Cards

Print this page, cut out the cards, and tuck one in a drawer or tape it under a piece of furniture. The things are only half the inheritance. The stories are the other half.

A Story Worth Keeping
Item:
Who owned it before?
Where did it come from?
Why does it matter?
Who should have it someday?
Told by _____ **Date** _____

A Story Worth Keeping
Item:
Who owned it before?
Where did it come from?
Why does it matter?
Who should have it someday?
Told by _____ **Date** _____

A Story Worth Keeping
Item:
Who owned it before?
Where did it come from?
Why does it matter?
Who should have it someday?
Told by _____ **Date** _____

A Story Worth Keeping
Item:
Who owned it before?
Where did it come from?
Why does it matter?
Who should have it someday?
Told by _____ **Date** _____

"You can replace furniture. You cannot go back and ask the question after the person who knew the answer is gone."